



Women in Agriculture 'Be Your Best Self' 2020-2021 training pilot: evaluation report



AGRICULTURE, ENVIRONMENT AND MARINE

Women in Agriculture 'Be Your Best Self' 2020-2021 training pilot: evaluation report



Acknowledgements

The researchers would like to thank all of the women who took part in interviews during this evaluation, for sharing their time and experience.

Photo by Scottish Government

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List of acronyms

- BYBS Be Your Best Self
- RESAS Rural & Environmental Science and Analytical Services
- WIA Women in Agriculture
- WiADP Women in Agriculture Development Programme

1. Executive summary

What is this report about?

This report outlines the main findings of an evaluation of the 'Be Your Best Self' training pilot 2020-2021, funded by Scottish Government through the Women in Agriculture Development Programme (WiADP). The evaluation has examined the impact of the training through two questionnaires and follow-up interviews.

The Women in Agriculture Taskforce was established in 2017, following research commissioned by the Scottish Government which showed that women face cultural barriers in the industry.¹ In its final report in 2019, the Taskforce made a series of recommendations including a Women in Agriculture Development Programme (WiADP). This aims to deliver training and mentoring to support women in agriculture to build their confidence, enhance their business skills, and develop their leadership abilities.²

What did we do?

Two online surveys were sent to all attendees in cohorts 2-4 before and after they had completed the 'Be Your Best Self' 2020-2021 training. The surveys were intended to provide evidence of the impact of the course on attendees' levels of confidence, their access to new opportunities and connections to other women in agriculture.

In-depth, follow-up interviews were then conducted with a total of seven women from across cohorts 1-4 six to twelve months after they completed the training. The interviews focused on the long-term impact of the course on attendees' confidence, the usefulness of the skills they developed, and any changes to their roles on the family farm or in the organisations they work for.

What did we find out?

Overall, the research demonstrates that the course has had a range of positive outcomes for women who took part, including:

- building their confidence in their skills and strengths;
- providing a chance for self-reflection, and to hear others' experiences;
- enabling them to refocus and explore new opportunities;
- equipping them with the skills and confidence to develop their roles on the farm or at work, and to form lasting connections with women in agriculture.

¹ [Women in farming and the agriculture sector: research report - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](http://www.gov.scot/resources/documents/2020/07/Women_in_farming_and_the_agriculture_sector_research_report.pdf)

² [Women in Agriculture Taskforce: final report - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](http://www.gov.scot/resources/documents/2019/07/Women_in_Agriculture_Taskforce_final_report.pdf)

What did the survey tell us?

The survey results are positive and show significant benefits across cohorts. The results indicate that the course has had a clear and measurable impact on respondents' feelings of optimism, confidence and connections to other women in agriculture.

For example, after completing the course:

- 98% said the course had a positive impact on their confidence in their own skills, strengths and experiences
- 88% of respondents said they had good connections to other women in agriculture
- 88% of respondents felt optimistic about their future in agriculture
- 100% of respondents said they had ideas or plans about their future in agriculture
- 100% said that they thought the course would be beneficial to other women in agriculture

What did the interviews tell us?

The interview findings build on this, indicating how women who completed the course have drawn on their increased sense of optimism, confidence and connections to other women to make changes in their lives and work in agriculture.

The majority of interviewees said they have gained a lot from the course, which has given them new skills and strengths which they have used to refocus, explore new opportunities and develop their roles on the farm or at work.

Importantly, the course has built interviewees' sense of identity and self-worth. It has made them feel more sure of themselves, and their role in agriculture. Since finishing the course, many have played a bigger role in decision-making and business planning, putting forward ideas and trying new activities on the farm.

The course has enabled most interviewees to build strong connections with other women in agriculture. Taking part has led them to feel more motivated and focused, and this suggests the wider impact the course will have on women's roles in agriculture.

On a less positive note, the interviews have highlighted some of the challenges experienced by women in agriculture during the COVID-19 pandemic. Whilst difficult to measure, this has also shaped the impact of the course.

Next steps

The findings will inform the ongoing delivery of the 'Be Your Best Self' training programme to further cohorts of women in Scottish agriculture during 2021-23. This report will also inform the development of further training pilots for women in agriculture.

2. Introduction

The Women in Agriculture programme

Women living and working in Scottish agriculture are an essential part of the future of the rural economy. Developing and expanding their skills and talents will ensure the long term sustainability of the farming and agricultural sector.

The Women in Agriculture Taskforce was established in 2017, following research commissioned by the Scottish Government which showed that women face cultural barriers in the industry.³

In its final report in 2019, the Taskforce made a number of recommendations including positive action to address women's training needs through a Women in Agriculture Development Programme (WiADP). The programme aims to deliver training and mentoring to support women in agriculture to build their confidence, enhance their business skills, and develop their leadership abilities.⁴

Through the programme, Scottish Government is funding three separate training initiatives developed by the Women in Agriculture Taskforce, specifically aimed at women living or working in Scottish agriculture, including the 'Be Your Best Self' course.

Be Your Best Self course

The 'Be Your Best Self' training pilot aimed to help women in agriculture:

- build their confidence
- discover the true value of their skills, strengths and experiences
- refocus and re-prioritise no matter what stage of life they are at
- explore new possibilities and opportunities
- gain support and connections with other women in the industry

The pilot was delivered to four cohorts of 15-20 women by Inner Works Coaching in 2020 and 2021. Due to Coronavirus (COVID-19) restrictions, the majority of the course was delivered online following the first workshop in February 2020.

The course was delivered to 70 women living or working in Scottish agriculture. Each online workshop consisted of four modules and one evening speaker session. Attendees also took part in an individual coaching session and two further online group sessions following the workshops.

The research was carried out to evaluate the impact of the 'Be Your Best Self' course against its intended outcomes. The main findings can be found on pages 9-10.

³ [Women in farming and the agriculture sector: research report - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/resources/documents/2019/06/Women_in_farming_and_the_agriculture_sector_research_report.pdf)

⁴ [Women in Agriculture Taskforce: final report - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/resources/documents/2019/06/Women_in_Agriculture_Taskforce_final_report.pdf)

3. Methods

The evaluation methodology comprised two questionnaires and in-depth, follow-up interviews with a sample of participants 6-12 months after they completed the course.

All attendees on the 'Be Your Best Self' 2020-2021 training pilot were asked to complete a pre-course and post-course questionnaire. The questionnaires were designed to provide evidence of the impact of the course on attendees' confidence in their skills, strengths and experiences, their connections to other women in agriculture and views of the course.

A total of seven follow-up interviews were then conducted with women from across the four cohorts six to twelve months after they completed the training, between February and November 2021. This represents a sample of 10% of all attendees. The interviews lasted 30-45 mins and were semi-structured with open questions.

The interviews with participants focused on:

- what they hoped to get out of the course
- its impact on their levels of confidence
- the usefulness of any skills they developed
- any changes to their role on the farm or at work
- their connections to other women in agriculture

This stage of the evaluation involved women of different ages (from 21 to 51) and from various locations across Scotland. Participants were at different stages of their lives, and had a range of responsibilities, from managing a farm to working on the family farm, studying full-time, caring for children or working full-time at an agricultural organisation. The research has indicated how these factors have shaped the course outcomes.

Participants from cohorts 1-4 of the 'Be Your Best Self' 2020-2021 pilot were randomly selected and asked to take part in an interview. The interviews were conducted by phone or online and recorded with participants' consent. The recordings were then transcribed, coded and analysed. Respondents were sent a copy of the transcript to review.

In addition to the questionnaires, the interviews have provided detailed insight into the experiences of women who completed the training, their views on the course and how they have put the skills or tools they learnt into practice in their daily lives and work. The interviews have also enabled us to explore whether participants gained a support network of other women in agriculture once the course finished.

The main findings from the questionnaires and follow-up interviews are summarised in this report, and a one-page summary will be shared with participants.

4. Main findings

What they wanted to get out of the course

Most interviewees said they hoped to build their confidence and meet other women in agriculture by taking part in the course. Others wanted to find a clearer direction or progress in their careers. Whilst those attending the course were from a range of backgrounds, they felt they had the same aims and a shared 'lack of confidence'.

When asked if the course had been what they expected, a number of interviewees said they had not realised it would have such a personal focus. Despite this, most stated that they have gained a lot from the course, with one participant saying that it has had a more 'lasting impact' than other, more practical farming courses she has done.

What they have gained from the course

The course has had a range of positive impacts for interviewees, from building their confidence in their skills and strengths, to enabling them to refocus, explore new opportunities and develop their roles on the farm or at work. It gave interviewees a chance for self-reflection, and to think about others' behaviour and how to work with them.

The course has built participants' sense of identity and self-worth. It has made many interviewees feel more sure of themselves, and their role in agriculture. This was the case for women from a range of backgrounds, from younger women and new entrants to those who have grown up working on family farms.

Changes to their role on the farm or at work

Women who took part in interviews have been able to develop their role on the farm and at work. The course has given them the confidence to: play a bigger role in decision-making, put forward their ideas, make decisions about their own business, try new activities on the farm or apply for new jobs and further training.

The course also introduced them to practical tools, which many have used to take a more active role in business planning, from diversification to getting jobs on the farm 'done'. This has led them to feel more motivated and focused, and suggests the wider impact the course will have on women's roles in agriculture.

Connections to other women in agriculture

The course has enabled attendees to build strong connections with other women in agriculture. The majority of interviewees were still in touch with other women in their cohort six to twelve months after finishing the course. Through groups set up on social media,

members of each cohort has been able to ask questions, share practical advice, farming knowledge or general support and encouragement.

The course brought together groups of women of different ages and backgrounds, who were able to share their knowledge with each other and learn from others' experience. This has particularly benefitted younger women. Despite differences in their situations, attendees were able to 'relate' to each other. Interviewees noted that they felt they could be 'open' and share their mistakes or concerns.

Interviewees spoke about the benefits of connecting to other women in agriculture, who understand what working in the industry is like. The course has helped some of the women to develop wider connections with other farmers in their area.

Feedback on the course

During interviews, participants also gave feedback on specific aspects of the course. The one-to-one meetings were important, as they made participants feel comfortable before taking part. They gave attendees an opportunity to talk about what they wanted to get from it, and to identify specific issues. Several interviewees spoke about the benefit of being put into smaller groups during the course, as it gave them a chance to get to know other women in their cohort, and made it easier for those who were less confident to take part.

COVID-19 and other challenges

The interviews highlighted some of the challenges experienced by women in agriculture during the COVID-19 pandemic. Whilst difficult to measure, this has also shaped the impact of the course. For example, one interviewee noted that it was difficult to maintain a 'positive mind-set' after the course due to ongoing restrictions.

Others had struggled to balance childcare, home-schooling and their work on the farm during this time, but stated that the online groups were an important form of support.

Whilst interviewees had largely positive experiences of doing the course online, with some noting that this made it more accessible for women living in rural and island areas, several felt they would have made stronger connections in-person.

Next steps

The majority of the women interviewed stated that the course has had a positive impact on their plans for the future. In many cases, it has led them to re-focus and re-prioritise, from changing jobs to taking up new opportunities.

All interviewees felt more confident about applying for further training to gain new agricultural skills or develop their careers. The research suggests that the course has increased their confidence, resilience and motivation. It has given them more options and made many feel 'more optimistic' about their future in agriculture.

5. Survey results

This section presents the results from the pre-course and post-course questionnaires completed by participants from cohorts 2-4 of the 'Be Your Best Self' training pilot.⁵

The questions were designed to measure the success of the pilot against the intended course outcomes (see page 7).

These are the main findings from both surveys:

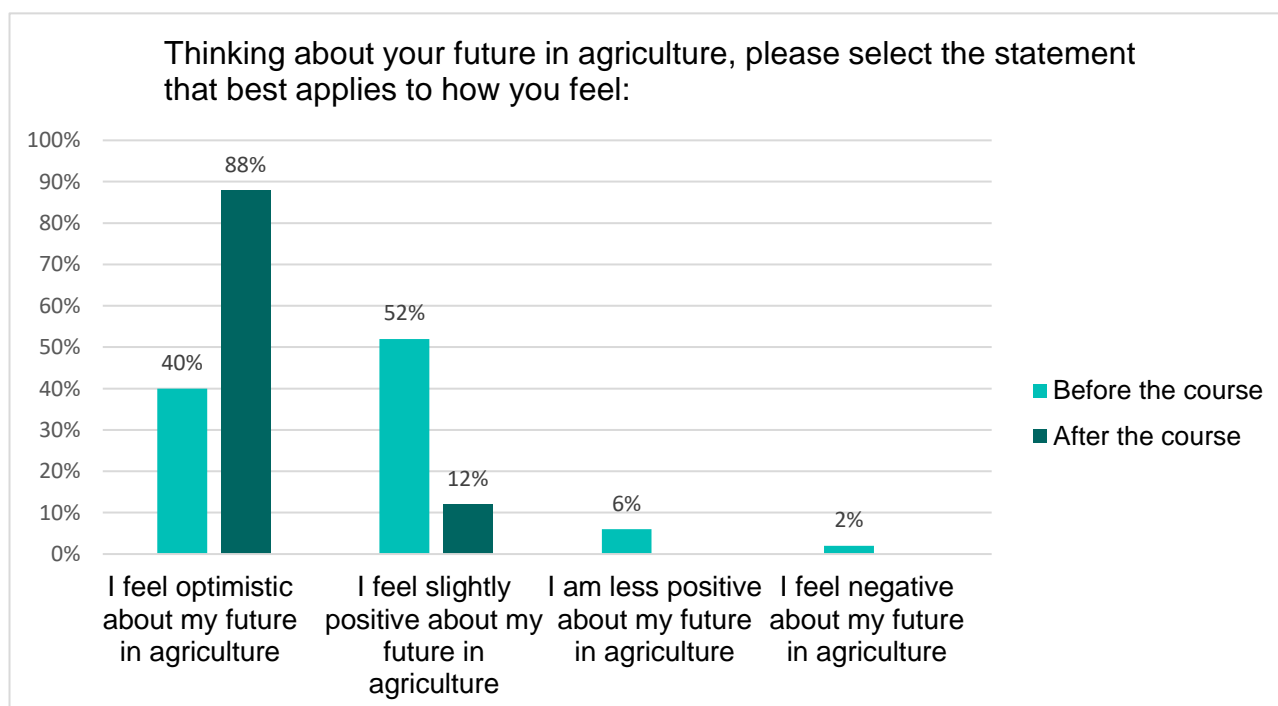
- Respondents felt more optimistic about their future in agriculture after completing the course. Whilst in the first questionnaire, the most common response was 'I feel slightly positive about my future in agriculture' (52%), after the course the majority of respondents felt 'optimistic' (88%) about their future in agriculture.
- Respondents had clearer ideas about their future in agriculture after completing the course. Before the course, most respondents said they have 'a few ideas or plans' (67%) and a quarter said they lacked or had no clear plan or ideas (25%). Following the course, half of respondents said they have 'clear' ideas (50%) about their future in agriculture and half stated that they have 'a few ideas or plans' (50%).
- Before the course only 13% of participants were confident that they have useful skills, strengths and experiences when thinking about working in agriculture, and one in five were 'not sure' (20%). After the course, over half stated that they were 'confident' that they have useful skills, strengths and experiences (63%) and none were unsure.
- The majority of respondents stated that the course had a 'positive impact' on their confidence in their own skills, strengths and experiences (98%).
- Before the course, over a third of respondents felt 'unsure' about going to agricultural events, meetings or training (35%). After the course, the majority of respondents stated that they would feel more confident about taking part in agricultural events (78%) and signing up for further training or employment opportunities (88%).
- Respondents felt more connected to other women in agriculture after taking part in the course. In the first questionnaire, 27% said they had good connections to other women in agriculture, 47% were 'unsure' and 25% said they did not have good connections to other women in agriculture. Afterwards, the majority of respondents said they had good connections to other women in agriculture (88%).
- Lastly, all who responded to the post-course questionnaire stated that they thought the course would be beneficial to other women in agriculture.

⁵ The pre-course survey received 54 responses and the post-course survey received 50 responses. Not all respondents answered every question. In general, percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

5.1 Their future in agriculture

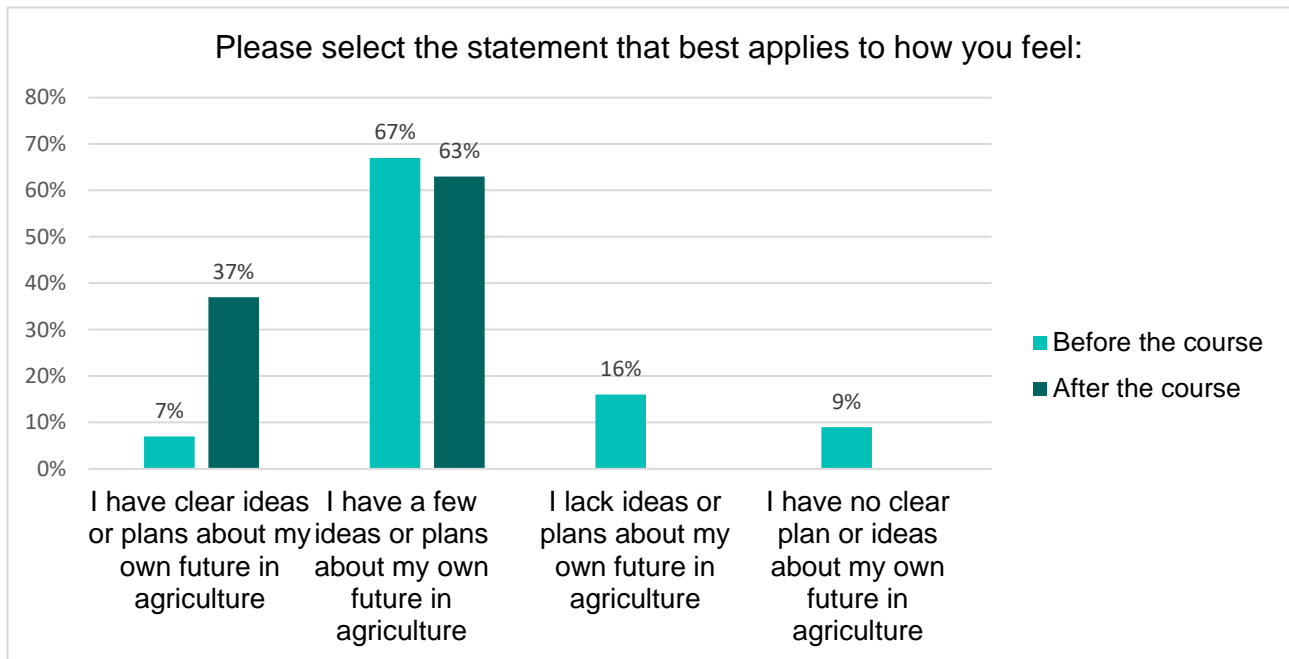
- In the pre-course survey, the majority of respondents said that they felt either 'slightly positive' (52%) or 'optimistic' (40%) about their future in agriculture (see Figure 1).
- A smaller number felt either 'less positive' or 'negative' (8%).
- When asked how they feel about their future in agriculture after they had completed the training, the majority of respondents felt optimistic (88%). A smaller number felt slightly positive (12%) and none felt less positive or negative.

Figure 1. Optimism about the future



- In the pre-course survey, most respondents said they have 'a few ideas or plans' about their future in agriculture (67%). A small number had 'clear' ideas (7%), whilst 16% said they 'lack ideas or plans' and 9% said they 'have no clear plan or ideas' (see Figure 2).
- After the course, over a third of respondents said they now have 'clear' ideas (37%) about their future in agriculture and over half stated that they have 'a few ideas or plans' (63%). None stated that they lack or have no clear plan or ideas.

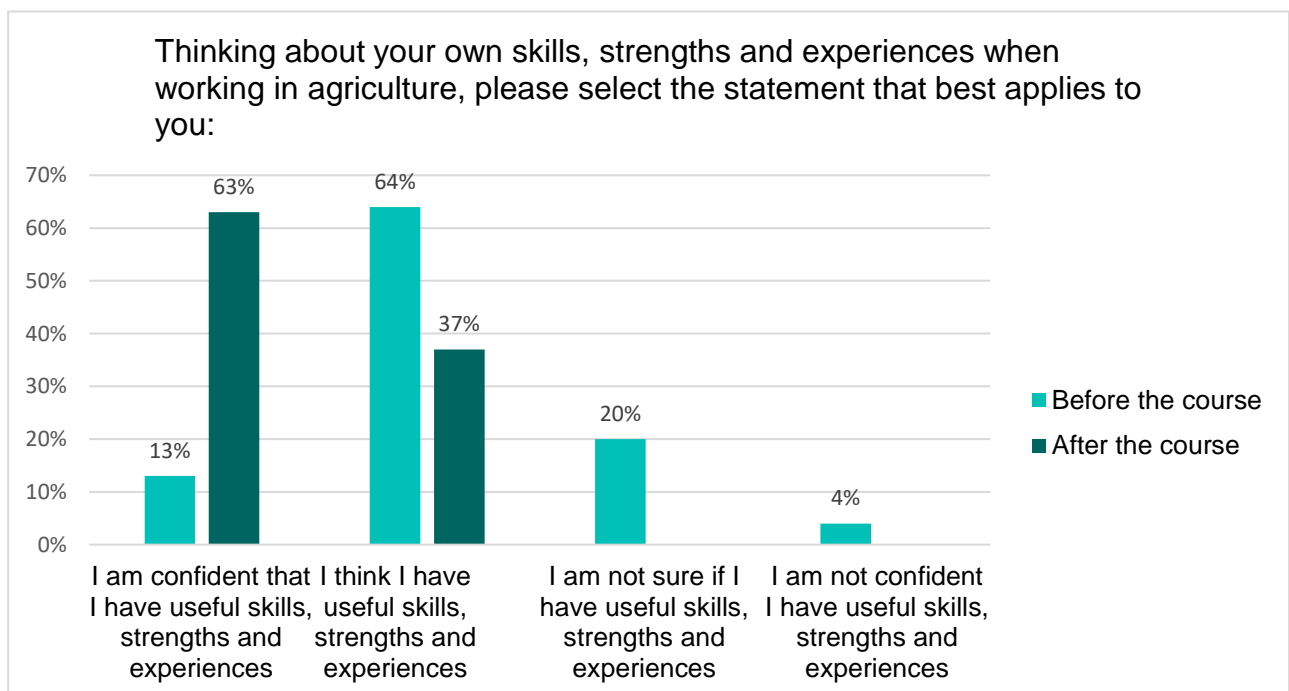
Figure 2. Ideas or plans for the future



5.2 Confidence, skills and experience

- In the pre-course survey, when asked to think about their own skills and experiences when working in agriculture, over half (64%) respondents said 'I think I have useful skills, strengths and experiences' (see Figure 3).
- A smaller number were 'confident' that they do (13%). One in five said they were 'not sure' (20%) and 4% were 'not confident'.

Figure 3. Skills, strengths and experience



- After the completing the training, over half (63%) of respondents stated that they were 'confident' that they have useful skills, strengths and experiences. The rest stated 'I think I have useful skills, strengths and experiences' (37%). None selected 'not sure' or 'not confident'.
- When asked about the impact of the training on their confidence in their own skills, strengths and experiences, the majority of respondents stated that it had had a 'positive impact' (86%), with 12% selecting 'slightly positive' and a minority (2%) saying it had had 'no impact' (see Figure 4).

Figure 4. Impact on confidence



- In the pre-course survey, when asked if they feel confident about raising issues or concerns about the way the business is run during their day-to-day life, over a quarter of respondents were 'confident' (27%), whilst nearly a third were 'slightly confident' (29%), and a further quarter (25%) were 'unsure' or did not feel confident (see Figure 5).
- Almost a third (31%) of respondents to the pre-course survey felt like their views and opinions were acted on, whilst one in ten (11%) did not (see Figure 6).
- Almost a third (31%) felt that they have a say in financial decision making in the business they were part of, whilst almost a tenth (9%) did not.
- Over a tenth of respondents stated that they 'would like a greater say in decision making in the business' (11%).
- Almost a third (31%) stated this was 'Not applicable'.

Figure 5. Confidence in raising issues or concerns

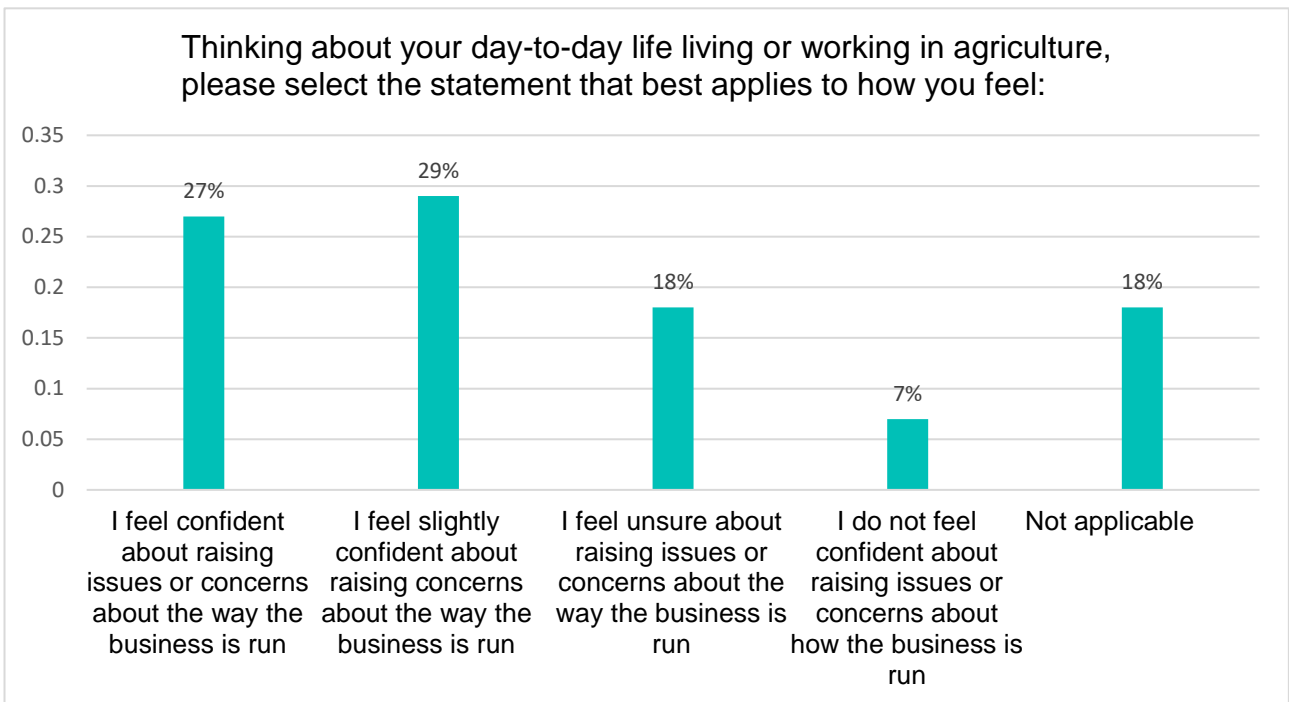
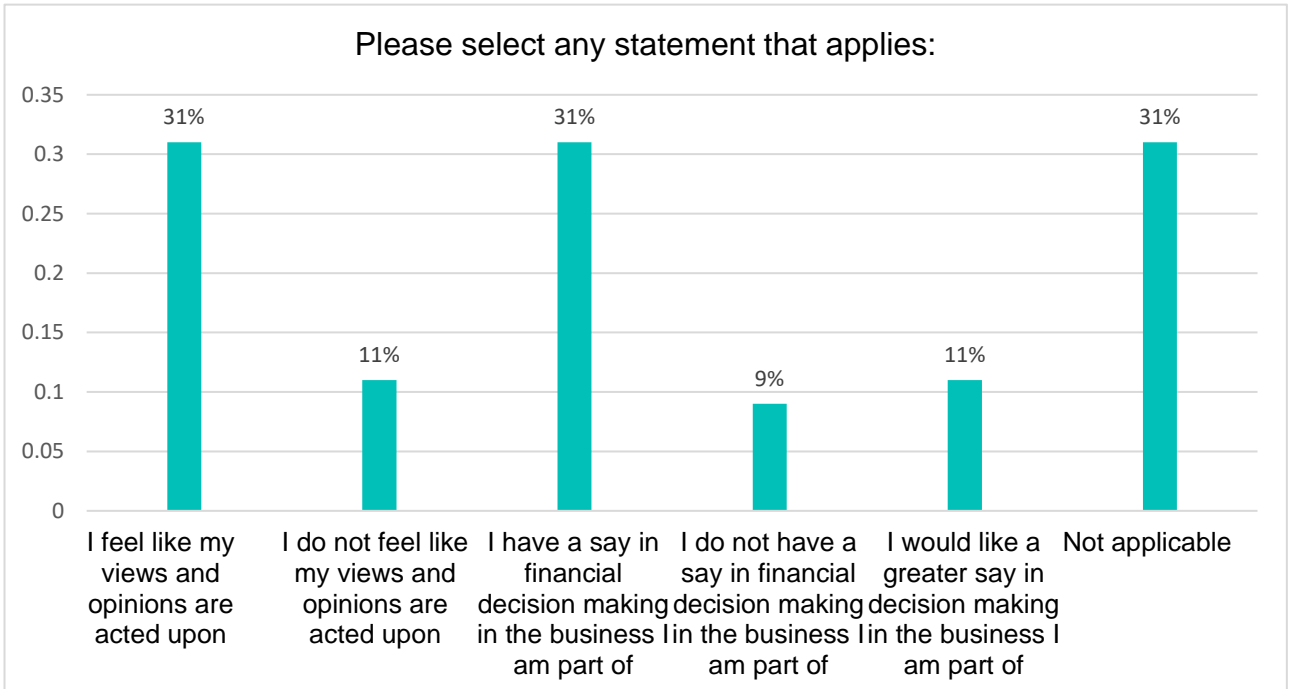


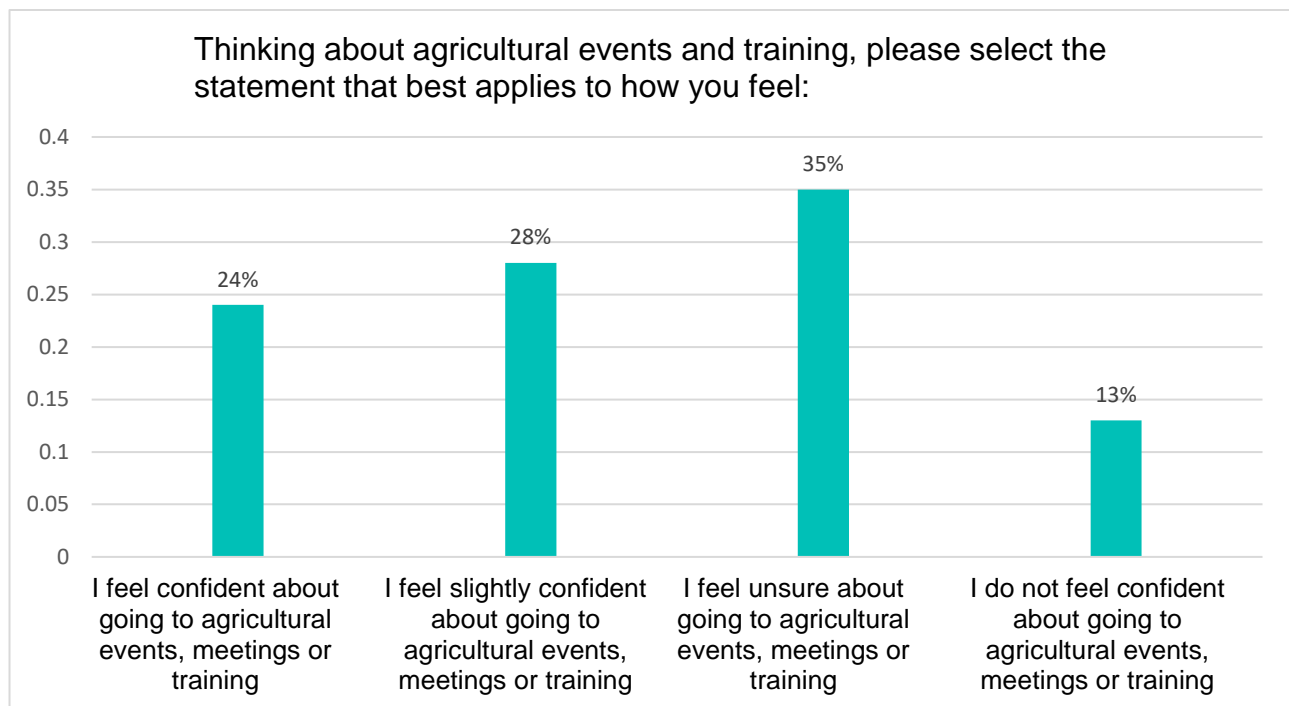
Figure 6. Views and opinions



5.3 Agricultural events and meetings

- Respondents to the pre-course survey were most likely to feel ‘unsure’ about going to agricultural events, meetings or training (35%). A smaller number felt ‘confident’ (24%) or ‘slightly confident’ (28%) and over a tenth (13%) did not feel confident (see Figure 7).

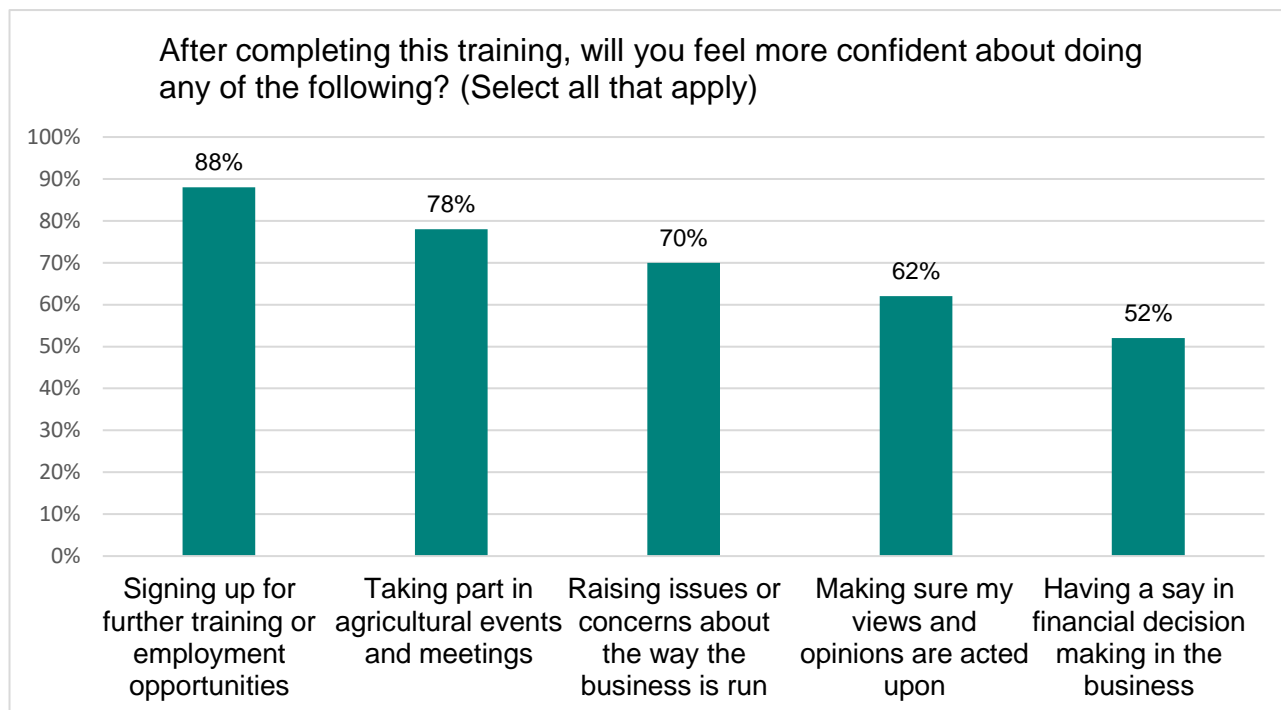
Figure 7. Going to agricultural events, meetings or training



After completing this training, the majority of respondents stated that they would feel more confident about doing the following (see Figure 8):

- signing up for further training or employment opportunities (88%);
- taking part in agricultural events (78%);
- raising issues or concerns about the way the business is run (70%);
- making sure their views and opinions were acted on (62%);
- and having a say in financial decision making in the business (52%).

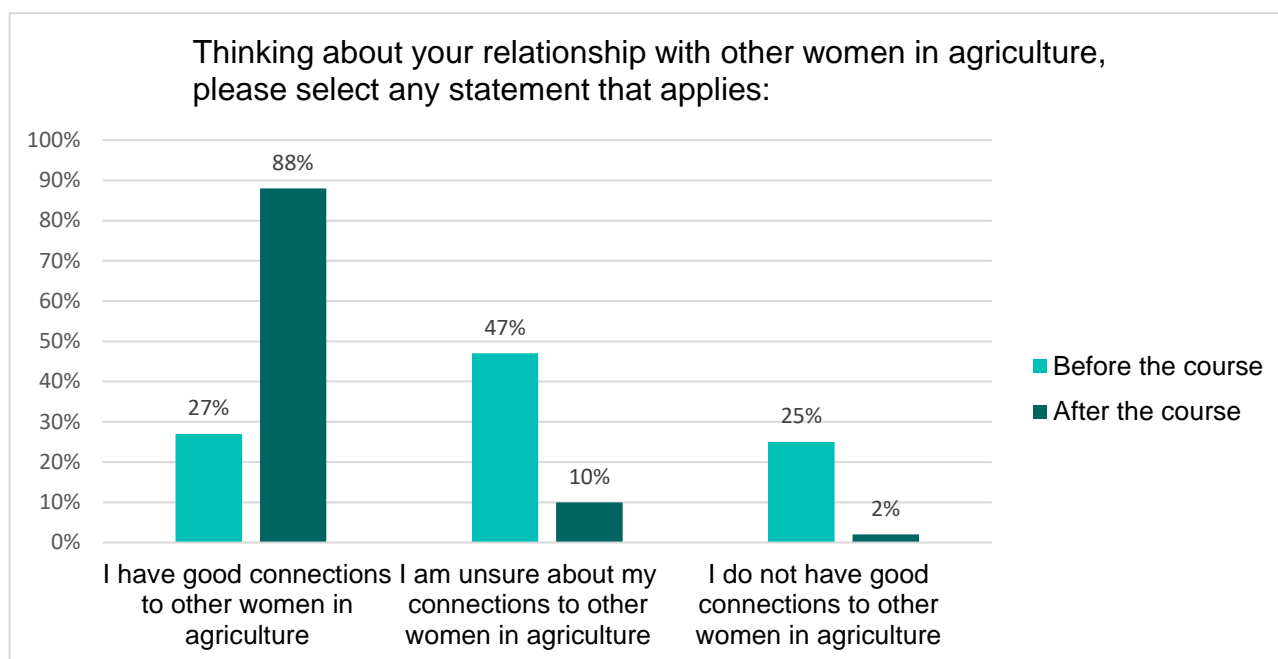
Figure 8. Confidence after completing the training



5.4 Connections to other women in agriculture

- In the pre-course survey, when asked about their relationship with other women in agriculture, over a quarter of respondents said they had good connections to other women in agriculture (27%). Almost half were unsure (47%) and over a quarter (25%) said they did not have good connections to other women in agriculture
- When asked about their relationship with other women in agriculture now that they had completed the course, the majority of respondents said they had good connections to other women in agriculture (88%), whilst a fifth remained unsure (10%). Only 2% said they did not have good connections (see Figure 9).

Figure 9. Relationship with other women in agriculture



5.5 What respondents hoped to get out of the course

- When asked about the main thing they hoped to get out of the course, respondents were most likely to say: confidence and focus, making connections, a support network, career direction and a plan for the future.
- Further responses included relevant skills such as agricultural knowledge, running a business, managing staff.

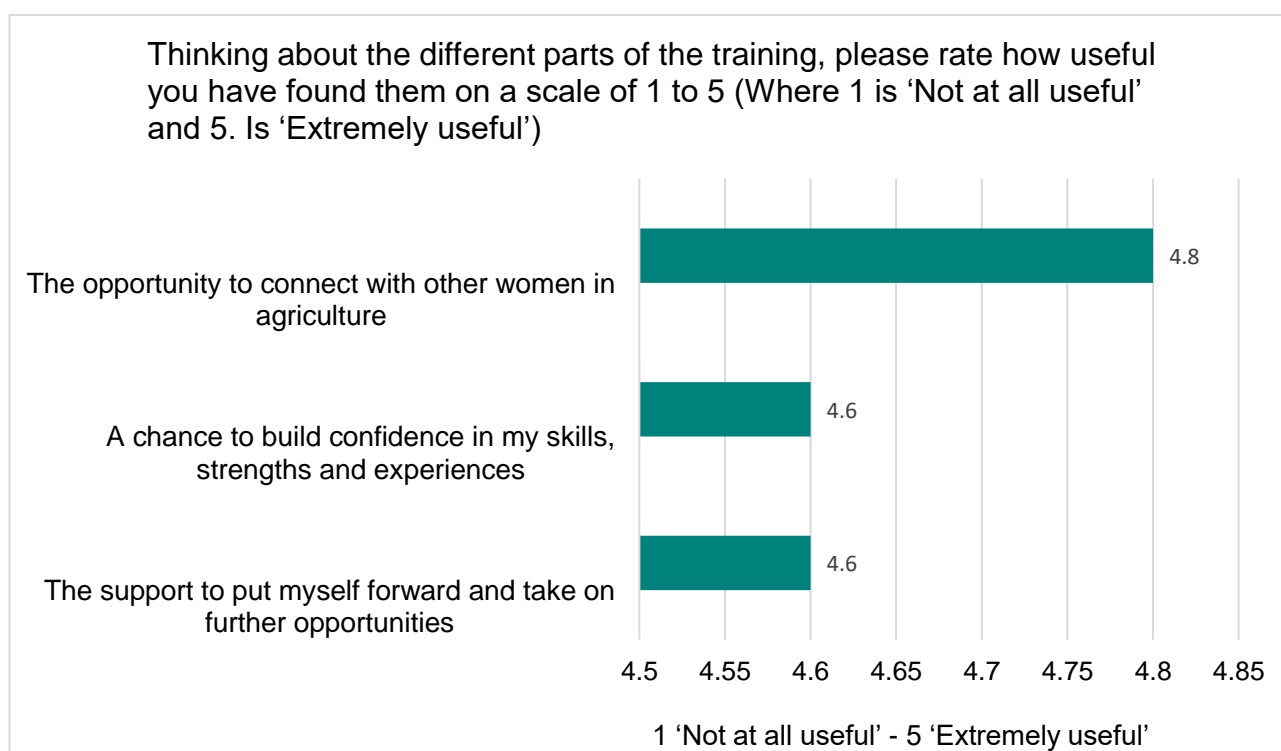
Examples

- 'A greater sense of my role on the farm for now and in the future. The ability to articulate in a non-confrontational manner what I would like my role to involve / not involve. The confidence that I might have some knowledge / transferable skills relevant to the business. The feeling that I've contributed to farm life and helped to make a difference, rather than feeling that I don't really have a role.'
- 'To be more confident when communicating with others in my industry. Although women are very often very involved practically, it is usually the men who make the decisions about buying the rams.'
- 'My main objective for this course is to become more confident, particularly in social/networking situations such as shows and meetings but also within my day to day work.'
- 'I hope to increase my confidence and try to work out where I fit within the farm business. [...] I am struggling to find exactly where I fit in whilst also juggling a young family and my own business. I am hoping the course will help me to see a way forward and be more positive for the future.'

5.6 Views on the training course

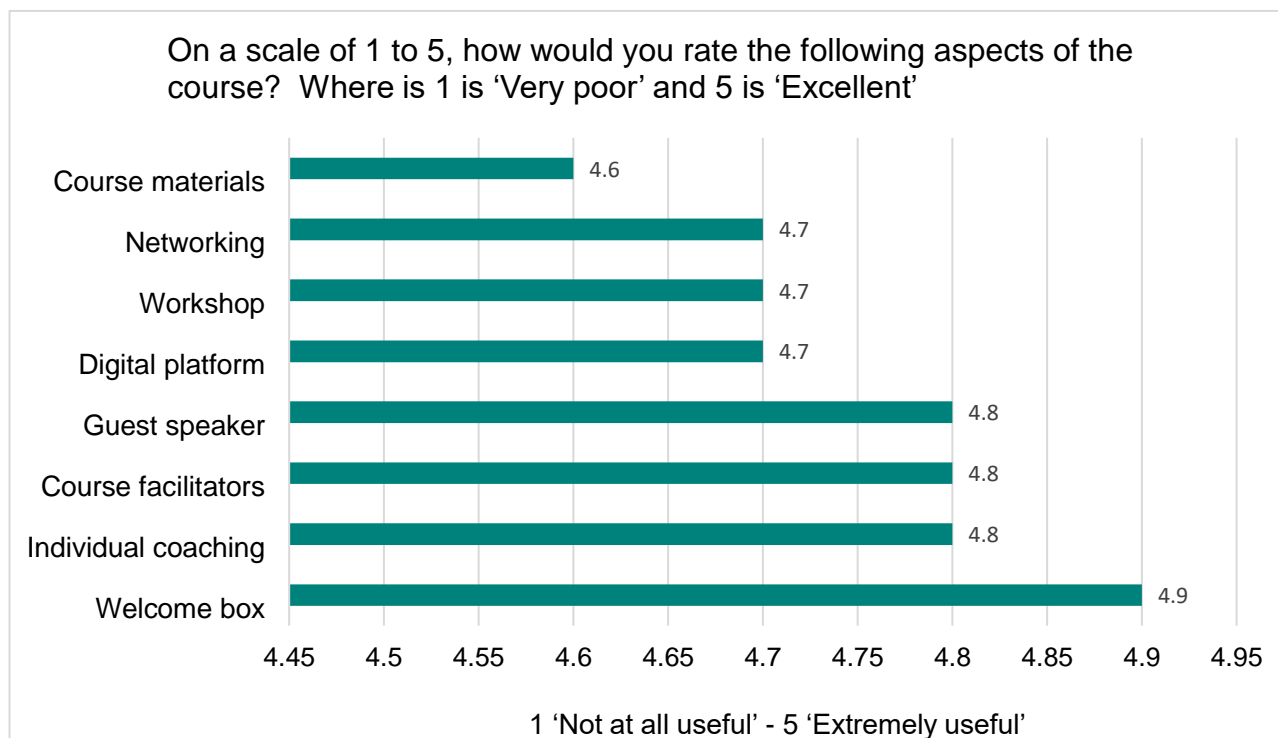
- Respondents were asked to rate how useful they found different parts of the training on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 'Not at all useful' to 5 'Extremely useful')
- The average scores were as follows: 'The opportunity to connect with other women in agriculture' (4.8), 'A chance to build confidence in my skills, strengths and experiences' (4.6) and 'The support to put myself forward and take on further opportunities' (4.6) (see Figure 10).

Figure 10. Usefulness of the training



- When asked to rate different aspects of the course on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 'Very poor' to 5 'Excellent'), respondents rated all aspects highly (see Figure 11).
- The average scores were as follows: welcome box (4.9), individual coaching (4.8), course facilitators (4.8), guest speaker (4.8), workshop (4.7), digital platform (4.7), networking (4.7) and the course materials (4.6).

Figure 11. Feedback on the course



Thinking about the course as a whole, and your expectations before you began, was the training relevant to your needs?

- The majority of respondents felt that the course had been relevant to their needs, even if they had not known what to expect.

Examples

- 'I had no clue before signing up what it was about. I did not really know my needs before the training as I had never looked at myself. The training has allowed me to identify these needs to progress further.'
- 'Yes. I wasn't sure what to expect but the course was so cleverly designed and aligned to what I needed and really went on a journey of learning more about myself and the things that I can change as well as meeting lots of other women, getting inspiration and tools to help breakdown problems and plan things out.'
- 'It definitely exceeded my expectations. It also gave me the opportunity to take some time out and review where I am. The most relevant and useful training that I've done in recent years.'
- 'This course was about finding your voice by looking inside and opening up. I found this really valuable, and I can apply the things I have learnt not only to myself, but my relationships as well as giving me the confidence to start a small rural business. I would say that the support from the other participants forms a big part of the success of the course too.'

What skills has this course helped you to develop?

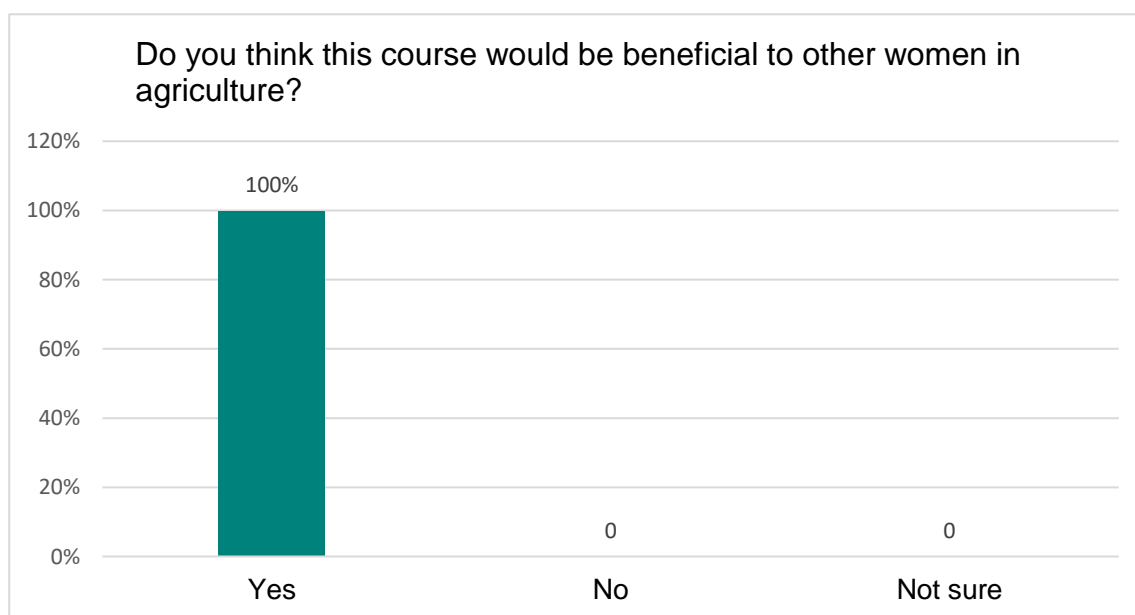
- Respondents stated that the course has helped them to develop their skills in communication, self-reflection, planning (e.g. mind maps) and networking.
- They also indicated that the course has given them practical tools, e.g. in being aware of their own thought processes and behaviour, recognising their strengths or weaknesses, dealing with stressful situations and feeling more confident.

Examples

- ‘The course has given me the confidence to make bigger decisions, take more calculated risks and really be excited for the future without fearing what others might think or worrying about getting things wrong.’
- ‘Greater self-awareness and self-reflection. I’m hoping the ability to be a better communicator. It’s helped me to develop my networking skills and the ability to recognise that I actually already have lots of skills!’
- ‘Confidence to believe in my own abilities, how better to deal with difficult situations and to assert my own needs.’
- ‘I feel much more confident in approaching other people within agriculture to gain information and collaborate with. I have been able to take a strategic look at what my farm business needs to develop and move forward.’

All respondents (100%) stated that they thought the course would be beneficial to other women in agriculture (see Figure 12).

Figure 12. Benefits of the course



5.7 Demographics

- The majority of respondents were aged 30-49 (62%). 15% of respondents were aged 18-29 and a further 25% were aged 50 and over.
- Respondents were most likely to live or work on a farm (64%), whilst a smaller number stated that they live or work on a smallholding (15%) or croft (7%) and a further 16% selected 'not applicable'.

Figure 13. Croft, farm or smallholding

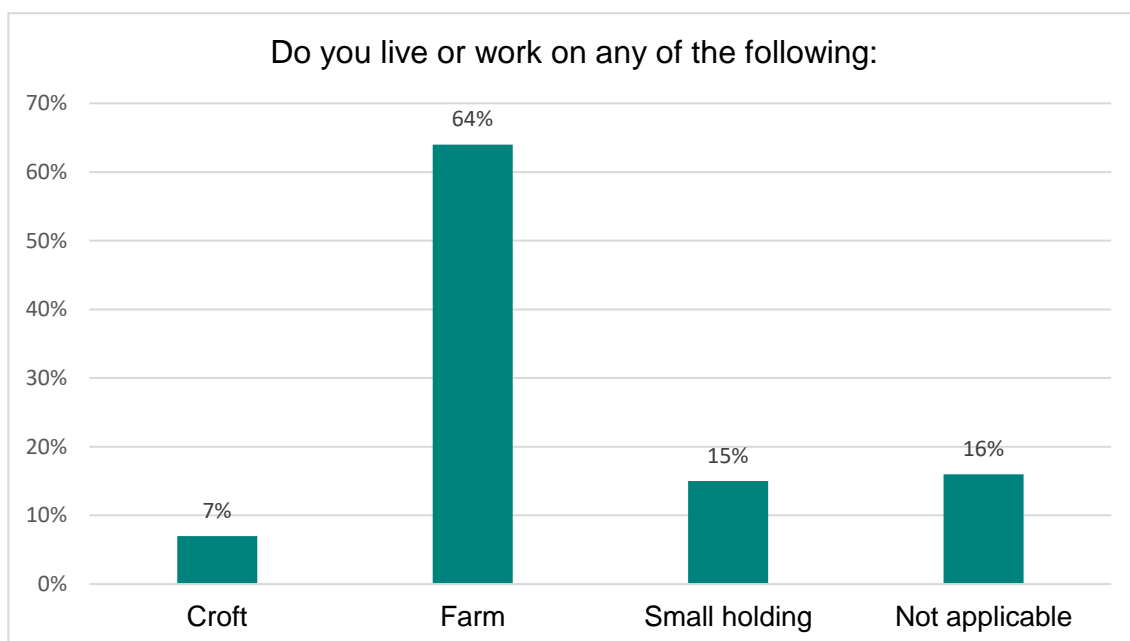
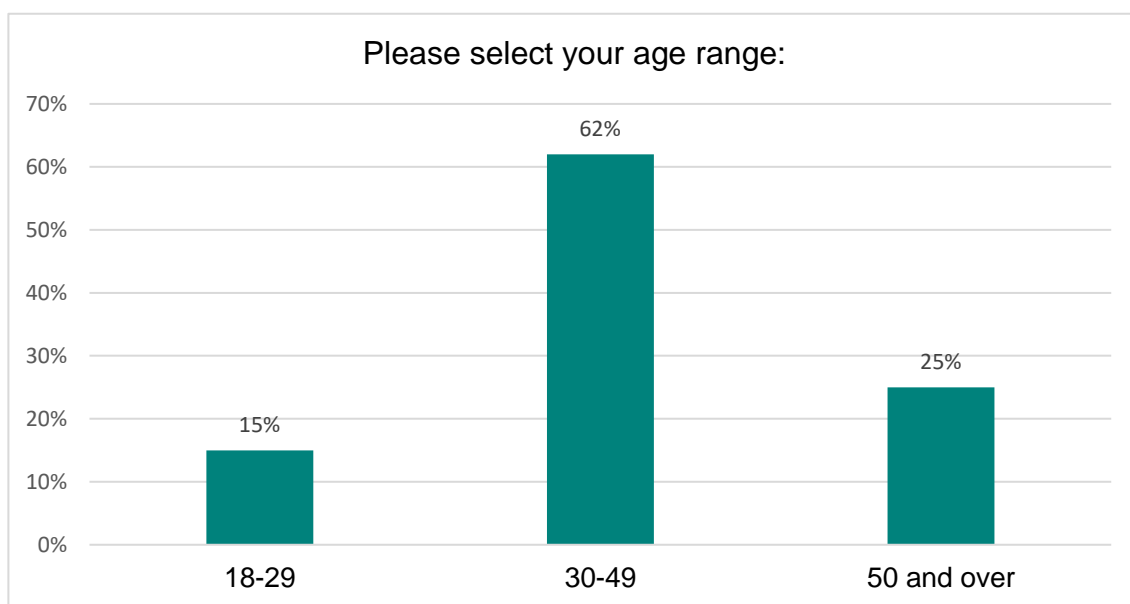


Figure 14. Age range



6. Interview findings

This section provides a more detailed summary of the key interview findings by topic.

6.1 What they wanted to get out of the course

When asked what they wanted to get out of the course, the majority of interviewees said they wanted to build their confidence. Several also wanted to meet other women:

Self-confidence I suppose [...] getting to know myself better, and also I was hoping to meet people who [...] if I had a problem or something I wanted to talk to people about, they would understand. (Interview 1)

Others wanted to find their 'direction'. As the same participant put it: 'Knowing what I wanted to do, and whether I was happy doing what I was doing, and just being confident in what I was doing'. As another suggested:

When it came down to it everybody's main aim on the course was pretty much the same, even though we were all at completely different stages of life, it was all very similar when you broke it right down. (Interview 3)

Two of those interviewed noted that the women all shared a 'lack of confidence'.

Several interviewees wanted to progress in their careers, by increasing their confidence and gaining new skills, including decision-making:

Throughout my life, every time I've changed jobs, I've always seemed to take a step back before I get a step forward, and it's just really frustrating [...] to see if I could find ways of [...] pushing myself forward a bit more. (Interview 4)

When asked if the course had been what they expected, a number of participants said they had not realised it would have such a personal focus. One stated that she was not sure, at first, if the course would be 'useful' for her:

It was totally different to what I was expecting [...] every other course I've ever done farming wise has been more practical and knowledge-based, stuff that I can do on the farm – whereas this was about me and my approach to it, and I think actually it's had more of a lasting impact [...] than any of the other things that I've done. (Interview 7)

A number of participants felt nervous before starting the course, as they did not know what to expect, and hadn't done anything like it before:

I walked into the room and it was just full of people [...] it was quite daunting [...] because you don't really know fully what it was going to be about [...] after the first day, it was like we knew each other for years. (Interview 2)

As one interviewee stated, people in agriculture 'tend not to [...] speak about things'. The course therefore took them out of their comfort zone:

I used to come out of each thing, and I'd be like [...] you just can't believe what we've just been talking about, and my husband would be like, well how's that to do with farming – and I'd be like, well I don't know, but it is, because now I feel like I can go and do A, B or C [...] (Interview 7)

6.2 What they have gained from the course

The course has had a range of positive impacts for interviewees, from building their confidence in their skills and strengths, to enabling them to refocus, explore new opportunities and develop their roles on the farm or in the businesses they work in.

Identity and self-worth

The course has had a positive impact on participants' identity and self-worth. It has made many of the women who took part in interviews feel more sure of themselves, and their role in agriculture:

I think it's had quite a big impact [...] now, if somebody asks what I do, I say well I'm a farmer [...] you can call yourself a farmer, you don't have to be the farmer's daughter or the farmer's wife. (Interview 1)

For one interviewee, a new entrant, the course enabled her to re-consider her own perceptions, and has made her feel more 'confident in myself':

It's just made me feel like a lack of knowledge is not necessarily a bad thing [...] just because I'm a woman, and just because I'm a new entrant, it doesn't mean that I don't belong there [...] I used to feel like I was almost not a real farmer [...] actually [...] This really is my job, maybe I will class myself as a farmer now. (Interview 7)

As one interviewee put it: 'I think the thing I got out of it most when it comes to being a woman in agriculture is [...] feeling stronger about it, in a sense' (Interview 2). The course has enabled attendees to re-focus their ambitions. As another said:

I want to make a name for myself in this industry, and I don't want to be that person that's behind the face of my Dad and my partner [...] I want farmers to know me as, oh [...] I'll phone [name], because I know her from the market or I know she's got a good reputation, she's trying to build herself in the ag world. (Interview 3)

Self-reflection

For many interviewees, the course was an opportunity for self-reflection, and to think about how to handle others' behaviour or manage conflict:

It made you think about a lot of things that you do, and why you do them, and if there's things that you could change [...] to make your life better. (Interview 1)

I thought, people are just totally taking advantage of me [...] after that day I was like, no, enough, I'm not being that person that you walk over anymore [...] I learnt so much more about myself and other people. (Interview 3)

One participant felt she had developed skills in 'listening, understanding people', and 'working out what kind of person you are'. This has helped her to 'approach people differently', including her family: 'I've [...] bitten my tongue, walked away, taken a deep breath, came back [...] I might have not done that a year ago' (Interview 6).

Changes to their role on the farm

The impact of the course on participants' levels of confidence has enabled them to develop their role on the farm and play a bigger role in decision-making:

Now, if they're not listening, I'll sit them down and say look, you're not listening to me, I want to speak to you [...] if I've got something to say that I feel is important, I'll make sure that I do get listened to. (Interview 1)

One participant, who is a partner in the family farm, is 'more confident' about putting forward her ideas and taking part in 'big decisions that are made on the farm':

We grow a lot of malt and barley and we haven't had a good year this year, so we've had quite a lot of discussions about what we're going to do [...] and we've left the company that we used to sell to and [we] had a conversation with a new grain group, but we were both involved in the conversation. We put the phone on speaker and we were both here [...] which wouldn't usually have happened [...] so decisions like that that [...] have quite a big impact on our business, we're now discussing them more.

Another participant now feels able to make the decisions herself:

I always tended to fall back on my husband even though the farm is my thing [...] because I lacked confidence [...] whereas now I'm just like actually, no this is my thing [...] I'll make these decisions, and I've made them because I've done all the research, I've spoken to people [...] it's definitely changed how I conduct myself, as the main person on the farm.

Like changing tups [...] we've changed breeds this year, so that was my decision [...] now I've got the confidence, that no this is my business, and I'm in charge of it [...] if I know what I want to do then I just do it.

Similarly, another interviewee felt that the course has had a 'big impact' on her confidence, from studying to her role on the farm:

I'm more confident in what I'm doing with myself, and at home, if there's something that [...] I would disagree with [...] I'd be more inclined to say something, rather than just be like, oh that's just the way it's done. (Interview 2)

The course has made her feel more confident about trying new farming activities:

Before, I would shy away from things that I hadn't done before [e.g. tractor work] [now] I'm more inclined to be like, right, I'll put a bale out for the cattle, I'll plough this park [...] trying to tell myself, just do it. Just get on with it. Try new things [...] I've been pushing myself to do everything and learn everything.

She feels that her role on the farm has changed, and that her family have realised she needs to be 'more involved' with the decision-making, as 'it is going to be [hers] one day':

[They're] more inclined to actually try new things and listen [to] what I'm saying [...] I feel like it's definitely become [...] more of a kind of joint partnership.

Interviewees also pointed to the potential long-term impact of the confidence they have gained, for example in succession planning:

There are changes that we know need to take place in our own business here, but it's just a matter of timing [...] the course probably gave me the confidence to voice my opinions more. (Interview 4)

Business planning

The course also gave interviewees practical tools to use in business planning. One participant had drawn a mind-map on the course, and shared it with her family. They then did a mind-map of the farm, which has given them a 'direction':

It's allowed us to say right [...] this is what we're doing [...] then [I] did a kind of timeline, and said right, well this is [a] three month window, bearing in mind we're lambing and calving [...] this was a six month window, and this was a year window, and I put things down on it, saying well we'd like to achieve X by that time [...] (Interview 6)

Like other family farms, she explained, they've often 'drifted along', but now, 'let's get it done, let's get it finished and out of the way'.

Similarly, another interviewee said:

We were never very good at planning [...] now, on a Sunday morning we'll sit down and [...] get the diary out and write down the jobs we maybe want to do that week, or discuss what we're going to do that month [...] we are trying to forward plan more than what we did before [...] It makes you feel more focused on what we're going to do, what jobs need done. (Interview 1)

The course had also helped other participants to think about diversification plans, and 'using everything you've got around you to the best of your ability':

I have everything here already to be able to do all this [...] It's given me the confidence that I can wait, and there still will be a market for it. I don't have to do it immediately, but I can start planning now. (Interview 7)

Changes to their role at work

The 'Be Your Best Self' course has helped participants to be more confident at work. For example, one interviewee felt able to speak to her manager to get recognition for the work she'd been doing. 'I would never have done that before':

I messaged him, and said [...] can I just have five minutes of your time to explain what I've done [...] I was able to have that confidence in myself and I was able to say it to him and speak to him without getting angry and upset [...] (Interview 3)

Since finishing the course, she has been able to 'develop' at work, drawing on the plan she wrote. It has also changed how she deals with problems, by 'taking a step back and [...] saying right, how do we do this'.

This interviewee now finds it easier to speak to senior management, 'listen and understand what people are saying', and 'voice [her] opinion'.

Another participant explained that she is now more confident at work, and feels able to ask questions during team meetings.

The course has given interviewees the confidence to apply for new jobs, study for new qualifications or find additional sources of income. This will help them to develop their careers in the agricultural industry. As one put it:

I've had so much confidence from it [...] I thought [...] if it doesn't work it doesn't work [...] whereas before I would have turned round and gone oh no, I'm not doing that [...] I'll stick to my comfort zone, whereas now I think [...] it's time to make a change.

New skills

The course has given interviewees further practical tools, including the notes they made during the sessions, which several use for 'reference':

I've still got the planning book [...] it's got all my little diagrams and things in it, and I still use them now, my little flow-charts [...] that was like a way to put it down on paper, and just keep coming back to it and refocusing my thoughts, so it just gives you a direction of where you're going. (Interview 7)

We wrote down skills which we could do [...] a really big list, and realised that that would relate to this job, that would relate to that job, which made you kind of think about what you actually could do [...] then when I looked at it, I was like oh wait, I actually could manage that [...] [it's] something that I've gone back to. (Interview 2)

However, this approach did not work for everyone, as one interviewee said:

We did get a few new skills, but I think it would take practice to actually get good at and to be honest I haven't really practised them [...] I'm the type of person [...] I just like to see the big picture, and then act [...] I don't take time to analyse, which is probably why I haven't practised the techniques that we were being taught. (Interview 4)

As this participant acknowledged, a recent set-back at work impacted her experience of the course: 'it hasn't changed much for me', 'but then that's maybe just early days'. This suggests that attendees who have looked back at what they learnt on the course and put their new skills into practice have seen clearer benefits.

6.3 Connections to other women in agriculture

The course has enabled attendees to build connections with other women in agriculture. The majority of interviewees were still in touch with other women in their cohort six to twelve months after finishing the course:

Having that group of women is actually the main thing that I took away from it [...] It's nice to have people around you that you feel are supportive. (Interview 1)

We've all come together, and I feel now I've made friends for life [...] I'll be able to go to the Highland show for example, and we're all there and catch up or being able to support each other. (Interview 3)

Several participants stated that during the course, their group was able to break down the barriers that people often put up, and be more 'open' with each other:

I was able to say [...] I am struggling with this, or I am worried about this, can you help, and I felt like it was such an open, safe group that if you said something [...] nobody would judge you, they would all be supportive of you. (Interview 3)

The groups brought together women of different ages and backgrounds, who were able to share their knowledge with each other. Many of those interviewed felt they had benefitted from meeting women 'from different walks of life'. Younger participants, for example, found it useful to hear about other women's experiences and ask their advice.

As one interviewee stated, whilst their ages and situations may have been different, 'you did find ways that you could relate to each other':

It is nice to be able to speak to somebody completely different about like, what's going on at home, or what you need advice on [...] everybody's got different strengths and can advise on different things [...] it's a really good support group to have. (Interview 2)

This was less beneficial for others. As one older participant stated: 'I was more able to share my previous experience than to gain from other people's experiences'.

Participants have met up in person, stayed in touch through social media, or talked to each other on the phone. The majority are still in touch with their cohorts online, sharing messages or replying to posts, and in some cases organising zoom calls.

I feel that there's quite a lot of the ladies that I could message privately at any time about anything really and get help or advice [...] (Interview 1)

Through groups set up on social media, the women are able to ask questions, share practical advice, their progress and encouragement about farming activities:

One of the girls has just bought herself some sheep, so we had quite a good discussion about that [...] when she comes round to lambing time, she'll have questions, and there'll be plenty of people there to help her. (Interview 1)

When I was trying to decide on a tup, I had two breeds in particular and I just asked for anyone's experience [...] one of the girls, she's got native breeds, and I used to keep native breeds [...] I realised actually I have got some experience that other people don't have [...] I actually can offer some advice (Interview 7)

One participant spoke about the importance of the group and described it as an 'imaginary pat on the back': 'you feel as if [...] you're being thought about, you're being cared about'. As she added, even if the online group isn't as active, 'we're still there at the end of a telephone if somebody's needing anything' (Interview 6).

Interviewees spoke about the benefits of connecting to other women in agriculture, who understand what working in the industry is like: 'it's been great having that new group of friends really, that can relate to what you're going through' (Interview 1).

It was nice to see how each person has developed and what they were doing and how we could come together to help each other in our different roles [...]

It's just nice to feel that everybody was taking something out of that, and thinking you know what, we are not just women in agriculture, we're here to make an impact, let's raise our voices. (Interview 3)

The course has strengthened existing connections and led to new ones. For example, one interviewee has met other farmers in her area through women in her cohort, whilst another has become friends with someone she got to know better on the course. As she said, 'it was good to see them in a different environment', and talk about something 'different'.

All of the interviewees felt that it was important to create these connections between women in agriculture. Several felt it would be beneficial to bring women from across the different cohorts together, to create a wider network.

6.4 Feedback on the course

During the interviews, participants also gave feedback on specific aspects of the course. The one-to-one meetings were key to making participants feel comfortable before taking part. They gave interviewees an opportunity to talk about what they wanted to get from it, and to identify specific issues. For example, one said the facilitator had drawn attention to her body language, and how it reflected her lack of confidence. Another said:

I was so nervous going into that one-to-one meeting [...] and after ten minutes I just felt like, I'm just gonna open up [...] and she was like, right okay, let me help you with this [...] we need to work on this [...] she kind of gave me like an action plan thing to work with. (Interview 3)

One participant, who hadn't benefitted from the course as much as other interviewees, said she wished she had 'made more' of this meeting: 'I should have just opened up and told her [...] properly what I was hoping to get out of it'.

Several interviewees spoke about the benefit of being put into smaller groups during the course, as it gave them a chance to get to know other women in their cohort, and made it easier for those who were less confident to take part:

I really enjoyed when they'd split us up into smaller groups [...] and then when you then fed that back to the main group, the sharing of those experiences was quite empowering [...] I'm not a big talker [...] but by the end of it, I already knew [...]

what value they were adding to my own experience [...] that aspect of it [...] learning other people's stories, gave me [confidence]. (Interview 7)

I think that's part of the reason that we all ended up feeling quite safe to say things, and that we have a bit of a bond with the other group members [...] that kind of cohort approach, I think worked really well. (Interview 5)

We were given the opportunity to discuss things that we'd not done so well, and there was absolutely zero judgement, and all anyone ever had was positive advice and encouragement [...] they could actually give you some practical feedback, as well as giving you that moral support. (Interview 7)

One interviewee felt that doing the course in half-day sessions made it a more manageable time commitment:

It allowed us to kind of disappear off, have a think about things [...] and then two days later we came back and we were going, yep, I knew exactly where you were coming from. (Interview 6)

Participants also valued being able to give feedback during the course, on what they were learning, and to share their 'honest opinions'.

6.5 COVID-19 and other challenges

The interviews also highlighted some of the challenges experienced by women in agriculture during the COVID-19 pandemic. Whilst difficult to measure, this has shaped the impact of the course for the women who took part:

It's so difficult coming back with such a positive mind-set and then everybody's still the same as they were a couple of days before [...] it was quite hard to begin with to try and keep this momentum up, because we're locked down. (Interview 2)

Several interviewees had struggled to balance childcare, home-schooling and their work on the farm during this time. The online groups were a key form of support. As one noted, they may not 'have had as much contact if it had been a normal year':

I think just having people there who can relate to what you're going through is really helpful [...] what we've gone through in the last year, there's quite often been a day where somebody's put on, you know, I'm really struggling [...] It's such a lovely feeling, to know that you've got all of those people there. (Interview 1)

Whilst interviewees had largely positive experiences of doing the course online, with some noting that this made it more accessible for women living in rural and island areas, several felt they would have made stronger connections in-person:

I would have really liked to have [met face-to-face], and I think that would have made a big difference to me [...] on how I felt I could approach the members in the group afterwards, because at the moment it still feels a bit remote. (Interview 4)

It's been a bit difficult because ours was delivered online [...] our group sort of said we'd really like to meet up [...] it'd be great to meet up with the other cohorts as well [...] there is the start of a network there that could be very influential. (Interview 5)

6.6 Next steps

This [course] has given me something that I didn't have before [...] for me it was the right place and the right time [...] whilst it's not given me the answers it's made me go forward and it's given me options [...] (Interview 5)

The majority of the women interviewed stated that the course has had a positive impact on their plans for the future. In many cases, it has led them to re-focus and re-prioritise, from changing jobs to taking up new opportunities. All of the women felt more confident about applying for further training to gain new agricultural skills or develop their careers.

I want to go on a clipping course, so I can clip my own sheep [...] I'd be more inclined I think now to go on courses and learn different things [...] It's definitely opened my eyes to more options. (Interview 2)

Those interviewed have taken actions including: applying for board roles, signing up for further coaching, looking into bookkeeping courses and contacting sheep breeders to gain work experience during lambing season. Several wanted to develop their careers in agricultural businesses with further practical training:

A couple of years ago [...] I was like, oh no that's not for me, whereas now I feel well, if I put myself out there and I get accepted, it'd be brilliant, if not I'll try again [...] I want to put as much into my career as I can. (Interview 3)

I haven't been successful yet [...] maybe I've just not been the right fit or [...] not had quite the right skills [...] I'm sure it's something that I could be good at, and actually I'm not put off by the fact I've applied for a few things and then not been successful because I know that I'll get there in the end [...] (Interview 5)

The course has increased their confidence, resilience and motivation. For example, one participant said that the training has made her think about 'how things fit together':

It's made me having a look at what I've done with my life, what qualifications I've got, what I've enjoyed doing, and then kinda just reassessed what I've got [...] Then I also looked at, okay, the farm [...] where could I have an involvement [...] what other things can we look at [...] (Interview 6)

Another interviewee said that she now feels more 'more optimistic':

It's definitely made me more optimistic about my future as well, thinking about widening my options a bit, and even though I do want to stay at home, realising there is more than just going home and getting that office job [...]

Now I definitely want to go and do a couple of lambings down south, experience a couple of things [...] see how other folk run things, and maybe adapt that into what we're doing to make it more profitable. (Interview 2)

This connects to the wider sense of confidence the course has given attendees:

I think I took quite a lot of inspiration [...] that you can do whatever you want to do, you don't have to wait for somebody to give you permission to do it. If you want to work hard enough and you want something enough, then it's possible [...]

There was another girl that I know that was thinking about applying for it, and I just told her to go for it [...] I said it'll be the best thing you've ever done. (Interview 1)

Conclusions

This report has discussed the findings of an evaluation of the 'Be Your Best Self' (2020-21) training pilot, delivered as part of the Women in Agriculture programme. The evaluation included pre-course and post-course questionnaires, and follow-up interviews with seven women around six months after they had taken part in the course.

This research provides evidence of the long-term impact of the training, in addition to the views of the women who took part on the course delivery. Their feedback on the course has enabled us to plan the next stage of the 'Be Your Best Self' training programme in 2021-23, its design and evaluation.

Overall, the research shows that the 'Be Your Best Self' training pilot has achieved its aims by helping women in agriculture to: build their confidence; discover the true value of their skills, strengths and experiences; refocus and re-prioritise; explore new possibilities and opportunities; and gain support and connections with other women in the industry.

As the survey results show, respondents felt more optimistic about their future in agriculture after completing the course. It had a positive impact on their confidence in their skills, strengths and experiences, and after the course, the majority felt more confident about taking part in agricultural events and signing up for further training and opportunities.

Building on this, the interview findings demonstrate that the course has had a positive, long-term impact on interviewees' sense of confidence, optimism and self-worth, and that this has led to positive changes in terms of their own roles in farming and agriculture.

For example, since completing the course, participants have gained the confidence to take on a bigger role in business planning and decision-making, and try new activities on the farm. Many of them feel more motivated and focused, and this suggests the wider impact the course will have on women's roles in Scottish agriculture.

Whilst the course outcomes have been shaped by a range of factors, including challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the course has been successful in helping women at different stages of their lives to refocus and to explore new opportunities.

The course has led to lasting connections between women in agriculture, with participants staying in touch online, meeting in person and sharing advice and support.

Those interviewed have valued the opportunity to meet women of different ages and backgrounds, from various locations and roles in farming, to share their knowledge and experience with each other. The research shows the benefits of connecting women in agriculture, in addition to increasing their confidence, knowledge and skills. Both are important in supporting women's progression in the industry.

Next steps

This research highlights what has worked well or not as well, and areas to focus on in delivering the next stage of the ‘Be Your Best Self’ course:

- The course should be a safe and open space where those taking part can discuss both their concerns or doubts and their plans for the future
- Those delivering the course should aim to create both a challenging and supportive environment by building relationships with and between the women
- Through one-to-one sessions at the start of the course, participants should be encouraged to open up and feel more confident about taking part
- The aims and design of the programme should be clearly explained to applicants, so that women know what to expect before taking part
- Participants should be given the opportunity to talk in smaller groups, so that they can build relationships and take part in discussions
- Cohorts should be encouraged to build a support network, stay in touch with each other and continue to share their experiences after the course
- A wider network of women who have taken part in the course should also be set up, to build further connections between women in agriculture
- The programme should continue to be delivered online, but consideration should be given to encouraging women to meet in person when possible

The survey results show that after completing the course, respondents felt more confident about signing up for further training or employment opportunities, taking part in agricultural events and raising concerns about the way the business is run. The ‘Be Your Best Self’ course will therefore play an important role in our work toward achieving the aims of the Women in Agriculture taskforce. It will help to support positive change within the industry, by breaking down barriers faced by women and inspiring them to reach their full potential.

In the survey, just over half of respondents felt more confident about having a say in financial decision making in the business. We will focus on this area in planning the next stage of the Women in Agriculture Development Programme (WiADP).

The ‘Knowing your Business’ course will be designed to enhance women’s business skills, and will aim to help women involved in agriculture increase their knowledge, skills, tools and confidence to improve business performance. This will be piloted in 2022-23.

The 2021-22 Programme for Government sets out a commitment to ensure that women living or working in Scottish agriculture are empowered to develop their skills, access opportunities and realise their potential.⁶ The findings outlined in this report show that the ‘Be Your Best Self’ training programme is key to delivering this commitment.

⁶ [A Fairer, Greener Scotland: Programme for Government 2021-22 - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/programme-for-government-2021-22/pages/100.aspx)



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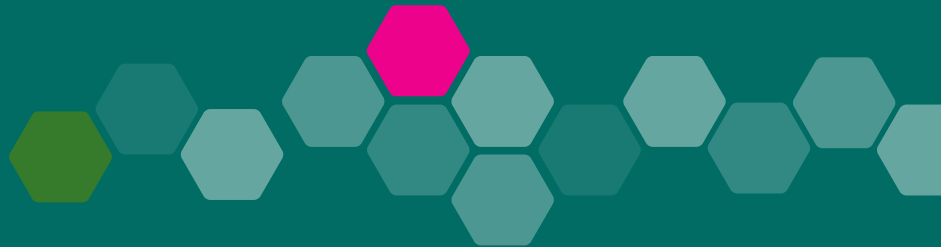
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This document is also available from our website at www.gov.scot.
ISBN: 978-1-80435-126-0

The Scottish Government
St Andrew's House
Edinburgh
EH1 3DG

Produced for
the Scottish Government
by APS Group Scotland
PPDAS1034130 (03/22)
Published by
the Scottish Government,
March 2022



Social Research series
ISSN 2045-6964
ISBN 978-1-80435-126-0

Web Publication
www.gov.scot/socialresearch

PPDAS1034130 (03/22)