

Down on the farm



Murray at Altyre with Allan Michie and Nicholas with Gordon Whiteford at Highland Eggs

Ringlink's successful internship programme provides young people with rural skills and training, making them ready for employment in land-based mentor businesses.



spreader, customised to suit the application! Beneath the humour it was very apparent that both mentor and pupil take things very seriously; a farm can be a dangerous place with heavy machinery always on the move and one slip of concentration could result in serious injury.

Murray is from a farming background so is no stranger to farm life, but he now has new responsibilities which will increase from day to day as Allan entrusts more and more to his young charge.

From Altyre it was on to Highland Eggs. Owner Gordon Whiteford is mentor to 17 year old Nicholas Davidson who has no background in farming. Nicholas does not live close to the farm and has to travel by bus from Portsoy every day to start work at 7am. He is a quiet, respectful young man but is just as committed to his placement as Murray is. He, too, takes his work very seriously and is willing to turn his hand to any jobs that need doing. Although the majority of Nicholas' duties include the welfare of the hens, egg collecting and grading, he also works with the cattle and the sheep when required.

Following up on the article in the August issue of *Lifestyle*, Gail Robertson at the Laurencekirk Office of Ringlink suggested we visit two very different farms to meet both the mentors and their interns.

The two farms we visited were completely different. Located in a densely forested area south of Forres, the Altyre Estate is steeped in history and has both arable and livestock, as well as driven pheasant shooting; the other farm, Highland Eggs at Lower Mill of Tynet, produces organic and free range eggs. It also has cattle and sheep grazing its rolling countryside.

We met Allan Michie, a first-time mentor and farms manager at Altyre, who mentors 16 year old Murray Reid. It was obvious that the two of them had struck up a very good working relationship. They are an inventive twosome, turning a standard motorbike into a revolutionary seed

Both Allan and Gordon are keen for young people to be encouraged to enter farming, even if they do not have a farming background. Two very different environments but with the same commitment to their farms, their workforce and the future. It is time well invested.

