

## **Nuffield Beckett Scholar Group 2004**

The Beckett Scholars held their 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Weekend in Aberdeenshire. It was hosted and organised by Sarah Mackie who, having left Safeways and London, is now back at her home base and working for Tesco.

The Group was shown not only the very best in traditional Aberdeenshire farming but also the way that the entrepreneurial spirits in the area are bringing in new enterprises and lateral concepts. For example the Maitland Mackie family milk over 500 cows in a very rural setting using eight robotic milkers and converting the majority of the product into ice cream. This is sold not only all over the UK, but is also exported to Korea.

Another member of the extended Mackie clan was growing superb quality raspberries on a large scale in poly tunnels. Like farmers all over Britain he found his best, if not only, source of labour was eastern European. Elsewhere a small farm which would not now be economically viable had been transformed into an Outdoor Activity and Conference Centre. With three man-made lakes creating a beautiful setting the venue offered rally karting, clay shooting, trout fishing, off-road and obstacle driving, paint ball jousting, archery, golf, putting, indoor archery, nature walks, falconry displays, conference facilities and traditional Scottish wedding celebrations.

Possibly the highlight of the weekend was a dinner given by Sarah and her parents in their lovely Scottish farmhouse, where the home-grown sirloin and extensive selection of puddings were cooked by our cordon bleu-trained hostess herself.

The next morning the group visited The Store, a farm shop created by a local farming family initially to sell their beef and advertised as "the changing face of food shopping .... we intend to keep Scotland's natural larder door well and truly open". It is now spreading its wings fast.

Finally there was a brief tour of Sarah's family's home farm, then soup and sandwiches and sadly we all had to part and make the long trek home. The Weekend had provided an insight into the traditions of a famous farming family in a famous agricultural county and made us all realise what we, as farmers, need to stand for and uphold. However, we shall not be able to do this by sticking to the conventional husbandry and marketing of the past, and that is what the Beckett Group is all about and why we seek for innovation and entrepreneurship in production and marketing.