

## People

# Picturing the realities of farming lives

Photographer Valerie Mather has captured the lives of farming families for her first book. She speaks to **Sophie McCandlish**.

The lives of farming families have been captured through the lens in a new book described by its creator as a "labour of love".

The 70-page *Yorkshire Born & Bred: Farming Life* has been two years in the making for former lawyer turned photographer, Valerie Mather, who said she feels there may still be more to come for the project.

The coffee table book features more than 50 photographs of Yorkshire farming families, capturing their lives on the farm, at agricultural shows and auction marts.

Valerie, who retired early from law to pursue her lifelong love of photography said she wanted to show the realities of farming life particularly in the current climate of change.

"Farming and farming families are part of my local community and I feel they sometimes don't have a voice," she said.

"Farming is currently facing the greatest period of change since the tractor replaced horses and we are also becoming very removed from the production of the food we eat. So I felt really I wanted to educate myself and, if I could get the pictures out, to educate the public about the life of farmers."

Starting at agricultural shows and auction marts, Valerie, who lives in Boston Spa, near Leeds, said over time she got to know some individual farming families who allowed her to keep visiting and observe their daily lives through her camera.

"The book includes farmers who have been farming for three or four generations as well as first-generation farmers who are not long

out of college. "I very much enjoyed all the different stories," she said.

"I met people who have chosen to farm having, in some cases, perhaps done something else and others whose grandparents and great grandparents were farmers. It was also lovely to meet some of the very young children who clearly have a passion for the job at a very young age.

"I was so warmly welcomed by the farming community and I am very grateful to all the farmers and their families for their willingness to share their stories."

Valerie said she felt "very passionate" about the images she had taken and decided to publish the book to share them with a wider audience.

She also has tentative plans for an exhibition when lockdown restrictions are finally lifted.

"It is a real labour of love and although it is hard to know when a project is done, I don't feel this one is. I am learning so much about rural life that I didn't know before and it continues to engage and inform me."

The images Valerie has taken for the project also earned her an Associate distinction with the Royal Photographic Society, an accolade presented for a body of work which the society judges said is of a "high standard".

"Photography is where my focus is now," she said. "I have always loved it but with no formal photographic background doing the associateship has been my way of educating myself."

■ *Yorkshire Born & Bred: Farming Life* by Valerie Mather is available from [valeriematherphotography.co.uk](http://valeriematherphotography.co.uk)



**CAUGHT ON CAMERA:** Valerie Mather, above, started the photographic project to educate herself and the general public about the life of farmers. PICTURES: VALERIE MATHER



