GORDONSTOUN
Plus Est En Vous

Dr Laura Miller

Hopeman, 1993

Recognised for her outstanding contribution to veterinary research, as a leading authority on biosecurity with a dedication to global animal health.

Laura Miller is a leading veterinary virologist and biodefence specialist who has dedicated her career to animal health and the safeguarding of global agriculture.

Born on a 6000-acre farm in Caithness in 1975, Laura spent her teenage years lambing, calving and riding her horses. After completing her preparatory schooling at Blairmore, she won a scholarship to Gordonstoun where she played four instruments and adored playing hockey as goalkeeper in the 1st XI. Laura was a member of the Coastguards and, along with her Upper Sixth year group, won the Gordonstoun Association Prize for Service in 1993.

At Edinburgh University, she played rugby for Scotland whilst studying Medical Microbiology, before taking up a PhD post in Molecular Virology at the Pirbright Institute. In 2001, she was completing her PhD when the Foot and Mouth outbreak began and she found herself on the front line for diagnostic testing.

Later that year she moved to America as a research fellow at the USDA where she remained as a Microbiologist working on high-consequence pathogens for over 20 years. During this time Laura dedicated much of her work to livestock viruses including disease detection in Swine Flu samples in 2009 and developing diagnostics for the 2013 pig outbreak PEDV. In 2020, she served on the US Task Force for managing the Covid pandemic, and was part of the team that recommended the mRNA vaccine programme.

Currently an Associate Professor at Kansas State University, Laura continues to direct research into livestock disease and lead national animal genome projects, whilst mentoring the next generation of research scientists. She also serves on the board of the American Association of Veterinary Immunologists, has authored over 70 peer-reviewed papers, and regularly speaks at major international conferences.Outside of work, she is known for her success breeding vizsla dogs and competing on horseback alongside them in Field Trial events - with her dog Bull elected to the Vizsla Club of America Hall of Fame in 2025, the Kansas Field Trial Hall of Fame in 2024 and National Vizsla Association 2027.

My academic career has often coincided with real world examples of the value of my work - it's sobering.

Being at Pirbright when Foot and Mouth broke out was a front line view into the reality of biosecurity failure. It's one of very few high containment facilities for transboundary animal diseases in the world so it was a uniquely powerful position to be in. It was amazing to see how fast the centre responded and be part of the programme that analysed over a million samples whilst training other teams.

When Covid hit, again, I was in the unusual position of already understanding the diagnostic needs; in fact, I had been following the outbreak and already had the technology in my lab to do it. The US government sent us home and wouldn't let us continue to work, but I spent the time advising on the task force and continuing to look ahead to future Covid threats. I wrote a paper predicting the disease would jump into deer species - something we're seeing happen right now.

The work itself is important, but it also matters to me that I advocate for women in science.

I always thought a career in science would be highly respected, but it's a challenging industry.The spread of misinformation has had a direct impact on funding, so vital research is going unfunded and we're losing talented graduate students. At the same time, I've mentored students who've gone on to do amazing things and I think it's so valuable to elevate the next generation, to shine the spotlight on their achievements. Supporting women in science is so important. I'm still shocked at how hard it is for women to progress and receive the recognition they deserve. I hold a position that enables me to boost the profile of my female colleagues and raise their value in the industry; it's just not done enough.

I'm known for my resilience - I think my time at Gordonstoun shaped me in this way.

I think my peers would say I get stuck in and make things happen. Gordonstoun gave me a fearlessness which enabled me to adapt well to all situations. I think my willingness to break barriers and succeed in unconventional paths, both professionally and personally, reflects the spirit of embracing challenge.

At the same time, the central pillar of our education - service - has always stayed with me. My work directly serves the global community by addressing critical threats to public health and global food security, but I also try to clear a path for others to be professionally recognised.I want to have integrity in my actions now so that I can look back, when I'm 80 years old, and know I did the right thing; I helped others succeed.