Mill of Inverarity Farm is run by Rob and Alison Stodart, with their two sons Rory and Tom. In total the business farms 358 hectares. The farm is a traditional mixed unit growing 130 hectares of cereals, with a herd of 200 suckler cows and a flock of 700 breeding ewes. The business also annually buys in store cattle and lambs for finishing and has recently set up a laying hen enterprise on farm of 4,500 hens.

On the day the group looked at pre-mating management of ewes and tups, planning ahead the housing of cattle and the cost of production on last year’s winter crops to look at changes for this year.


KEY MESSAGES

- Condition scoring ewes is an essential part of planning for pre-tupping management. Target ewe condition score at tupping is 3 – 3.5
- Tup MOT’s are important and should take place 8 weeks before being turned out with ewes.
- Try and target young ewes in the flock for preferential feeding to ensure good fertility.
- For pre-housing plans there was a focus on measuring and trying to reduce pneumonia. The key areas were avoiding stress, separating out unavoidable stress, reduce challenge and improve housing, if possible.
- Vaccinating against pneumonia – target the specific bugs, always follow instruction and complete the full course BEFORE the pneumonia challenge hits the cattle.
- It is essential to look at winter crop growing costs to ensure the crop is profitable and no excess costs are incurred over the growing season.
AREAS OF DISCUSSION

- One of the main themes on the day was discussion with sheep expert, John Vipond, on pre-mating management of ewes and tups. There was a good discussion on the topic. The group thought that at weaning the in first week of August they would identify culls based on their udders, teeth and feet but disregard condition as milky ewes could be thin from putting everything into rearing their lambs. Any fat ewes could be sold immediately and put the rest on best quality grass to regain condition for selling.

- Once culls are identified and pulled out the ewes will now be condition scored to group for feeding prior to tupping for targeting a body condition score of 3 – 3.5. When grazing the sward height will be measured to ensure it goes no lower than 4cm. A target for the sward is 6 – 8cm of good quality grass preferably with a clover/grass mix. The group got a technical demonstration on condition scoring and got to score groups of ewes at the meeting then discuss feeding.

- Other suggestions that came from the flock management session was to run the cull ewes with the finishing lambs and at weaning move the ewes to a different field rather than the fields to reduce stress and weaning check.

- Cost of production for the farm winter crops were discussed. On drilling down through the gross margin, the feedback from the group was a concern over the costs of sprays used. Going forward the monitor farm would like to see this reduced and margins looking healthier for the crops.

FARMERS UPDATE

- New laying unit is now up and running with 4,500 free range hens in the shed.

- Discussion underway with Strone Monitor Farm on buying in store hill lambs to finish at Mill of Inverarity.

- Crops are all looking well, and winter crops are almost ready for harvest to start.
FACTS & FIGURES DISCUSSED

- Laying hen unit is now and up and running at Drowndubbs with 4,500 hens producing free range eggs. Labour for this is provided on farm by Alison each morning sorting eggs for packaging.

- The winter crop production costs were looked at and discussed and cost for the 2017 growing seasons were as follows: Winter Wheat £515/ha, Winter Oilseed Rape £480/ha and Winter Barley £367/ha. These costs were lower than 2016.

- Undersown spring barley trials are ongoing on farm this year with 4 different grass varieties being sown under Chronicle spring barley. The aim of this trial is to produce good sward of grass for winter grazing that does not have a detrimental affect on the barley yield. At the same time it helps the farm meets its greening requirements as the Stodarts would like to get away from leaving land lying fallow. The trial is progressing well with some grass varieties doing better than others.

OPPORTUNITIES/CHALLENGES

- Condition scoring ewes at key times throughout the year
  Members of the community group were discussing the importance of condition scoring ewes prior to tupping, when in lamb and at weaning. Going forward this is an opportunity for the Stodarts to do more condition scoring and tighten up feeding groups ensuring all ewes are at the best level of production they can be.

- Does the spring barley undersown with grass work?
  The group were really interested in the undersown barley trials and how the different grass varieties were coming on. It has provided the Stodarts with some winter grazing for lambs whilst still fulfilling their greening requirements for Basic Payment Scheme compliance. The grass types ranged from timothy and cocksfoot to Italian ryegrass.
ACTIONS FROM LAST MEETING

- Harvest will commence and the results of the undersown barley trials will be revealed to the group for discussion.
- PD results for heifers that were AI’d earlier in the year.
- Performance of the breeding flock will be looked at after lambs are weaned and sales start.
- Yield maps and results from harvest 2017 will be out for the group to discuss.

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