Mill of Inverarity is run by the Stodarts and in total the business farms 358 hectares. The farm is a traditional mixed unit growing 130 hectares of cereals, with 200 suckler cows and 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 took an in depth look at the cattle enterprises on the farm and discussed several topics including the use of artificial insemination and cow type at Mill of Inverarity. The meeting also looked into the 2017 harvest results.

**Management Group:** Graeme Mather, Fiona Lawson, Ian Pattullo, Neil McGowan, Stuart Lawrie, Duncan Wilson, Graeme Neill, John Kidd, Robin Norrie, Sam Ruddell.

**KEY MESSAGES**

- If possible, getting heifers calving at 2 years old proves more productive than leaving them longer and older when put to the bull.
- The use of AI has a time and place, but the monitor farm had poor results with their first round of AI in heifers and had greater success with natural service.
- The most efficient cow in the herd was a 644kg cow that produced a 292kg calf but the spread of cow efficiency in the herd was wide indicating good scope for improvement.
- On the day the group also discussed harvest 2017 and what the general thoughts and feelings were and lessons that were learned from 2017. The best bits seemed to be yields were up in certain varieties of barley like Laureate and oilseed rape yields were up on last year.
AREAS OF DISCUSSION

- A key topic up for debate in the cattle enterprises was the use of AI on the heifers in the herd versus natural service with a bull. The group had some costings to look at and when compared the price per heifer in calf for AI was £177 compared to £18 for running a bull with the herd. The strength and weaknesses of both methods were discussed and the main point that came out of it was that if AI was to be tried again on farm then the criteria for selecting heifers must be strict and adhered to.

- The next topic that created most discussion on the cattle was spring calving versus autumn calving and is autumn calving profitable? The group were given the costings for the Mill of Inverarity compared to the QMS costings for the top 25%. This showed the variable costs to be in line with the QMS figures, but a greater gross margin was needed by Mill of Inverarity to hit the top 25% figures. When it came to the comparison between the spring and autumn calving, the variable costs are significantly different (£235 for autumn and £154 for spring). This led the group to question the Stodarts on whether they should have an autumn calving herd or should they move the whole herd to spring calving.

- All figures from the meeting can be found in the supporting topic sheet.

FARMERS UPDATE

- Following the results from the AI in heifers, and the group discussions, the farm has decided to stick with use of bulls on the heifers until replacement numbers are up to where they would like them. AI may be trialled again in the future when Stodarts will be able to be a lot stricter with selection criteria.

- Yields have been finalised for harvest 2017 and an example of one of the fields can be seen on the right. This field was in winter oilseed rape and shows the wide range in yields across the whole field.

- The cattle enterprise was scrutinised in this meeting and so the breed of cow may move away from Limousin as the thoughts are that the LIMX cows are becoming too pure.
FACTS & FIGURES DISCUSSED

- The physical performance and costings of the use of AI on a batch of heifers at the Mill compared to the use of natural service were calculated. The Mill had a poor success rate with the AI with only 51% of the heifers being in calf compared to another farm running a bull with heifers that had a conception rate of 95%. This lead to an expensive first attempt with AI with the cost being £177 per heifer in calf compared to £18 per heifer in calf for running a bull.

- Cow efficiency was discussed in more detail with the use of adjusted calf weight against cow weights leading to a major difference between the most efficient cow at 45% and the least efficient cow at 21%.

- Cows at Mill of Inverarity were costed against the QMS booklet to measure and monitor performance and came out with a gross margin of £230 per cow to the bull whilst the top 25% are hitting margins of £433. This gives the Stodarts a good indicator of performance and a baseline for looking into the cattle outputs.

OPPORTUNITIES/CHALLENGES

- **Look at the breed of cow in the suckler herd – does it need to change?**
  Members of the community group were discussing the possibility that the breed of cattle mainly in the suckler herd may not be the right type for the farm. Rob Stodart has agreed that the cows may be leaning towards having too much Limousin in them and an alteration to breed type may benefit the system.

- **Does autumn calving pay?**
  The group were really interested in the figures that came out from the discussion around autumn calving at Mill of Inverarity. It was a lively debate that challenged the Stodart family on whether they should be autumn calving at all.

ACTIONS FROM LAST MEETING

- If the farm decides to go ahead with autumn calving, the decision has to be made soon for sorting out cows and bulls.

- Winter planning for cereals to look at any changes that are to be made.

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