

ABOUT THIS MONITOR FARM

Farm name Girtridge Farm, Dundonald, Kilmarnock, Ayrshire, KA2 9BX

Girtridge Farm is run by the business of Messrs John Howie, a partnership consisting of John Howie, his mother Margaret and his sister Mary. The business farms a total of 140 hectares of non-LFA land and 35 hectares of LFA grassland.

Livestock

Finished Cattle: Approximately 230 finishing cattle purchased through the local market all year round. The aim is to sell cattle at R4L deadweight through either Stoddarts or Highland Meats.

Sheep Flock: 140 cross ewes put to Suffolk, Texel and Beltex x tups. All lambs are sold finished through the live market. All replacement females are purchased through the market.

Breeding Cattle: 10 mixed breed spring-calving suckler cows running with a Limousin bull. Calves transition to the finishing cattle system.

Cropping

Spring Barley: 28 hectares of Spring Barley. All barley and straw is used on farm.

Forage: 2 cuts of silage are taken with 7.13 hectares of hay also being produced.

Meeting Topics

The management group drives the direction the monitor farm takes and suggests ideas for meetings and try-outs for the host farmer to explore. There was such interest in being a part of the project that our management group comprises 20 members including local farmers, the farm vet, as well as the Howie family and facilitators. The current management chairman is Mr Craig Bryson, a young farmer who matches the drive and enthusiasm of our monitor farmer John Howie. He also operates a finished cattle enterprise and is keen to adopt any new techniques or ideas that arise from the monitor farm programme. It is envisaged that the chairman of the management group will be rotated over the course of the programme to allow other members of the group to determine the direction the monitor farm takes.

Year 1 Meeting Summary

Date	Attendance	Aims	Outcomes
01/02/2017	73	Getting to know the farm. Establishing a functioning group.	Understanding the business. Ideas for meeting topics based on the introduction. Potential improvements to the farm. Encouraging attendees to get involved.
<i>Management Group Established</i>			
31/05/2017	47	Understanding cattle behaviour and designing new handling facilities. Effective worm control strategies. Analysing lamb losses.	Blood testing ewes to determine cause of lamb losses between scanning and birth. All purchased ewes to be routinely Toxovac'd. Faecal Egg counts carried out on lambs and ewes to establish the need for drenching. Post drench efficacy tests carried out to identify any resistance problems. Host farmer (John) taking community group ideas forward to price a new handling facility.
06/07/2017	44	Explore soil essentials, grassland establishment and grazing techniques. Understand the carbon footprint for Girtridge's farming activities.	Established rotational grazing paddocks for the finishing cattle and sheep. Closer attention to nutrients, in particular Lime. Understanding of how increased efficiency and improved output can reduce the farms carbon footprint.
20/09/2017	73	Assessing finished lambs and cattle for market.	A proportion of lambs were sold deadweight to receive greater feedback on whether lambs were meeting specification. Cattle gross Margins calculated to identify those animals returning the most profit. Avoid over finishing livestock which adds cost for both producer and processor. The importance of having a set of weight scales was highlighted with our guess the liveweight competition.

21/09/2017	26	Carcase Viewing	The group got the opportunity to view and challenge the carcasse grades providing greater understanding of the EUROP grid and carcasse classification system and reasons for carcasse condemnation.
<i>Benchmarking Group Established</i>			
01/12/2017	64	The basics of Cattle rationing. Understanding cattle respiratory diseases. The impact housing can have on cattle performance.	Housing alterations proposed at Girtridge to improve ventilation and livestock performance including removing some of the cranked ridges and modifying the vented side cladding. Rations formulated for the finished cattle to drive an increase in DLWG.

Attendance

Attendances have been strong for all of the meeting so far. However, monitor farm meetings cannot simply be judged on these figures; sharing knowledge and encouraging uptake of best practice and change at farm level are far more important. Feedback from the group highlights the need not only for relevant topics and good quality speakers but also for the meetings to be enjoyable and informal where they are comfortable to share their views.

- Total attendance for year 1 is 326, with an average of 55 at each meeting.
- Some prefer to attend all meetings; others will pick and choose by the topic.



FACILITATOR CONTACT DETAILS

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