

ABOUT SUTHERLAND MONITOR FARM

Farm name	Clynelish Farm, Brora, Sutherland, KW9 6LR
Meeting Number	17- Winter management options
Meeting Date	Thursday 10 October 2019
Next Meeting	TBC – Start of December 2019
Report date	Friday 11 October August 2019

Clynelish Farm is a 125-hectare farm run by Jason Ballantyne and his wife Vic, in partnership with Jason’s dad Murdo.

Cattle: The family run 80 suckler cows with calves sold store at 10 months of age. Cows are all out-wintered.

Sheep: There is a flock of 900 breeding ewes, of which about half are Lairg type Cheviots and the other half Lleyn cross, currently lamb outdoors at the end of April.



Unusually for the area, the cattle and sheep enterprises are both on forage based diets with virtually no concentrate feeding.



Management Group:
John Scott (Chair)
Rory MacKenzie, Sheena MacKenzie, Brian MacLeod,
Danny Miller, Iain MacKenzie, Donald Ross



KEY MESSAGES

- Pasture is the cheapest feed and leaves a smaller carbon foot print
- Fencing is the most powerful tool to influence grass growth
- Profit is linked to the percentage of pasture grown that is consumed
- Chemicals should be used last in the control/eradication of rushes

AREAS OF DISCUSSION

As it was warm(ish) and dry the meeting started with a tour of the farm to see the fodder beet trials and the area of rushes are being controlled.

All 11 trial plots of fodder beet are looking well and have performed very well compared to 2018. The crop had the same products applied as in 2018 but as the crop was grown under the watchful eye of an agronomist the sprays and fertiliser have been applied timeously. When the fodder beet has stopped growing the dry matter (DM) of the different plots will be calculated. This will show if variety and/or management has impacted on the dry matter. The calculation of DM will also allow Clynelish to plan on how to utilise the crop.

As the fodder beet is a very good feed for ewes, the ewes carrying twins will have access to the area post scanning. If there is enough DM then some of the young beef animals along with the ewes will strip graze the area. As a guide when moving the strip graze fence at least 25% of the previous days allocation should remain- this means the animals are eating adlib and they are not hungry when you move the fence- which could cause gorging issues.

The fodder beet should be supplemented with some silage to ensure that stock are getting enough protein. All stock should be transitioned on and off the fodder beet and have access to a lie back area. Stock should be vaccinated for costrioidal diseases due to the sugar level in the fodder beet.

Rushes thrive in water logged and acidic soil and with 8500 seeds per rush head it is no wonder rushes spread so quickly. Integrated control is required for rushes. Correcting the pH of the soil will allow nutrients to be used effectively and as phosphate is key for early growth this promotes grass growth and competitive swards can out compete rushes.

The area of rushes treated on Clynelish is a small fenced off area which has not been used productively over the recent years. A ditch was dug approx. 2 years ago which has helped with the water level in the field. The area was sprayed with MCPA chemical in mid-June when the rushes were just coming into flower. Clynelish have noticed the increase in the amount of grass in the field and it was proposed to introduce cows to the area to trample and damage young rush growth.

Ploughing and reseedling can help with rush control but the rushes must be buried at 10cm however rush seeds can live for in excess of 60 years.

When back at the farm Trevor Cook gave an interesting presentation on winter management of grass. Trevor started by giving a brief history of his involvement with Clynelish. When he first visited he was explaining what to do and how to do it but after a few years he now knows the constraints of the farm and can help them to develop. Trevor thought that as the price to produce the product is the only aspect that farmers can influence the biggest opportunity to Scottish farmers is to maximise production, use the minimal amount of non-pasture feed and set up spring growth of grass. I.e. grow more and use more grass.

To maximise your lamb crop ewes and gimmers should be in the condition score of 3. The “golden 20 day” 10 days before and after tupping ewes should have access to fresh pasture to raise the scanning percentage (even if they are not at BCS 3). You then want to maintain the ewes at BCS 3 to lambing as this influences the number of lambs, the amount of colostrum, how long it takes for the lambs to stand and the lactation of the ewe. You can change the BCS by feeding from scanning to lambing. It is poorly defined what influences the birth weight of progeny. Essentially you wish ewes to maintain a BCS of 3 from tupping to lambing with a drop to BCS 2.5 at peak lactation rising again to 3 from weaning to tupping.

Cows are different in that at weaning (150 days post calving) the cows can be BCS of 3.5-4 but can lose condition to then calve to a BCS of 2.5. Cows can lose 1 BCS over the winter but they cannot lose any BCS more than 30 days before calving (as this can reduce the amount of colostrum).

But how do you do this from a pasture based system. You have to know your demands and know your requirements.

In the winter you must not overgraze not leaving less than 1300kg of DM/ha in the field.

Trevor did state that fencing and the division of field is the most powerful tool as this allows you greater control of the use of your pasture. He has also found that units using rotational grazing have found that spring has come earlier- but this is because they are resting the grass and grazing it in a managed way. Trevor shared with the group QMS spreadsheet for grazing planning (spreadsheet below) which Clynelish have used to manage their grass.



Copy of

*Spreadsheet correct at time of report * [qms_quick_simple_g](#)

FARMERS UPDATE

- Ewes and Lambs
 - 631 lambs have been sold (mix of finished and store average of £60.50/lamb)
 - 141 of those sold were sold fat between 17-18kg dead weight
 - All male entire lambs have been sold- not doing it again due to management issues
 - Around 300 yet to sell but they will be sold before the end of November
 - 120 are currently on brassicas
 - All lambs have been dosed
 - The new weighing machine and race has made things **so** much easier
 - Ewes are currently on the rough grazing and will come home early November
 - Ewes were condition scored at weaning and leaner one were put to with the gimmers
 - Gimmers at on better pasture at Clynelish
 - Ewe lambs kept for breeding average weight of 34kg- on track to be 40kg at end of November 60% of mature weight (better than previous years)

- Cattle
 - On Trevor Cook’s advice bought 18 Luing calves to winter and then finish over the summer
 - Luing purchased as hardy, perform on forage and easy to finish using swedes and rotational grazing
 - Next summer use the Luings as bracken control on the field at the sheep stock club

- Bought some Aberdeen Angus and along with home bred and home bred Charolais they will be housed
 - Stabilisers will be wintered outside
 - All cattle to be finished from grass
 - New winter feed area created for 40-50 cows
 - Calves to be weaned by end of October possibly try soft weaning
- Grass
 - 820 silage bales wrapped and ready for winter
 - Compared to 413 in 2018
 - Hesston bales bought

FACTS & FIGURES DISCUSSED

- 300 lambs left to sell- 120 currently on brassicas
- Luing calves bought for finishing- a good investment?
- Ewe lambs are on course to be 60% of mature weight by end of November
- Straw bought and delivered to farm rather than Clynelish buying it off the field
- Tup to go out 25 November

OPPORTUNITIES/CHALLENGES

- Grass over the winter- making it last and livestock performing
- Controlling rushes further- possible to reseed area, apply lime?
- More subdivision of fields
- Fodder beet – what will be the dry matter? How many will it feed?

ACTIONS FROM MEETING

- Sell the remaining lambs
- More sub-division of fields
- Keep moving stock to avoid over grazing
- Wean calves

FACILITATOR CONTACT DETAILS

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