

## CLONHIE MONITOR FARM 17<sup>th</sup> Meeting Report

Meeting Date – 27<sup>th</sup> Nov 2019

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Next Meeting – 27<sup>th</sup> Feb 2020

### ABOUT CLONHIE

**Clonhie** is a tenanted farm on Buccleuch Estates run by Andrew and Aileen Marchant, new entrants to farming in 2012. Neighbouring Glengar was added to the farm business in 2016 taking the farmed area to 303ha (750ac), from 100m to 300m above sea level near Penpont in Nithsdale.

**Sheep** - numbers are up to 900 lambing ewes all lambing outside in April. Moving over to Aberfield and Highlander cross ewes and using Abertex, and Beltex cross terminal sires.

**Cattle** – Herd of Luing cattle is now up to 16 calving cows & heifers. However summer grazing heifers are also taken on and store cattle are wintered in the sheds on a B&B basis as well.

**Red Deer** – A herd of 150 breeding hinds is being established in collaboration with Buccleuch Estates, with plans to grow numbers to 250

**Management Group** is chaired by local farmer Colin Forsyth, Bennan, and includes Nithsdale Vet Alistair Padkin, David Wilson, Marwhirn; Robert Osborne, Castlehill; John Wildman, Glenkiln; Alisdair Davidson, Poldean; Colin Cuthbertson, Thripland and Andrew Best of Watsons Seeds



Richard Barbour introducing his dairy beef system to the Clonhie group

### KEY MESSAGES

- Dairy beef is a real and growing part of our beef marketing chain. It can become more efficient. It can and will grow a considerable proportion of British beef.
- Suckler beef will have to compete. The story of suckler beef production will be an important part of our marketing but price will also have to be competitive – even if it is a bit higher than the dairy beef product – plenty of opportunity and thinking out of the box going on [by many progressive producers]
- Richard Barbour does see a future for suckler production but plans to keep fewer, and have them further up the hill than at present
- The world market for protein has to grow as population grows, there will be a place for beef from different systems

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- Is there interest in the concept of beef producers, store growers and finishers being paid for liveweight gained ?

## AREAS OF DISCUSSION

The morning began at Crocketford House where Richard & Sarah Barbour along with herd manager Ryan Lamont welcomed the group to their dairy beef unit. The unit was established 4/5 years ago to exploit the large numbers of dairy calves in the area, in the belief that these calves can be grown and finished to produce a standard beef product and provide the business with a 'reasonable' profit.

Richard and Ryan explained and discussed their system, the main points of which included:-

- 50+ calves are collected from about 20 local dairy farms every Monday/Tuesday
  - All calves are from Holstein type herds. Did try JerseyX calves but they are much smaller at 1 year old. So they stick to HolsteinX.
  - The calves are paid for by liveweight, thus encouraging dairy farmers to feed and look after them as well as they can, with the average age at uplift being 18 days old.
  - Richard checks each calf is fit and healthy before accepting it. If he is not happy he leaves it on the home farm until the next visit to see if it is any better.
  - Not much variation in numbers through the seasons, numbers can drop a bit in July – wonder if this is to do with cow fertility in the back end when they're transitioning from summer to winter diets/regimes?
- On arrival at Crocketford House the calves are :-
  - Electronically tagged (so progress and records are monitored on computer throughout the whole system) and weighed (weights are 50-55kg for BlueX; AAX can be a bit lighter)
  - Given their first rispoval vaccine and Solacyl (aspirin for calves) which helps greatly in reducing their antibiotic use at this stage – see link <https://meadowq.co.uk/meadow-quality/>
  - Calves are put in batches of 6 or 7 and a whole shed is filled every week, which reduces infection build up as calves are all at the same stage.
  - Sheds all have a ventilation fan installed – some debate on whether warm air 10 to 12oC would help with calf temperature and health in cold weather.
- Feeding milk is kept as simple as possible with the powdered milk being mixed up in a separate shed and pumped through a hose to each calf shed. Calves are fed using a rack with a set of buckets and teats on it which is hung on the pen front and the buckets filled to the required level for each batch of calves. This way calves all get their quota and are seen feeding twice a day.
- The calves always have fresh straw available to eat – until silage becomes their main dietary forage.
- Did try once a day feeding but not so happy with it. Think the calves do better when they are fed and seen properly twice a day rather than just once.
- Calves start on 400g of milk powder twice per day, and build up to 800g of milk powder twice per day, which is then reduced to 600g/day for weaning.
- Harbro calf pellets are introduced at the start and once the group are eating 1.5 to 2kg/hd/day gradual weaning commences.

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- Calves are weighed at week 3 and ~ week 8 in the system. Target daily liveweight gain (DLG) is 0.75kg/head/day for the first 3 weeks, increasing to 0.9kg/hd/day by weaning at weeks 8 – 10.
- Aim to have calves at 90 to 100kg for weaning at weeks 10 to 11 (in the system)
- At the moment have mixture of BlueX and AngusX calves but have found that the BlueX calves do not perform nearly as well on the summer rotational grazing system when the weather turns (which it can often do in SW Scotland). So the Barbour's have encouraged all but one supplier to start using Angus genetics from Genus, which includes a carbon footprint (efficiency) EBV for some AI bulls. The aim of this is to be producing a more consistent and predictable product for the market/processor.
- Treat ~ 16% for pneumonia. Have changed vaccine to one that covers 2 types but still get it. Mortality is ~ 2.5%
- Colostrum and early care are key. Reckon can often trace ill calves back to when the normal care plans didn't happen properly (e.g. calves born at weekends or when usual staff on holiday). Can have problems in January going back to baby calf management over Christmas & New Year.
- Also point out to some suppliers that calf jackets make a real difference in first 2 weeks of life – stronger, healthier and heavier calves to sell. There is a hygiene risk, and they must be cleaned properly, but are definitely worth it for thin skinned calves until 4/5 weeks when their rumen develops, and they can heat themselves properly.



Baby calves in milk shed



Ryan at weaned calf shed



Discussing the diet



Nearly ready to move on...

## WEANING

- At weaning calves need to be 90-100kg – generally ~ week 8 (10 to 11 weeks old). Calves are moved up to the first of 3 large sheds which form a courtyard further up the hill.
- The calves move along the sheds / round the courtyard as they grow and require increasing amounts of food / changes in diets. This way the different diets and quantities in each pen don't really change. It's the calves themselves that move onto the next stage.
- The front passages are all scraped out and courts bedded 3 times a week.
- Aim to get the calves to an intake of 4kg/hd/day of Harbro calf pellets. Then over the next 2 weeks they are transitioned onto a cheaper home mix, which will form the base for their diet whilst in this growth stage. The home mix includes :-
  - 50% barley; 15% dark grains; 10% beet pulp; <5% minerals; adlib access to red rock salt lick
- Used to ring calves but found it gave them a real check. Now wait until they are settled with no changes in feed or management for a week to 10 days before and after and vet cuts them.

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- At 135 – 140kg (~ 3.5 to 4 months old) transition calves onto a silage TMR which includes 3kg/hd/day of the same home mix or move out to paddock grazing in summer. Calves which have not reached these weights are held back until they do.
- The TMR for the older cattle in the system includes
  - Silage to appetite with 3kg of the above home mix added in
- Richard has recently started paddock grazing with Rhidian Jones's guidance and sees great potential for this to grow the calves over the summer months and cheapen / improve system efficiency.
- The cattle are then grown on to 500kg liveweight.

## FINISHING

- At ~ 500kg the cattle are moved to Dunbar for intensive finishing using mainly maxamon barley.
- This is the most expensive part of the system where just £20 difference in the cost/price of feed barley determines profitability of the whole system
- Takes 10 to 12 weeks to finish the cattle but hope to be able to fine tune this to 8 to 9 weeks in future through improved genetics.
- Target deadweight is 330kg deadweight. Cattle are sold direct to processors.
- No need to clip before slaughter over there – on so much straw bedding!

After lunch Richard went on to discuss some wider aspects of the business the main points being :-

- 2018 beef prices forced a review of what we do and how we do it.
- There has to be demand for beef as a sustainable protein as the world population continues to grow.
- Still very much see a place for sucklers, but it will be further up the hill and fewer of them – used to breed own beef herd replacements but going back to dairy cross cows for our herd replacements – can't beat milk for getting calf growth.
- Expanding dairy calf numbers.
- Have been doing ~300 bull beef, but if demand remains so low will have to change.
- Now concentrating on paddock grazing. Works well and am looking to expand the area and numbers grazed to help drive costs out of this middle part of the system to reduce the overall cost.
- Looking forward to getting much more uniform genetics in the near future. This should improve, simplify and ease management of the whole system
- Interested in finding a way for farmers to be paid per kilo of weight gain for wintering cattle – but not getting a lot of interest.
- Once genetics have transitioned to the AAX looking to drive finishing period down to 8/9 weeks.
- We run a flock of 800 Blackface hill ewes, believe there is a future for lamb and wool as sustainable natural products fitting with future consumer trends.
- Have a joint venture AD Plant with a neighbour. Were offered an electric grid connection in 2023, so are doing it as gas to grid :-
  - 50% of feed stocks have to be waste – fits in nicely with all cattle manures etc
  - Feel we are making better use of our resources and get a better nutrient fertiliser from it.

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- Richard believes he has identified a good opportunity for developing a supply chain of local calf rearers, growers and finishers to work in collaboration to grow and finish these dairy beef calves in South West Scotland.
  - He is keen to establish and grow a group who work together to produce a specific and consistent SW Scotland dairy beef product.
  - Use of improved genetics, animal welfare (not transported far as baby calves) and carbon footprint efficiency will all play their part in the marketing story of Scotch Beef PGI.
  - Having spoken to 2 retailers there is real interest in a local source for such beef.

## ANDREW'S CLONHIE UPDATE

With an agreed sustainable end price for a desirable and consistent end product this would be a good opportunity for farm businesses to make a very competitive return rearing ~400 calves to ~450kg.

Andrew Marchant gave us his Clonhie update :-

- Tups went in to the ewes on 12<sup>th</sup> Nov. Contemplating leaving it til later to have more grass at lambing time but it's a balance between that and having enough good grass for them all at tugging
  - A Flock to Aberfield and Highlander sires
  - B Flock to terminal sires
- Ewes averaged 61 to 61.5kg this year which is 8.5kg (more than 15%) heavier than at the same time last year. This should make a great difference to fertility and scanning %
- Have managed them for the "Golden 20 Days" i.e. giving them the best possible grass for the 10 before and after the tups go out to maximise fertility. We've got 3 or 4 days to go but still have plenty of good grass for them.
- Sales of 2019 lambs to the Tesco contract we have signed up to are going well. They are weighing and grading very well.
- The cover crops we have arranged to graze after mid-January aren't the best. The conditions at and after planting were not the best and the crop hasn't grown as we'd hoped. But I think we have enough grass at home to keep everything going- but intending to do a forage budget to check this moving into winter.
- We have been putting more and more information onto the FARMAX system and will be sitting down to do some planning shortly.
- Cows are now weaned and have been put out onto Glengar hill for winter grazing.
  - Calves are a bit heavier than last year which is great
- We've done the annual testing for the herd health scheme and are now Johnes 1, which will mean any heifers sold next year will be worth a bit more.
- Red deer hinds were weaned after the rut. They are in very good condition, so we didn't dose them.
- Hoping for a good scan at the end of Dec/early Jan when we will also dose them. Will batch them into groups by calving dates to reduce infection build up as we lost a few calves to cryptosporidium this year and want to do all we can to prevent a repeat occurrence
- Red deer calves look a lot better than last year's calves but we don't yet have the weigh scales in place so don't know their weights. They are settling into the sheds well.

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- Just waiting to hear when our 16/17-month-old stags are to go to Dovecote Park for slaughter. This is through the Waitrose contract that First Venison have (we are members of the First Venison Co-op).
- We have recently done some soils mapping of the best 75ha of silage and grazing ground on the farm. The pH of these fields as a whole is very near 6. We will use this information to better inform variable spreading of lime and prilled lime to get them to a uniform 6.5pH.
- We need to get on with our annual planning and budgets for 2020, FARMAX will be a big help in predicting and planning numbers etc for this

## OPPORTUNITIES/CHALLENGES

- Please see the related power point PDF for further details

We had a quick panel discussion on the beef industry. Panelists were Richard Barbour, Donald Biggar, Chapelton and Sarah Millar [QMS] and chair was Andrew Marchant. The main points raised were :-

- Dairy beef such as we have seen today will grow and can supply a proportion of the market demand. There will be a place for suckled beef, which has the USP which highlights the story of the natural environment and carbon sequestration benefits etc, we can use suckler cows on areas of land that are not suitable for other types of cultivation and create a stratified beef sector.
- There's a really good opportunity for local farms to collaborate to rear and grow these calves for an attractive return compared to current beef and sheep margins . . . (contact Richard if interested)
- We have a dysfunctional supply chain. How can we collaborate when each time we find ourselves in over or under supply the processors change their target dead weights or classification grades?
- World population is set to continue to grow and environmentally produced animal proteins will continue to be demanded by consumers- we need production systems and fair supply chains to enable us to meet this challenge.
- The BBC programme on Monday night did not give UK production systems a fair airing, and instead showed production systems from other parts of the world that don't have such stringent environmental, food safety and production restrictions. This is adding to the low confidence in the red meat sector at present.
- What marketing budget does our red meat industry actually require to compete with alternative proteins marketing spend.

## ACTIONS FOR NEXT MEETING

Many thanks to Richard and Sarah Barbour and Ryan for giving their day for such an informative day.

Our 18<sup>th</sup> and final Monitor Farm meeting will be at Clonhie on Thursday 27<sup>th</sup> February, when we will review all our successes, and failures, over the last three years. Justin McCarthy, editor at Irish Farmers Journal, will be our main speaker for the day.

We also have an evening meeting on Succession Planning next Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> December.

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