

LOCHABER MONITOR FARM The Impact Of Taking On More Land

THE CHALLENGE

An opportunity came up for the Chris to apply for a tenancy of an additional 42ha of in-bye land at Fassfern, 11miles from the home farm at Strone, Banavie but adjacent to his croft at Corriebeg.

There had been no land or infrastructure improvements at Fassfern for at least 20 years and it was therefore in need of a lot of investment. However, the land does come with a 75ft x 45ft agricultural shed



- Would it be viable for the business take on this extra land?
- What effect would it have on the rest of the farming business?
- What would the best use of the newly obtained land be to best fit with current farm policy?

WHAT WE DID ON FARM

Chris took on a 5 year tenancy of Fassfern in March 2018.

The community group agreed that the first priority should be to improve the quality of the grassland at Fassfern.

In order to help establish the cause of the poor grass growth, Routine Soil samples were taken. Results confirmed that the soil had generally low pH levels and low levels of phosphorus (P) and potassium (K) in some fields.

Field	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	F6
BPS Region	3	1	1	1	1	1
pH	5.2	5.1	5.2	5.0	4.8	5.7
Lime Needed (t/ha)	5.5	6.7	6.2	8.2	9.3	2.3
Phosphorus (P)	M	L	L	L	L	L
Potassium (K)	M	L	L	M	M	L

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In order to tackle the low pH, 3t/acre of lime was applied to 14ha of the farm in 2018. The current plan is for 2t/acre to be applied in 2020.

Fertiliser (20:10:10) was spread all on 42ha of the farm at a rate of 120cwt/acre.

Rushes had encroached on several fields and these were sprayed and topped in 2018.

Due to the distance from the main farm, it was logistically difficult to manage the land with the same machinery and equipment as at Strone. The following items were purchased:

- A second quad (Road legal as Fassfern is split by the main A830)
- Flatbed trailer (haul feeding from Strone)
- 7ft trailer for feeding ewes
- BPS entitlement purchased



Other improvements made include fitting a new water system to the existing livestock shed

Chris decided to mainly use this newly obtained land to reduce the grazing pressure on other parts of the farm, rather than increasing the livestock numbers drastically.

He did however purchase 30 ewes, bringing the total numbers of ewes and gimmers to 540.

THE RESULTS

As a result of taking on this new tenancy, the main farm at Strone has benefited greatly. Previously all sheep were lambed on the in-bye fields at Strone. This year, 190 (all singles) were lambed at Strone, all the gimmers (120) were lambed in the shed at Fassfern and 160 twin bearing ewes were lambed at Fassfern. The remaining 50 lambed on Corriebeg croft. Being able to manage the sheep in separate batches with more scope and grazing, resulted in Chris achieving a lambing percentage of 106%. This is the first time he has had a result over 100%.

The reduction of grazing pressure on the silage fields at Strone has also been evident. Before the new land at Fassfern, ewes would graze the silage fields until the beginning of June but this year the grass was rested from the last week in April. All spring work was completed earlier than ever before and the first cut of silage was taken 3 weeks earlier than usual.

The grass yields have also improved as the silage fields only had 130 ewes grazing over the

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lambing period compared to the normal 450 ewes.



In the late summer and autumn of 2018, 227 lambs were fattened in the shed at Fassfern, rather than being sold store (see separate theme report for full details).

The addition of the extra land has also made the croft at Corriebeg much more viable to run. Corriebeg was stocked with 80 ewes previously and being 11 miles from Strone, it was costly to run due to mileage etc. Between Corriebeg and Fassfern, the land is now stocked with 200 ewes, making it much more economical for Chris to work this land.

WHAT HAS CHANGED ON FARM

In conclusion, taking on the land at Fassfern has incurred more expenditure than first anticipated due to the need to purchase machinery and entitlement but it has also been very rewarding.

Chris said "I was really keen to take on something new for myself. It's been good to see that with a bit of effort, blood, sweat and tears, that you can make improvements to the land and then reap the benefits. I'm really chuffed to see the knock on effect that having more grazing has had on the lambing results and the increase/earlier cut silage. The cattle also

benefit as there is more scope for their summer grazing in Inverness with all the twin bearing ewes summering at Fassfern. All in all it's been a really positive experience so far."

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