

ABOUT BORDERS MONITOR FARM

Farm name	Whitriggs, Denholm, TD9 8QR
Meeting Number	11- Bull Fertility, Arable Costings and Fodder
Meeting Date	Wednesday 22nd August 2018
Next Meeting	Wednesday 26th September

Whitriggs Farm, near Denholm, is run by Robert and Lesley Mitchell and their son Stuart, with support from Stuart's brother, Alistair, during busy periods.

The Mitchells currently farm 442 hectares of mainly semi-permanent and permanent grassland.

Cattle; 140 Shorthorn X and AAX, with all calves not required as replacements finished on the farm.

Sheep; 1000 Lleyn ewes, tupped with Lleyn, Suffolk and Hampshire.

Arable; 28ha of wheat & oats fed to cattle.

Deer; 160 Young hinds, due to have first calves in 2019

Management Team; Andrew Tullie (Chair), Robert Catlin, Scott Girvan, Giles Henry, Megan Mabon, Andrew Robinson (Vet) and Jonny Williams.



On lovely evening chairman Andrew Tullie welcomes over 40 farmers and trade to the 11th meeting of the Borders Monitor Farm. After a tough spring, and a dry summer the group were looking to get things back on track by looking at ways of improving technical performance as well as profitability.

KEY MESSAGES

- Tight calving requires fertile cows and bulls
- Have a pre -mating check list for your bulls, give yourself time to act if you find a problem
- Beef supply may tighten in the autumn,
- Be aware of religious holidays and other drivers of demand when marketing stock
- Take account of how enterprises cross over with each other, as well as costing on an individual basis. Often enterprises complement each other and allow best use of resources
- Carry out a feed and bedding budget pre-winter, look at alternatives if needed

AREAS OF DISCUSSION

Bull Fertility

Colin Penny from Zoetis carried out a practical demonstration of pre mating checks on a bull, including a semen test and scrotal measurements. Surveys have shown that around 20% of UK stock bulls are sub fertile (less than 40% conception rate.) With the Mitchells looking to reduce calving to a 6 week block, excellent bull fertility will be required, as well as cow fertility, in order for this to be achieved. Below is a pre-mating checklist for bulls:



- Body Condition Scoring – Should done and adjustments made 3-4 weeks before working
- Exercise before use, particularly if kept in pens.
- Disease Status, if bought from high health herd, may be naive to endemic diseases e.g BVD, IBR. New bulls should be isolated and tested/vaccinated
- Lameness/feet, if required trimming should be carried out 2 months before mating
- Pre- Breeding Examination should be carried out by a vet, including, semen collection, physical examination and test mating.
- Observation during mating period, record matings, should see less than 50% returning
- Bull Ratios, Young bulls 15-20 cows each, mature fit bulls 35-40 cows each.

Although almost half of the group had seen a semen test of a bull, less than 20% regularly carry out these tests on their breeding bulls.

Market Update

Stuart Ashworth, Director of Economic Services with QMS gave the group an overview of the current beef and lamb markets. Some of the highlights are below.

Beef

- Market really being driven by high levels of supply; with Scotland up 3% and the whole of UK up 2%
- Higher levels of heifers (+3.5%) and cows (+2.5%) being killed which is a concern for the national herd numbers.
- 5-6% of calves registered with BCMS are lost before 12 months.
- Market should see tighter supply going into autumn.
- Internationally US, AUS, Brazil, Uruguay, Argentina all have increased production, UK, Canada and India have lowered production.

Lamb

- May kills down 8%, June down 16% and July down 3%, however this has maintained a stronger price.
- NZ has an estimated 3.8% decrease in lamb crop which should reduce discounting into UK.
- Lamb market has dropped slightly, retail price cannot rise due to perception of it being too expensive for consumer.
- Understand the market, including markets such as Islamic New Year in coming weeks.



Stuart Ashworth from QMS gives a market update

FARMERS UPDATE

Cattle

- Bulls will be out from 15th July to the 1st September, cows look settled and will be scanned later.
- First year of reducing calving period.
- One calf with pneumonia and one cow with mastitis in one quarter

Sheep

- All lambs weaned early and have had Crovect and Zolvix
- Ewe lambs have had Heptavac P
- 181 lambs sold so far
- 220 ewes sold at Longtown

Harvest

- Oats combined, with yield and straw disappointing
- Field sown into stubble turnips the following day, Skyfall and a new trial variety
- 1181 bales of straw so far secured, including OSR straw
- Likely to be the last year of Urea treated wheat due to change in marketing policy (selling store)
- Muck spread

Deer

- 160 Hinds arrived 1st August and seem to have settled in well. Stags will go out in autumn
- Fencing now complete

FACTS & FIGURES DISCUSSED

It was the turn of the arable enterprise to come under the spotlight, with both its financial return and impact on the business discussed. Below are the net margins for the past 2 years

	2017	2018
Net Margin/Ha W Wheat	£-18	£10
Net Margin/Ha W Oats	£-33	£-80

Both years had been challenging, due to weather issues at various times. In 2018 this resulted in a reduced area due to a failed crop. The issue of fixed costs was discussed, particularly the feasibility of growing a small acreage of crops in a cost- effective manner. The Mitchells felt they could easily grow another 80-100ha of

crops without needing any further labour or machinery. Similarly, if the crops were not grown, only the combine would be surplus to requirements with the machinery and labour costs passing to other enterprises. The advice of the group was to look to reduce the fixed cost burden by growing more cereals and having a crop to sell, while not relying on bought in straw.

Fodder and bedding stocks were also assessed with the following in stock the Mitchells are comfortable going into the winter.

- 1200t silage + 150t to come later (was 1400t in total in 2017) 39% DM, 14.8P, 11.6ME
- 220 Bales Hay
- 75 Bales silage/haylage (for deer)
- 1200 bales straw (possibly more to come, includes 420 bales of rape straw, 1500 bales total in 2017)
- 13ha of Stubble turnips/rape for ewes and lambs
- 3.2ha of swedes for ewes
- 5ha kale/yellow turnips – for ewe lambs

Whitriggs Stock Numbers:

	2017	2018
Cows	168	175
Heifers	35	40
Finishers	80	0
Stores	132	142
Bulls	5	7
Ewes	1000	3-400?
Ewe lambs	330	500
Finishing lambs	1400	1450
Deer	0	160

OPPORTUNITIES/CHALLENGES

- Look into growing Miscanthus grass for bedding in future
- Potential to bring on some store animals if plenty of fodder this year
- Need to look at whether to reduce or increase arable area, staying the same if probably not a good option.

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