

ABOUT BORDERS MONITOR FARM

Farm name	Whitriggs, Denholm, TD9 8QR
Meeting Number	14 – Design a Flock & Agri Epi technology update.
Meeting Date	Wednesday 23rd January 2019
Next Meeting	Wednesday 6th March 2019

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; Currently 1000 Easy Care and Blackface lambs on a B&B basis. Future flock is under review.

Arable; 28ha of Wheat & Oats fed to cattle, 30ha of spring barley to be sown 2019

Deer; 125 Red Hinds due to calf in 2019, with a further 30 calves which will calf in 2020. Currently planning on building to 215 hinds, close herd and breed own replacements.

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

The first meeting of 2019 brought around 60 farmers and trade to Denholm to discuss the key theme of plans to re-stock the Whitriggs flock after it was culled due to MV. It is a rare opportunity to start with a blank sheet of paper and really think about not only whether there is a need for sheep on the farm but also if there are what breed, type and system should be implemented? The management group identified 4 farmers who they thought could give some guidance to the Mitchells and help to come to a decision.



Gregor Ingram, Graham Lofthouse, Kevin Stewart and Pete Scott spoke about their systems and breeds

Following this, Gavin Dick gave an update on the work of Agri-Epi, alongside a sight of some of the technology which would be available to farms in the coming years.

KEY MESSAGES

- When thinking about any business change, start with the market, no matter how well you do in every other aspect, if the market doesn't want it then it then you will never succeed.
- When selecting sheep, the breed is not the important thing, it is keeping the quality high and culling out problems which are more important.
- In all aspects of farming, it is those with passion and attention to detail who are most successful.
- It is important to understand how an enterprise sits within a farm business, you can't just copy and paste a system

AREAS OF DISCUSSION

Before looking at the type of sheep to re-stock with, the discussion in the family was around whether they needed sheep? It was felt that sheep offered a good mix with the other enterprises, making use of grass which cattle couldn't as well as making better use of labour and machinery and spreading fixed costs. To help the discussion, the Mitchells have drawn up a rough outline of what they are looking for. They are flexible on the system used so long as it fits in with other work.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MV Free/Accredited • A good fit with cattle (health) • Low input system • Self-contained/replacing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roughly 500 in flock • Lambs finished pre-Christmas • Good feet • Not Blackies!!!
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Before moving onto breed selection, Haig Murray from Dunbia outlined the type of animal the market is looking for. He explained it was a global market, not just local, with not enough capacity in Scotland. The spec is dictated by supermarkets where most lamb is sold. The loin is most important, an R grade is ideal in the range of 15-22kg dead. It is important not to take lambs too fat, often producers aim for 22kg carcases but to achieve the weight the lambs become fat (more than 3H) which results in costly waste; 6mm of fat is the maximum needed. The specification should be tighter, however there is a need to keep plant working at capacity and although more are taken penalties are imposed if they fall out of spec. Haig emphasised that it is crucial to understand your market before you start, and then aim to meet that spec. and hopefully achieve maximum price.

Pete Scott, from Dolphinstown explained why the **Lleyn** fits well with his system. Pete lambs 1600 Lleyn ewes and 500 lambs each year. Has used Leyn for 10yrs since converting to organic. He scans 195%, sells 165% and handles a maximum of 50 ewes at lambing time, aiming to use as little labour as possible. The flock is self-replacing and therefore improving genetics is important and selecting ewes to retain daughters from, focussing on maternal traits. Reducing cost is the focus and lambs are marketed through Farmstock or Longtown.

Kevin Stewart, Sharpitlaw lambs 1750 **Highlander** ewes on 3 units 30 miles apart. 1200acres across 3 units 30 miles apart. Tups used include Aber Black, NZ Suffolk, and Abermax. The flock is MV accredited and Aberfield and NZ Suffolk tups are sold. Lambing is outside in April, with ewe's house in January and clipped prior to housing. Lambs are rotationally grazed and some fed barley, with marketing through Farmstock. Lambing has increased by 40% in 10 yrs. and feed costs are £2.20/ewe. Average ewe weight is 67kg, with average lamb carcass 19.7kg this year.



Graham Lofthouse, Bankhouse, lambs 600 **Easycare** ewes each year. The flock has been bred by using Easycare (WelshxCheviotxWiltshire Horn) rams over a Texel ewe, to produce the “Ultimate Easycare”. The aim is to produce the ewe’s bodyweight (less than 65kg) in 100 days and have a large pelvic area. Tup lambs were kept for breeding to consolidate the type. The flock are rotationally grazed with 30 ewes and twins per hectare, lambs grow at up to 500g/day. Lambs killed out at 18.75kg with none below an R grade. Easycares have strong basic traits Fertility – Teats – Udder – Feet – Lambing ease – ultimate forage converter. Rams run with up to 150 ewes each, ewes last for 6 crop+, with ewe lambs tupped if they are 48kg, nothing under 40kg is kept for breeding



Gregor Ingram, from Aberdeenshire discussed his “**Logie**” breed, which are a maternal breed which has been developed by the Ingram family using genetics from Leyn, Easycare and their other terminal breed the Durno, which itself is a stabilised hybrid of Charolaise and Texel. The Ingram’s have 3200 ewes, aiming for a white faced, medium sized ewe which will rear 2 lambs. They are lambed in May after tupping for 21 days, scan at 200% and wean at 180%. Last year 7% were E grade, 43% U & 49% R at an average weight of 21.02kg, with lamb’s backfat scanned to breed for larger loins. The breed is easy to manage and selected for maternal traits, each labour unit looks after 5-700 ewes. They are MV accredited and Scrapie monitored. The Ingrams sell over 700 rams each year.



The group were then asked to split and discuss which breed, if any, met the specification laid down by the Mitchells and what would suit the system at Whitriggs. Chairman Andrew Tullie led the “Wildcard” group, arguing that it would be better not to own sheep, but simply to bring in lambs on a B&B basis, giving an almost guaranteed income with less risk. It would also allow the family to concentrate on the cattle, deer and arable enterprises where their passion and skills lay.

Gavin Dick – Agri Epi

Gavin outlined some of the work being done currently on satellite farms to bring innovative technology to life with practical applications. The group were challenged to share their own views on technology and what they would like to see developed.

Why are we not getting the most out of the technology we already have?

- Readers, not synched to management programmes and manufacturer lock-out.
- Lack of phone signal causes issues
- Clarity of data provided needs work
- Perception that it increases workload
- Lack of training and awareness of potential
- Generic software – too much info which is not relevant
- Multiple points of entry – need simplified
- Need to learn from dairy and transfer to beef sheep

What tech or data do you need to aid the efficiency and productivity of your farm?

- Health data & growth rates
- Drones to measure grass quickly and easily
- Simple weight gain measures
- Anything that saves labour
- Targeted treatments/dosing
- Auto weighing at grass
- Health indicators
- Effective individual ID (sheep)

How can we as an industry get more out of technology?

- Raising awareness of possibilities
- Needs to be intuitive – easy to use
- Next generation taking a lead
- Simplify data and its presentation
- Persevere – Be imaginative
- Employ geeks!
- Must add value to business, not just cost
- Work more with R & D to get what we want.

FARMERS UPDATE

Cattle

- Cows in on the 20th November, weaned and backs clipped 2 weeks later.
- Cows scanned, 12th December.
- 7th Jan blood test cattle for Johnes and BVD as entering Premium Health Scheme. The point of joining was to give piece of mind that the cattle didn't have an underlying problem like MV in the sheep.

Deer

- Rut finished 17th November when stags were removed.
- 75 rutted hinds arrived with 32 calves. Calves housed on arrival. Very little straw needed.
- 5th December all yearling hinds were moved into the wood where they will be fed in a corral with the silage the sheep would have got.
- 14th Jan- 15 more calves arrived and there will be another 20 later this week. 50 more due this summer then doors closed to expand as a closed herd.
- Handling system is being built, first of its kind, with a focus on safety when working with stags.

Sheep

- The last were sold on the 22nd November to MV solutions for research tests into MV and OPA.
- 450 lambs still to be sold, growing well on grass and Swede.
- 500 Blackies and Easycares left on B&B.
- We currently have 450 lambs left to be sold which are growing well on grass and going onto swedes shortly. We have about 500 blackies and easy cares left on B&B.

Other

- Robert & Lesley enjoyed 3 weeks in India and haven't stopped talking about it since!
- Stuart has grudged the time away but is getting his own back as he and Kate head to NZ for a month, Kate thinks it's a honeymoon but it is really to look at sheep and deer!

OPPORTUNITIES/CHALLENGES

- Decision to be made on replacement of the sheep. Although there is a recommendation and advice from the group, the family need to finalise the best way forward
- Challenge of skills, we have asked before, how many things can you be excellent at? Managing the new enterprises on the farm and increased importance of cereals is not easy.
- Management and eventual eradication of Johne's
- Planning for 2019/20 winter, how much silage will be needed and what quality?
- Greater interaction with R & D needed across the industry.

ACTIONS FOR NEXT MEETING

- More thought to be given to selling calves, last year sold on 24th Feb, and costings need to be done for this year
- Look into Johnne's eradication.

FACTS & FIGURES DISCUSSED

- Improvement at 92% in calf overall after 6 weeks with bull – last year it was 87%
- 4% of herd were Johnne's positive, which is not unexpected for a first test.

FACILITATOR CONTACT DETAILS

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