

## ABOUT BORDERS MONITOR FARM

Farm Name	Whitriggs Farm, Denholm, Hawick, TD9 8QR
Meeting Number	05 Pre-tupping checks- Tup MOT-Condition scoring and lamb performance
Meeting Date	Thursday 28 <sup>th</sup> September 2017
Next Meeting	Wednesday 22 <sup>nd</sup> November 2017, 11am Auld Cross Keys Inn, Denholm, TD9 8NU

Whitriggs farm, near Denholm, is ran by Robert and Lesley Mitchell and their son Stuart, with support from Stuarts brother, Alistair during busy periods.

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

Cattle: 140 shorthorn cross and Aberdeen Angus cross with all calves not required as replacements finished on farm.

Sheep: 1000 Lleyn ewes, tupped with Lleyn, Suffolk and Hampshire tups.

Arable: 28ha of wheat and oats fed to cattle.

Borders Monitor Farm management group- Andrew Tullie (chair), Scott Brown, Robert Catlin, Scott Girvan, Andrew Robinson, Megan Mabon, Jonny Williams.

Chairman Andrew Tullie welcomed a strong turnout of around 55 farmers and trade representatives to Whitriggs Farm on what had been a rare dry and warm day. The aim of the meeting was to look at two areas identified by FarmBench+ as showing room for improvement on their output, both in terms of lambs born and speed of lamb finishing.

## KEY MESSAGES

- Check both tups and ewes in the months leading up to mating. Keep an eye on condition throughout the season.
- If condition scores are not right, then act to change them while you have time.
- If in doubt when checking tups, speak to your vet.
- Look to achieve the optimal number of lambs, not the most. It will differ from system to system.
- Use evidence before treating, feeding or making any change.



## AREAS OF DISCUSSION

### Pre tupping checks:

Matt Colston from Elanco talked the group through a comprehensive and practical range of pre-tupping checks. These should be carried out around 8 weeks prior to ewes going out, then again once they are out to make sure all is still well. In terms of mating ratio, 1:60 is standard with up to 1:120 possible with Lleyn, reduced to 1:30-50 for lambs. At Whitriggs there are currently around 1:30. Detail on their use of teasers is shown here

#### Checking Process

- Condition score should be 3.5
- Check mouth and teeth
- Check feet and legs – must be sound
- Testicles should be even sized and move freely
- Diameter of at least 30cm
- Should be 5 degrees cooler than rest of body, so watch out for wool build up increasing temperature
- Look for hard or swollen testicles. One healthy testicle can still be saved and the tup will work.
- Wear gloves to prevent infection
- Penis should have no damage
- Check for scrotal mange, only solution is dipping. Look for thickening of skin at base of scrotum
- Think about semen testing if tups new to flock, working on own or an old tup (6/7 yrs old – 5yrs plus)
- If anything is abnormal or concerning, speak to your vet
- Cull if health issues are extensive

#### Teasers

- Aim is to get all ewes in group cycling before tups go in
- Can create a degree of synchronisation, with 80% in first week possible – see below
- Need 50% more tups to deal with this spike
- Low cost as teaser could last 8-9 years and each teaser can be run with 100-150 ewes.
- Harder to vasectomise lambs as everything is smaller. Carry out procedure in July/August to give time to clear all viable semen out, at least 4 weeks prior to putting out
- If aim is just to ensure all ewes cycling, put teasers in for 3-4 weeks then swap with rams.
- If aim is for synchronisation, ewes should be away from sight sound and smell of tups for at least one month, the teasers in for 2 weeks, then removed and a gap of 2 weeks left before rams go in
- For maximum effect, don't let ewes see or smell a tup before teasing
- Good to use on dry hoggs to get them cycling and used to tups
- Mark very clearly to differentiate from "live" tups



"Use the ugliest grumpiest tup, which will fight with anything, they tend to make the best teasers!"

## Condition Scoring

It is important for fertility and general health that ewes are kept in good condition. This is a cheap source of information which can be stored on EID and used alongside other information to produce gains. The FASS has useful factsheets on condition scoring.

### Tips

- Scale is from 1-5, 1 is hat-rack, 5 is butter ball
- Score ewes at every opportunity, pre-tupping, pre-scanning and pre-lambing. Nutritional requirements change rapidly in the last fortnight of pre-lambing, so bloods for metabolic profile are of more use here
- Weigh ewe-lambs to ensure consistent growth
- Too fat is just as bad as too thin
- It is harder to take back from a 4 to a 3 than go from 2 to 3
- Not an exact science
- Can move up or down 0.5 in next month before tupping
- The Whitriggs ewes tend to be 2.5-3 and it is important to keep there from now until tupping
- Ewes should be ideally a 3 at tupping, although 2 can be ok for hill flocks

## Lamb Performance

Over the past two years, lambs born in a compact lambing season starting 20<sup>th</sup> March have been sold finished between the following August and January. Lambs are weaned in mid-August onto grass and clover until late October (depending on grass growth) when those not yet sold move to winter forage crops.

- Lambs are sold deadweight through Farmstock Scotland at an average carcase weight of 19.73kg and an average value of £75 (£3.80 per DWKG)
- Lambs reared in 2016 have averaged 149 per 100 ewes to the tup (typical flock performance)
- Ewe flock costings for 2016 showed a Net Margin of £5.06 per ewe after family labour cost deducted. This was higher than SDA flocks, but lower than lowland flock benchmarks using QMS Cattle and Sheep Performance in Scotland data for 2016

The Community Group felt that lambs could be sold earlier in the season, which may deliver significant flock health and financial benefits. An earlier finishing period (Mid-July to mid-November) is likely to:

- Achieve a higher average payment rate per lamb DWKG (based on deadweight price trends over the past 3 years)
- Reduce the area of winter grazed forage cropping required for lamb finishing, allowing land to be freed up for other use or grazing of forage crops by other livestock
- Increase overall stock numbers
- Reduce the risk of bridging the worm burden in late finished susceptible lambs to the following spring and new lamb crop

The community group discussed lamb growth and finishing performance and identified a list of factors which may affect lamb growth rates. These were summarised into seven distinct areas of performance. The group were asked to record their top and second highest priority for action.

## Votes by Community Group

	First Priority	Second Priority	Aggregate Scores*
Ewe Feeding	12	3	27
Worms & Fluke	6	10	22
Grass Quality & Utilisation	6	1	13
Earlier Weaning (mid July)	1	5	7
Ewe & Ram Genetics	1	3	5
Date of Birth – Match to Grass Growth	0	4	4
Trace Elements	0	0	0

\*Aggregate scores calculated from adding together first priority = 2 points and second priority = 1 point

## FARMERS UPDATE

Lesley gave a comprehensive update on the work undertaken at Whitriggs since the last meeting. This included an update on the try outs of AI to bring late calving cows forward and the use of trace elements on fattening lambs.

## ACTION POINTS

- Condition score and record all ewes keeping an eye out for changes.
- Carry out checks on tupps.
- Blood test ewes 6-8 weeks prior to lambing.
- Monitor egg counts and put in place a treatment plan with vet where necessary.

### FACILITATOR CONTACT DETAILS

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