

ABOUT BORDERS MONITOR FARM

Farm Name **Whitriggs Farm, Danholm, Hawick, TD9 8QR**

Meeting Number **02 – Grassland Management, Lamb Mortality & Business Performance**

Meeting Date **Wednesday 17th May 2017**

Next Meeting **Wednesday 28th June 2017**

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.



Community Group at the Monitor Farm Meeting in May

KEY MESSAGES

- Grass utilisation will increase by rotational grazing
- Think about why you want more grass, what will you do with it?
- Use tools to measure grass e.g Sward Stick or plate meter
- Further information available in Annex 1 of this report.
- Importance of metabolic testing of sheep, prior to lambing
- Blood tests can help identify other issues e.g subclinical fluke
- Don't assume fluke treatments have worked, particularly triclabendazole

- Test at least three weeks before lambing to allow time to rectify issues
- Possibly protein supplementation for ewes carrying singles
- Full report available in **Annex 2** of the report.
- By looking at figures it is possible to identify areas of your business to improve or work on, benchmarking and using industry standard figures give a guide to performance but only by looking at the systems behind the figures, can decisions be made to change.

TOP TIP: Use smartphone apps to measure out paddock sizes quickly and easily, Stuart used "MiFARM" from precision decisions

AREAS OF DISCUSSION

After a more general introduction to the farm at the first meeting the aim of this meeting was to dig into some of the real challenges at Whitriggs and put in place ways of implementing lessons learnt through the monitor farm journey. The meeting was made up of the following topics

- Grassland management
- Lamb mortality and metabolic testing
- Business performance
- Feedback on lambing and calving 2017
- The groups split and took time to discuss grassland management options with Rhidian Jones, then results of blood tests and lamb mortality issues with farm vet Andrew Robinson.
- The group heard from Rhidian the potential benefit of rotational grazing, the group discussed and agreed this should be put in place in two fields as a trial and results in terms of growth rates and grass utilisation measured.
- Clipex fencing (right) was also discussed, with potential benefits of faster and easier erection as well as a longer life expectancy over traditional wood posts. For comparison, the clipex materials came to £2.88/m vs £2.05/m (using creosote posts guaranteed for 15yrs).
- Colin talked the group through some of the key performance figures for Whitriggs, providing comparison between QMS figures and Farmstock marketing figures. Although not an ideal benchmark it gives an idea. Once the business group is up and running there will be better opportunities to use real local comparisons to measure success.

FARMERS UPDATE

- Good spring with dry sunny weather has meant good grass growth, one field cut on 3rd May for silage.
- Ewes blood tested and FECs done, highlighted variable energy levels and fluke
- Lambing now completed and first three weeks of calving done, 55 so far
- Cows treated with 'lactovac' and trace elements
- Youngstock were turned out on 18th April after being weighed, dosed with Zermex LA, and BES tissue tags taken.
- Lime spreading underway using calcium lime at 7.4t/ha (3t/ac) following soil sampling. Going onto poorer performing grass, reseed, silage and some ground for forage crops.
- Fert spread on WW, WO & main silage crop
- Grass re-seeds, 8ha (20ac) of MSP Tweed for grazing and 8ha of MSP Forth for silage, both starting to emerge
- 900m of fencing for agri environment done, 2.7km to do in total.
- One field fenced into 1ha paddocks, potential to do more, looking for advice/feedback from the group.



FACTS & FIGURES DISCUSSED

- Some key figures as highlighted by facilitator Colin Macphail are available in **Annex 1** of this report

OPPORTUNITIES/CHALLENGES

Led by members of the management group smaller groups were formed to discuss lambing and calving. When in the thick of a busy season often there are things identified, which could be done differently or better, however by the time next year comes around these can be forgotten, so it is useful to take a note of them while they are still fresh. The community group were also asked for examples of things they had tried this year which were either successful or unsuccessful.

| Lessons learned from 2017? | What changes to make for 2018? |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weather – makes life easier! • Fluke dosing ewes • Bolus ewes pre tupping and pre-lambing has shown improvement • Bolus lambs at second dose and see improvement • Scanning dates – get them right • Teasers for three weeks is too long (12 days recommended) • Turning out triplets together • Prolapses – moving hill ewes in to better grass too late • Hill ewes housed and not used to eating – twin lamb problem • Fluke drench resistance • Lambing in paddocks 8/ha • Metabolic test too late • Bulled heifers six weeks? • Calf catcher | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fluke dosing ewes when dosing lambs • Blood test cows to find out deficiency hopefully less dozy calves and deficiencies • Different blood lines for replacement heifers • Push the better calves on to get away before the second winter • Blood test earlier • Adopt triplets rather than turn them out • Give singles small amount of protein • Upland ewes on to high intake blocks • Trace element bolussing from pre tupping • Use feed buckets for ewes sooner • Use disinfectants in lambing areas sooner and better • Move hill ewes in bye sooner and stock tighter • Industrial lime layer under woodchip bedding prior to lambing and calving • Use flukeiver • Track performance of triplets – is it £ worth it to feed them? • Lamb gimmers separately • Apply fertiliser earlier |

FACILITATOR CONTACT DETAILS

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