

## NORTH AYRSHIRE MONITOR FARM Cattle Handling and EID

### THE CHALLENGE

#### **Handling System**

The handling system at Girtridge was not fit for purpose and not safe for the operator or the livestock. As John handles large numbers of cattle by himself, and wanted to monitor the cattle's performance it was decided a new handling system was required.

#### **Cattle EID**

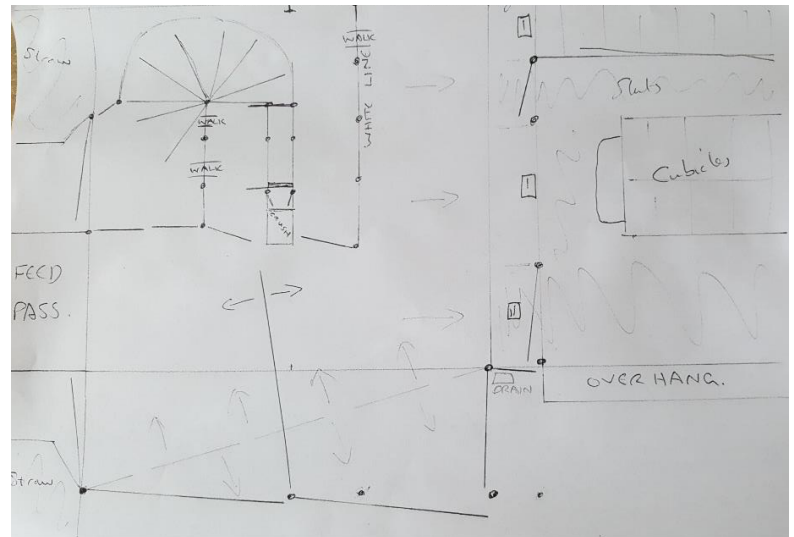
EID tagging calves may become compulsory from 01/01/20, and two years later, older cattle must have an EID tag before they leave the holding. This technology means it might be the end of cattle passports as we know it. EID will help keep accurate movement records giving traceability. EID tags are available as visual, Low Frequency (LF) & Ultra High Frequency (UHF). Currently market staff are visually reading the tag numbers from cattle tags, checking this against the passports and then putting this on the online system – this is time consuming and gives opportunities for error.

There is an opportunity to use this technology to monitor and record cattle performance, make management changes based on the information to increase production and overall efficiency.

### WHAT WE DID ON FARM(S)

#### **Handling System**

Different handling systems and locations for the facility at Girtridge were looked at. The new system was designed by the community group and cost £23,981 (including concrete). Over 15 years this costs £1,599/year and it is expected that the new system will last longer than this (although the original crush will need to be replaced before then). The facility is located under cover between the straw bedded shed and the cubicle shed for quick and easy access for cattle.



*Drawing of Handling System designed by the community group*

# THEME REPORT

The new facility enables one person to move cattle through the steading to the yards. Other key features of the new handling system include a holding areas for large groups of cattle externally and internally (in adjacent sheds), a forwarding pen, a forcing IAE Rotex pen, a race with inspection gate, a shedding gate and a crush with chin scoop. The forcing IAE Rotex pen is curved in a semi-circle shape to help the flow of cattle through the system. The forwarding pen doubles as a loading bank and there are three escape gaps in the system and operator safe working areas. The concrete floor is textured finished for anti-slip and the dirty water all drains to the slatted slurry tank.

## Cattle EID

A practical demonstration carried out by ScotEID at the 10<sup>th</sup> meeting in August 2018 showed how EID tags were read by a LF reader and a UHF reader, with the UHF reader having a higher read rate. If there are both beef and sheep on the holding then go for a LF reader as it can read both. However UHF is a more future-proof reader but only currently reads cattle EID tags.

A further practical demonstration at the Open Meeting in February 2019 showed how EID tags were read by a UHF reader. UHF read range is 5mm-8m and it has lots of memory with capacity to store management information, whereas LF read range is 80cm and has limited memory.

The Business Group Meeting in December 2018 included a visit to Tibbers Farm, Thornhill Alistair Kingan is finishing cattle on a large scale and uses EID equipment to monitor performance and help make management decisions.

Alistair installed a TruTest weigh-head and uses this alongside FarmWizard software and an EID stickreader. Alistair demonstrated how he uses the EID equipment and software by running a group of cattle going through the crush. Alistair knows how batches of cattle bought are performing and how individuals are performing. Alistair sends the recorded information and the Stoddarts kill-lines to the farmers who produce the store calves he buys.



*Demonstration of the technology at Girtridge*



*Practical demonstration at Girtridge*

This allows them to see how their cattle are performing when Alistair buys them and enables them to use this information to improve their system and the store calves which benefits both themselves and Alistair.

The FarmWizard Software app which Alistair uses costs £600/year. Recording this information allows Alistair to make more informed management decisions. For example, if a batch of store cattle bought are not performing as well as he would like, he can then make the informed decision to not purchase cattle from that producer in the future based on the DLWG figures. The information can also be used to decide when cattle are ready to be sold (e.g. if cattle are heavy and DLWG is dropping then it may make more economic sense to sell now rather than keep them and feed them for longer). The information can also allow Alistair to forward-plan better. For example, if it looks like there will be a time-period where no cattle will be at finished selling weight Alistair can alter the ration slightly to either push on or hold back some cattle in terms of DLWG to fill this gap.

## THE RESULTS

### **Handling System**

The benefits of the new system include:

- Labour savings of 1 hour per handling equating to £1,200/year
- Improved operator safety
- Improved livestock safety
- Reduced stress on livestock
- It allows better performance recording including monitoring weights and DLWGs resulting in overall increased efficiency.

### **Cattle EID**

EID can be used as a management tool for recording: births, deaths, monitoring and recording weights, and medicines administered. EID can save costs for example can identify underperforming cattle and reduce feed costs and an automatic dosing gun can be used alongside EID. There are different farm management software packages available.

EID equipment linked to a weigh-head and a software program can allow you to make more informed management decisions.



*Practical demonstration of EID at Girtridge*

# THEME REPORT



A handheld LF reader may be practical for John to read EID tags on cattle and sheep. Alistair Kingan's performance recording set up at Tibbers may suit John Howie as it is simple and the EID stickreader means you are not relying on an accurate read-rate from a static EID reader and there are no cables involved.

## WHAT HAS CHANGED ON FARM

### **Handling System**

John can now handle cattle in a safer, more controlled manner now that the new facility is in place. John has been using the new system to draw cattle into lots for targeted feeding and management. He will now start weighing cattle on a regular basis monitoring weights and DLWGS which will help him make more informed management decisions.

### **Cattle EID**

Now that the handling system is almost complete with weigh bars installed at Girtridge, John is now exploring options of software programs and EID readers to monitor cattle performance.

### **FACILITATOR CONTACT DETAILS**

Raymond Crerar & Kirstyn Blackwood  
SAC Consulting  
John F Niven Building, Auchincruive, KA6 5HW  
01292 525252  
[frbayr@sac.co.uk](mailto:frbayr@sac.co.uk)

