

## SUTHERLAND MONITOR FARM Improving Livestock Performance

### THE CHALLENGE

From the start of the Clynelish Monitor Farm Programme, Jason & Victoria were keen to maximise farm productivity and profitability and to be able to do this, they felt it was vital to have the ability to weigh their livestock and record their performance. Knowing the daily live weight gains of their stock would be extremely valuable to achieving high live weight gains and ensuring optimum weights for selling.

The existing aged handling system was not fit for purpose and they had no real means of accurately weighing stock. The solution was to look into the costs of different Weigh Head and Weigh Kit Handling options that would work on Clynelish for both cattle and sheep.

In addition and thinking towards the future, with the changes in cattle tagging in 2020, electronic ID tags are going to become compulsory, so finding a solution that would also fit this future criteria change was important.

There was an opportunity at Clynelish to ensure both the new weigh head and kit had the technology to meet the 2020 regulations but also to monitor and record livestock weight gains to allow Jason & Victoria to make management decisions based on the data recorded to help increase production and overall livestock performance. The plan was to introduce a fortnightly weighing regime for the lambs where Daily Live Weigh Gains (DLWG) would be recorded and the lambs managed accordingly in the first year. There after a plan would be put in place to modify the existing cattle handling system to accommodate the new kit for recording cattle weights.

### WHAT WE DID ON FARM

Victoria had previously looked at different solutions for the farm but with the backing of the management team, further investigation on the best weigh head to consider was discussed. We also heard from other team members on the systems they were using on their farms along with the plus points and negative aspects of each system.

It was key to have a simple solution that would electronically and accurately determine the daily live weight gains, provide data on the optimum time to sell, help measure and record health status, feeding management and produce data to reflect when to sell, so premium prices can be achieved.

In July we decided to invite Shearwell along to one of our meetings that was held on one of the community group attendee farms, who had a Shearwell handling system and weigh facility.

This gave everyone the chance to see and use the Racewell handling system along with an overview and feedback on the pros and cons. This particular model was only for sheep, however the weigh

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head was suitable for use for both cattle and sheep and an overview of its functions and capabilities was shown.

Cost also played a major factor as the Ballantynes were looking for a practical solution without spending copious amounts of money.

Although the Shearwell handling system was impressive, it played a major part in deciding that the best type of handling system for Clynelish would be a mobile option.



## THE RESULTS

Further investigations then followed and after a couple of months of discussions as to the best solution, it was agreed that a portable unit would indeed be the best model to consider. A mobile Alligator Weigh Kit along with a Tru Test XRP Panel Reader and EziWeigh 7 Weigh Scale Indicator were considered to be best options for Clynelish. Table 1 outlines the reasons why these items were chosen to be used at Clynelish.

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Table 1

Model	Cost	Benefits to Clynelish
Alligator Weigh Kit	£725	Portable handling system that can be operated by one person would be very effective on the farm and help contribute towards reduced labour. The kit provides quicker and safer handling management, option to move the kit to the livestock (as per picture)
Tru Test XRP Panel Reader	£1423	Blue tooth technology and ability to read and record electronic tags information – this type of system is not in use by anyone else in the local area.
Ezi Weigh 7 Scale Indicator	£885	Accurately determines the daily live weight gains, optimum time to sell, helps to indicate health status, feeding management and help achieve price premiums.

Table 2 shows the future benefit costs on the return of investment of the equipment with a net change of £5596.30.

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Table 2

Additional Income		Additional Costs	
Selling lambs at optimum weight (no penalties) - extra 2kgs per lamb @£3.85 for 332 lambs	£2556.40	Cost of Alligator Weigh Kit (£725) Ezi Weigh 7 (£885)	
Selling finished cattle at optimum weight (no penalties) - extra 10kgs @£3.70 over 18 finished steers	£666.00	Tru Test Panel Reader (£1423)  Amortisation percentage rate of interest of £3033 over 10 years	£792.00
<b>Total Extra Income</b>	<b>£3222.40</b>	<b>Total Extra Costs</b>	<b>£792.00</b>
Costs Saved			
Labour Costs for the sheep enterprise 60 hours @ £14.19	£851.40		
Labour costs for the cattle enterprise 50 hours @ £14.19	£709.50		
Reduction in overuse of vet & med costs - saving of £1.50 per head for 900 ewes as per FMH 2019/20 - "LFA Upland Ewe Flocks"	£1350.00		
Reduction in overuse of vet & med costs - saving of £3.00 per head for 85 cows	£255.00		
<b>Total Costs Saved</b>	<b>£3165.90</b>		
<b>Overall Total Gains</b>	<b>£6388.30</b>	<b>Total Extra Losses</b>	<b>£792.00</b>



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Using the Alligator Kit meant that the whole unit would be mobile and could be used both on farm, indoors or outdoors and it could easily be transported to the Sheep Stock Club location and be used by one person, which would help reduce labour costs on the farm. At a cost of £725, it was felt this system was good value for money and would provide the Ballantyne's with the features and mobility that they required. With their flock spread over more than one location, this system would be ideal for handling and help with bio-security along with saving time moving sheep back to the farm for weighing and recording of data.



The EziWeigh 7 was then agreed on, as it is designed to be used alongside an EID Reader and stores up to 15,000 individual records, which was more than enough capacity for all the stock on farm. It also provided all the functions that was required, as outlined earlier in the report.

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Finally the XRP Reader for reading the EID tags was decided on after reviewing several other options. The complete cost of the kit came to £3033 with an additional £900 for load bars. Through the innovations fund, the financial cost of the majority of the new weighing kit was absorbed through funding.

## WHAT HAS CHANGED ON FARM

The kit was all in place by July 2019, so this meant the 2019 lamb data could start being recorded for the first time on farm. All the lambs were weighed fortnightly, DWLG's calculated which meant the lambs could then be split into groups according to their size and time to market.

A total of 990 lambs were sold store or finished and marketed at the optimum time which has allowed them to forward book lambs with the processor.

The Ballantynes took the decision to keep all the lambs that were over 30kgs for finishing and anything under 30kgs was sold at weaning. Having the means to handle and weigh all the lambs accurately will also ensure they are not penalised when the lambs are sold finished.

Having this new kit has helped take the guess work out of how heavy an animal is and it has meant accurate statistics are now able to assist with when best to sell lambs:-

Table 3

Dates	Weight	Numbers & Prices
7 <sup>th</sup> August 2019	17kg DW	52 lambs sold to Dunbia averaging £65.60
9 <sup>th</sup> August 2019	25-30Kg	435 lambs sold via Dingwall mart averaging £59.20
13 <sup>th</sup> August 2019	30Kg	49 lambs sold via Lairg mart averaging £54.09
30 <sup>th</sup> November	>34kg	454 remaining lambs sold fat/store

It is still early days with the new kit but it has been in use indoors, as per the pictures in this report and has been used outdoors at the Stock Club Location. It has provided a safe handling system and given the Ballantyne's precise weights of each animal which means they can now manage their stock better and prepare for the winter feeding regime as they are now starting to build up a profile of data on each animal.

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Until now, the focus has been primarily on monitoring the DLWG's of the lambs so the correct lambs could be selected to be sold as store or kept to finish. As Clynelish now moves into winter the focus will now shift to the cattle enterprise.

The weigh head will help measure the cattle performance over the winter months and into spring. At the time of this report the Charolais sired calves were weaning at 1.3kg DLWG and the Stabilizer sired calves were 1.1kg, however after the stress of weaning the calves all dropped to an average of 0.8kg. It is hoped that now this will increase to 1.1kg-1.3kg DLWG and this will now be recorded accurately for the first time using the Weigh Head and its technology

Introducing the ability to weigh all the animals, record performance and DLWG's will now help target the optimum time for selling and improve the management system which will help both performance and profitability going forward.

## FACILITATOR CONTACT DETAILS

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