

ABOUT LOCHABER MONITOR FARM

Farm name **Strone Farm, Lochaber Monitor Farm, Banavie, Fort William, PH33 7PB**
 Meeting Number **11 – Cattle Genetics, EID & Lamb Finishing**
 Meeting Date **Thursday 31 January 2019**
 Date Next Meeting **18th March 2019- Succession Planning**

Strone Farm is run by Chris and Malcolm Cameron as a family partnership and in total the business farms 1,788 hectares.

Cattle: 40 Limousin cows producing store calves. Cows are in-wintered.

Sheep: 500 Cheviot ewes, producing store lambs. Mainly Lleyn tups and hoggs kept as replacements. Ewes lambed away.

Management Group: James Colston (Chair) John MacAulay, Paolo Berardelli, Peter Kennedy, and Ewen Campbell,



Some of the community group viewing the cattle at Strone

Aim of Meeting:

- Explore the value of cattle genetics.
- The future of cattle EID – how do we use EID technology to improve herd management.
- Lamb finishing trial the results and final conclusions



FARMERS UPDATE

- Calves sold in January 2019 on average weighed 24 kg/head heavier, at 30 days younger, than in the previous year. This was a significant improvement in physical performance from better silage quality and rationing. Unfortunately, they returned £52/head less due to market, but the margin would have been lower if growth rates and weight sold had not increased.
- The lamb finishing trial is now completed and the results are below.

KEY MESSAGES

The key messages delivered from this meeting were:

- Take time to understand and use EBVs when purchasing bulls. Focus on only 2 or 3 traits you want to improve in your herd. You cannot fix everything at the same time.
- The Strone herd has well balanced EBV's between growth and maternal traits and they have not selected bulls on any extremes. Future focus should be to improve the growth rates slightly and carefully so as not to be detrimental to the maternal side.
- Do not over buy cattle tags this spring until the EID system has been finalised
- Lamb finishing can be an alternative route to market. It's a bit of extra work and risk, but (depending on store price), it can improve returns and reduces reliance on only one marketing option.

AREAS OF DISCUSSION

Cattle Genetics (Alison Glasgow, British Limousin Cattle Society Technical Manager Geneticist)

Alison delivered an excellent and technical update on modern Estimated Breeding Values (EBV's)

- Use individual EBV's to improve a specific aspect of your herd rather than look at the overall index.
- Growth traits are highly heritable, but maternal traits are less heritable and so take longer to improve. However it is the maternal side that is often important to the store producer

EBV	Characteristic
Gestation length, Calving ease, Birth weight	Easier calving
200 day / 400 day / 600 day weight , growth	Efficient growth
Muscle depth / area / retail yield	Saleable meat
Fat depth / rib fat	Lean meat yield
Matern. Calv. Ease / Dtrs 200 Day Milk Age at first calving Calving Interval Longevity	Maternal Traits
Docility / Scrotal Circumference	Other Traits

- Use of EBV's to improve production efficiency and profitability is now well proven, but suckler beef and sheep producers lag behind other sectors like dairy, poultry and pigs in utilising the genetic potential.
- Pay attention to the Myostatin (double muscling) data listed on sales cards – can be positive or negative

- Genomic EBV'S (GEBV's) are currently being developed. These use DNA as well as conventional information to improve genetic selection.

OPPORTUNITIES/CHALLENGES

Cattle EID (Jane Thomson – Shearwell Data)

Cattle EID is coming, but there is confusion as to what form it will take.

Proposed Scottish timescale – though these could change :

- Voluntary EID tagging newborns July 2019
- Newborns to be EID tagged January 2020
- Animals leaving the holding to be EID tagged June 2020
- Historic herd (all non-EID animals) to be EID tagged 2025

The decision still to be made is whether the tags will be high or low frequency (LF or HF).

- LF (like sheep tags) mean you need to be closer to the animal, but get a more accurate read.
- HF are being pushed by marts and ScotEID as they are better at reading batches from a distance.

The big benefit of EID will be in ease of recording and linking that info to management records. Tag readers will become more refined and improve over time. But as usual and similar to any additional cost, larger herd/flock can spread this cost over a larger income base, while smaller producers (in terms of size and output) will struggle to afford these extra costs.

FACTS & FIGURES DISCUSSED

Lamb Finishing

The Vision for Hill meeting in Feb 2018 challenged the project to look at alternatives for selling a store lamb. Chris agreed to give lambs finishing a go and a total 227 Llyen x Cheviot lambs put through an intensive indoor finishing system.

The results are now in:

- 206 Lambs sold at £70.17/hd average
- 4 lambs died
- 17 lambs retained
- 22.4t feed used at £275/t on average
- 12 bales straw used
- Average growth rate was 234 grams/hd/day

The financial implications are shown below in the partial budget.

Partial Budget

Revenue Lost	£
227 lambs at £35	£7,945
	£7,945

Extra Revenue	£
Lambs sold 206 @ £70/hd	£14,454
Lambs Retained 17@ £67/hd	£1,142
	£15,596

Extra Costs	£
Feed 22.4t @ £275/t	£6,162
Vet/Med	£0
Straw 12 bales at £36/bale	£432
	£6,594

Costs Saved	£
	£0

Total Losses	£14,539
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Total Gains	£15,596
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Extra Benefit **£1,057**

Extra Loss **£0**

Other knock on benefits of this system

- Lambs weaned off ewes earlier
- Lambs off grass earlier
- It gave extra marketing options – Chris sold some direct and some through ring

Would Chris do it again?

- Yes, but he would make changes such as castrate the lambs to give more flexibility in marketing and would probably sell the best lambs store to hit an early market and focus on increasing value to the tail end lambs – see Theme Report for full details of this trial.

FACILITATOR CONTACT DETAILS

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