

## ABOUT LOCHABER MONITOR FARM

Farm name	<b>Strone Farm, Lochaber Monitor Farm, Banavie, Fort William, PH33 7PB</b>
Meeting Number	<b>06 – Winter Management of Cattle</b>
Meeting Date	<b>Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> November 2017</b>
Next Meeting	<b>Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2018</b>

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.



### Aim of Meeting:

- To identify the critical aspects of cattle feeding and management over the winter to optimise profitability for both in wintering and out wintering systems
- To explore essential minerals for cattle
- How do we deal with poor quality silage or lack of silage from this summers poor weather
- To identify how best to manage the health and nutrition of a newly purchased bull



*Above: Winners of the silage judging and bale weight competition (NB – the bale weighed 700kg)*

### Management Group:

John MacAulay (Chair)

Paolo Berardelli, Peter Kennedy, Ewen Campbell & James Colston,

## KEY MESSAGES

The key messages delivered from this meeting on cattle management were:

- Analyse your silage to assess quality, (very variable this year due to the weather) so you then know what supplementary nutrition is required.
- Split your cattle into management groups and target inputs to suit the requirements of that group
- Taking bloods and forage samples are the best way to find out your mineral supplementation needs
- When buying bulls, investigate the herd health history, buy local if possible and in plenty time.

## AREAS OF DISCUSSION

### Cattle Management Exercise:

The group were split into small sub groups and the scenario that they had purchased all the cattle at Stone and were tasked with designing a bulling, weaning and marketing policy for the herd. The herd currently calves all year round, calves are not weaned until sale and calves are sold in 2 batches Jan/Feb and May/June.

The cattle at Strone herd consists of:

16 Cows with calves at foot	10 In calf heifers – due to calve December onwards
18 Dry cows – due to calve Jan onwards	16 Weaned calves – average weight estimated at 280 kg

There were a variety of suggestions from the various groups for future policy, in summary:

### Bulling:

- Change to 1 or 2 more focussed calving groups – 2 calving groups seemed to be the consensus at the end (spring and autumn) with heifers calving 2 months earlier. Slip and sell cows to achieve this
- Spring born replacement heifers calve in autumn and vis versa, so first calf at 2.5 years
- Pull bull out to shorten / focus the calving periods
- Allow one yield period, move cow to opposite group, then cull if not in calf after 2<sup>nd</sup> chance.

### Weaning:

- Wean calves at around 6 months and use creep feed to minimise growth check

### Marketing:

The general consensus from the groups was that autumn born calves would be best suited for sale in May (6 months) whereas the spring born calves should be sold in Sep/Oct,

- Tight calving period should ensure uniform calf size.
- However this creates empty shed space, which begs the question, could the farm keep more spring calving cows or more autumn calving cows?
- The counter argument to this scenario is that the Limousin calves really flesh out from 6 months onwards which means keeping them to 10 - 12 months ensures they are sold to their growth potential.

The project is planning to explore calf marketing policy in more detail next year. The idea is to purchase a cattle weight scale to allow better recording of cattle weights, which will in turn inform the debate on when best to sell calves. Will the growth potential of the Limousin breeding overcome the extra cost and generally lower market price per kg when selling at 10 – 12 months? Further information will follow in due course.

## FACTS & FIGURES DISCUSSED

At Strone, the main groups of cattle being housed for winter are the spring calving cows (due to start in Jan), Autumn calving cows (with calves already at foot) and weaned calves (280Kg average) which are due to be sold in February. Is the silage produced on farm good enough to provide adequate nutrition over the winter period for these groups of cattle, or is additional supplementation required?

In order to get to the bottom of this, a total of 10 silages from across Lochaber were sent away for analysis (including the 3 produced at Strone Farm). The results were then used to rank the silages and show the range in quality in the Lochaber area. The top silage was the one which required the least amount of extra concentrated feed (we used 16% protein cake) to achieve target energy and protein in the diet.

	<b>Bottom</b>	<b>Top</b>
<b>Dry Matter (g/kg)</b>	186	332
<b>ME (MJ/kg DM)</b>	9.7	10.2
<b>Protein (g/kg DM)</b>	91	132
<b>D Value (%)</b>	60.9	63.5

Table 1 above shows that the top silage is much drier, with a much higher protein and energy and is more digestible. This is excellent silage.

Table 2 and Table 3 below shows the amount of beef nuts (16% protein, £245/t) needed to feed each group in addition to ad lib silage (at a standard £25/t)

Group	Fresh silage (Kg/day)	Beef nuts (Kg/day)	Cost (£/head/day)	£/head/winter
Spring calving cows	25.6	0	0.67	120.6
Autumn calving cows	32.9	1	1.06	190.8
Weaned calves	11.7	4	1.25	125

Group	Fresh silage (Kg/day)	Beef nuts (Kg/day)	Cost (£/head/day)	£/head/winter
Spring calving cows	41.3	1.5	1.38	248.4
Autumn calving cows	35.5	5.3	2.16	388.8
Weaned calves	12.4	5.3	1.59	159

The £/head/winter is based on a 180 day winter for the cows and a 100 day feeding period for the calves (gaining 1Kglwt/head/day). The tables show that the diet cost using the poorer silage is £128/head extra per winter for the spring calving cows, £198/head for the autumn calving cows and £34/head for the calves.

This illustrates the importance of knowing the quality of your silage. You will feed your silage regardless of quality – but the important thing is to know how much supplementation will be required to meet the animals nutritional requirements. This data has been prepared to demonstrate the quality of different silages only and not as a ration. Poor quality silage may not realistically be suitable for feeding to each groups, so it is important to get each silage tested before feeding and then allocate the silage to an appropriate group of stock.

To explore this in more detail, the three cuts of silage at Stone were analysed

	DM (g/kg)	CP (g/kg DM)	ME (MJ/kg DM)	D Value (%)
<b>Clunes</b>	332	132	10.2	63.5
<b>First Cut</b>	248	97	10.3	64.6
<b>Second Cut</b>	203	108	10.8	67.4

The following table identifies which cuts of silage should be prioritised to feed each groups. The Clunes silage is best choice for all groups but to make best use of the home grown nutrition, this silage should be prioritised for the weaned calves and autumn calving cows, this will also be the most cost effective option.

Group	Silage to feed
Spring calving cows	2 <sup>nd</sup> Cut Silage
Autumn calving cows	1 <sup>st</sup> Cut Silage and Clunes silage
Weaned calves	Clunes silage

## ACTIONS FROM MEETING

The actions for Chris and Malcolm to take away from this meeting are:

- Consider the options suggested by the Community Group to simplify and improve the efficiency of the Strone cattle system.
- Select the Strone silage cut to feed to the groups of cattle as per the recommendation above.



### FACILITATOR CONTACT DETAILS

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