

ABOUT LOCHABER MONITOR FARM

Farm name **Strone Farm, Banavie, Fort William, PH33 7PB**

Meeting Number **02 – Ewe Management**

Meeting Date **Thursday 9th March 2017**

Next Meeting **Tuesday 23rd May 2017**

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 used last year and hoggs kept as replacements. 120 poorer ewes went to Suffolk cross Beltex tup - aim was to produce a better lamb and ensure no breeding stock was kept from these ewes.



Unusually for the area, the ewes and lambs are moved up to seasonal inbye grasslands in Inverness-shire after lambing for the summer. Wether lambs are sold direct to market from summering in August and the ewes are brought back to Stone.



Management Group:

Paolo Berardelli (Chair)

Peter Kennedy, Ewen Campbell, James Colston, John MacAulay, Kenny Laing

Picture: Paola Berardelli chairing the meeting

KEY MESSAGES

- Regular condition scoring of ewes is vital for good sheep management.
- One of the most important aspects of lamb survival is lamb vigour at birth. If the lamb gets up and sucks quickly it help reduce chance of hypothermia and simulates the mothering instinct in the ewe.

- Watch ewe aggression at feeding during lambing time, this is a cause of mismothering and general upset. Find a system where the ewes feed calmly. Cereal /compound based supplementation often causes a problem here as ewes are hungry and tend to bolt the feed down. Draff is useful here as they stay fuller for longer and are calmer at feeding time.
- Supplementing with more than 680g/hd (1.5 lbs/hd) compound feed in one go will result in poorer digestion and rumen upset as the pH of the rumen drops. Whole cereals are better as they are regurgitated for chewing later on. Feed with long fibres such as draff and beet pulp also reduce the acid overload.
- Rule of thumb for feeding draff – max 1kg draff per 25 kg liveweight of animal.
- Hybrid vigour is incredibly useful to boosting productivity through expanding the gene pool.

AREAS OF DISCUSSION Expand on two of the key messages discussed and what were the key concerns or innovations

- Over 30 farmers enjoyed a lively discussion with a sheep focus at Strone farm for the 2nd meeting of this Monitor Farm project.
- Ewen Campbell and Harriet Wishart (pictured right) from SRUC Kirkton and Auchtertyre discussed and demonstrated the value of condition scoring for ewe management.
- John Vipond focussed on supplementation and gave some great insights and practical tips on feeding and managing ewes throughout the day. A summary of his talk is contained within the annex.
- Kenny Laing for Crown Vets provided an overview of sheep health issues.
- After the presentations, the community group were split into smaller groups and tasked with coming up with recommendations to improve the Strone sheep system.
- Overall a very positive meeting with good interaction from the community group and lots of technical information provided.



FARMERS UPDATE Summarise the development of the initiatives on the farm

- Calving ongoing.
- Clear Johnes test obtained.
- Trip to meet with MSP's in Edinburgh along with the other Monitor Farmers in the programme was interesting.
- First Management Group meeting held and Chair elected.

FACTS & FIGURES DISCUSSED Provide more detail on the farmer update, whether this is around financials/yield/health

- Scanning competed at Strone and at 121% this is fairly normal compared to past years. That said, the number of yeld ewes is lower than normal.
- This year the ambition is to get lambing percentage to 100% at point of moving the lambs up to summer grazings as very few are lost after that point. But the 21% gap is perhaps not large enough.
- The additional seasonal summer grazing has been very valuable to the farm over the past 10 years. The business suffered a large predation problem, with lambing percentages reducing to a low level and resulting in no genetic selection being possible and ewe numbers slowly eroding. Since this new system was implemented the flock as become regular aged, cast ewes prices have increased and the business is able to select its best ewe hoggs allowing for genetic improvement. So although there is a cost in renting extra land, haulage and fuel for checking and working with stock, in this case it has been well worth the change of policy.
- Blood tests taken by vet and nothing usual detected. Energy, protein and cobalt levels all fine.

OPPORTUNITIES/CHALLENGES Highlight one specific opportunity or challenge, or two or three smaller ones

The recommendation from the community group regarding the Strone sheep system are as follows:

- **Sheep Numbers?**
A clear recommendation to stop at 500 breeding ewes and do not continue to expand numbers. The focus instead should be on improving the performance of the flock.
- **What tup should be used on the Cheviot cross Lley n gimmers this autumn?**
Consensus was to use Lley n once again on these sheep, then back to Cheviot in following year. Try and obtain tups from a farm where the tups have not been pushed and overfed.
- **Feed Policy?**
Varied discussion on this topic comparing compounds vs blocks/buckets vs draff and soya. General consensus was to minimise feeding pre scanning – though use conditioning score to assess condition. Singles post scanning should be fed if lean, but otherwise try and limit. Twins post scanning should be well treated, existing system with draff works well – especially if Chris were to add lime to help aid digestion. Adding soya at 200g per ewe in last 3 weeks was recommended.

ACTIONS FROM MEETING Bullet points outlining what will be done between now and the next meeting

- Add lime (50g/hd/day) to daily draff feed as it increases the pH and aids digestion
- Test for resistance to flukicides and wormers and report back to group
- Feed soya to twin for last 3 weeks pre lambing at 200g/ewe.
- It's OK to mix batches /ages of sheep to better target supplementation to those that need it the most. Pick out lean gimmers for example and put with twins group.
- Keep stock at 500 breeding ewes and focus on improving productivity from these sheep, rather than continuing to expand numbers.
- Try and SHAPS health planning system with Kenny Laing (vet).

FACILITATOR CONTACT DETAILS

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