

ABOUT LOCHABER MONITOR FARM

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

Meeting Number **09 – Open Day**

Meeting Date **Wednesday 13th June 2018**

Date Next Meeting **T.B.C.**

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.

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



Group on farm tour at Glen Loy



Quiz winners with their QMS prizes

Aim of Open Day Meeting:

- Review keys messages and conclusions so far
- Tour farm and get updates on cattle, sheep and grass enterprises
- Explore future plans for the project

FARMERS UPDATE

- Lamb finishing trial has started with the twins at Fassfern. Creep feeders went out on 5th June.
- 11 Calves sold in May averaged 345 kg and £2.39/kg
- 25 cows with calves at foot have gone to summering in Inverness along with the ewes with singles at foot

KEY MESSAGES

Top messages from previous meetings were discussed.

Sheep:

- Regular condition scoring of ewes is vital for good sheep management.
- Hybrid vigour is incredibly useful to boosting productivity through expanding the gene pool.
- Store lamb producers are not necessarily limited to selling a store lambs. They can take lambs further either by renting extra low ground grazing, or trying a finishing strategy

Cattle:

- The community group were tasked with designing Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) for a west coast suckler herd at a previous meeting. Below is how Strone farm compares to the KPI's that were set:

KPI	Strone
Calving at 95%	96% (June 17- May 18)
Calving complete in 12 weeks	No; calving all year
GM Per Head- £250	£335 / head
Wintering Cost- 30% of calf value	14%
Weaning Weight- 50% of DAM at 180 days	47%

Grassland:

- Know your starting point- analysis of soil & forage, soil pits & bury your pants.
- Lime is the most important tool for grassland management. The correct pH ensures your soils release and utilise all the natural nutrients available.

AREAS OF DISCUSSION

At the three stations we looked at what changes have been made to each of the enterprises since the start of the project.

Sheep

Change	Reasoning
Ewes lambed away on rented ground in Inverness-shire	To reduce predation and to reduce pressure on Strone grass in the spring to allow for an earlier cut of silage
Lamb finishing trial	To explore alternative lamb marketing options the business is to try finishing some lambs in the 2018 season
Feeding system – used more draff pre- lambing	Reduced cost, improved ewe condition
Lambled 10 days earlier and weaned earlier	Heavier lambs at sale, ewes off the silage ground earlier, ewes in better condition at tugging

Cattle

Change	Reasoning
Heifers bulled 4 months earlier	To get heifers into breeding herd earlier
Spring born calves weaned at 6-7months & managed separately over winter	To allow the cows more time to recover before calving again.

Grassland

Change	Reasoning
Routine soil sampling	To make sure dung, lime and fertiliser is applied at the appropriate rate
Wall Park oversow trial	To improve sward quality and compare different methods of grassland establishment.
Reseed Clunes field	To improve grassland from grazing only to silage and grazing field
Digging soil pits (soil analysis)	Assess soil health, compaction and drainage problems.
Purchase new grass tedder & rake	Allow silage to be cut and baled in a day (difficult to get two consecutive dry days).

Clunes Before & After Reseed



OPPORTUNITIES/CHALLENGES

At each of the three enterprise stations, the community group were asked for ideas on what direction they would like the focus future meetings, topics and trials.

Ideas suggested were:

- Investigate what the optimum sheep numbers would be with the additional land at Fassfern.
- Look at cattle weights and feed conversion rate for the calves in the backend.
- A meeting on Estimated Breeding Values (EBVs) and genetics of cattle.
- A trial of following the Strone calves through to finished (not necessarily finishing them in Lochaber but perhaps on another Monitor Farm?)
- Field reseed trial using a variety of drills and a more natural grass seed mix than used in the 'Wall Park'.



Group at Clunes Silage field

FACILITATOR CONTACT DETAILS

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