

ABOUT THIS MONITOR FARM

Lochaber Monitor Farm

Farm name

Strone Farm, Lochaber Monitor Farm, Banavie, Fort William,

Meeting Number

018 – Final Open Day

Meeting Date:

Thursday 20th February 2020

Attendance: **35**



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

Cattle: 50 Limousin cows producing store calves. Cows are in-wintered.

Sheep: 550 Cheviot ewes, producing store lambs. Mainly Lleyrn tups and hoggs kept as replacements.

LOCHABER MONITOR FARM MANAGEMENT GROUP

James Colston (Chair)

Paolo Berardelli, Peter Kennedy, John MacAulay Ewen Campbell.

Aims of Open Day:

To summarise the project, explore the key messages and impact of this project and to think about future challenges and where do we go from now?

Speakers:

- Jamie Blackett
- The community and Business Group members

INTRODUCTION

This was the final meeting of the Lochaber Monitor Farm Project. After a short introduction, the group were split into smaller groups to visit three stations, focussing on the livestock, grassland and other topics that had been covered over the past three years. The group then heard about the work the Business Group has been doing and a video message from Kate Rowell, QMS Chairperson, before a final talk from Jamie Blackett (journalist and author of Red Rag to a Bull – rural life in an urban age), on a future view of farming: the main challenges and how do we change perceptions

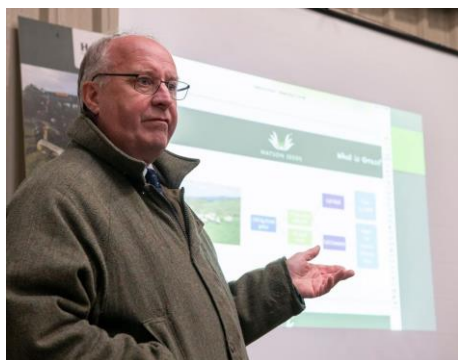
This meeting explored the key findings, trial results and experiences from the last 3 years of the project. Some of these key messages are noted below

KEY MESSAGES

Key messages - 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.
- Hill farmers and crofters are not necessarily limited to selling store lambs. They can take lambs further either by renting extra low ground grazing, or trying a finishing strategy.
- There are more cases of Fluke becoming resistant to Triclabendazol (The active ingredient in some winter flukicide products). Use fluke forecasting tools (NADAS) and regular testing (dung or Coproantigen) to confirm fluke policy

Key Messages - Grassland



Johnny Watson of Watson Seeds was on hand to go through the results of the grassland trial work the Monitor Farm has completed over the last 3 years. As well as looking at reseeding/over sowing and grass varieties, the project also explored rotational grazing and soil structure and management issues such as compaction.

The key message highlighted by Malcolm Cameron was the important of lime and getting your pH right.

Key Messages - Cattle

- 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 need
- Take time to understand and use EBVs when purchasing bulls. Focus on only 2 or 3 traits you want to improve. You cannot fix everything at the same time.
- Growth traits are very heritable, but maternal traits are less heritable and take longer to improve and it is the maternal side that is often more important to the store producer
- Do not over buy cattle tags until the EID system has been finalised



Key messages – Other Topics

A Vision for the Hills:

“The vision for the hills is to have an active and robust hill and mountain farming sector that supplies a quality product into the food chain, is fairly rewarded for actively managing the wider environment and landscape, is recognised for supplying key public goods and is attractive to young people wanting to enter the industry.”

Succession Planning

- Ensure you use professional advice when planning ahead – accountants and solicitors can save you money in the long term and are essential to set up key aspects such as wills, power of attorney and partnership agreements.
- Talk to your family about your plans – open communication is the key to success.

Environment:

- If you have designated sites on your land and can manage that land to benefit the target of the designation, then you have a much better chance of making a successful agri-env application.
- There is a drive to push farming business into woodland and forestry options. Woodland can complement farming businesses and headline rates can be very attractive. But a clear understanding of the risks and potential liabilities involved is a must.

Business Groups

The Business group was a small sub group of the project of 12 businesses who shared more detailed financial information and benchmarked their businesses. This sub group held 9 meetings, the highlights being:

- The away trip to Holyrood – including meeting with Fergus Ewing, Donald Cameron and Kate Forbes.
- The trip to the Angus Monitor Farm to see a more arable farmers view.
- Trips to a couple of other farms within the business group itself to see their systems, the challenges they face and how these challenges were met.
- The benchmarking and sharing of financial information and key performance indicators.

A FUTURE VIEW OF FARMING – Jamie Blackett

1. Understand the Threat

- Monopolists in supply chain
- Veganism
- Rousseauism from Left (watermelons)
- Free Trade from Right (subsidy & tariff removal)
- (Dairy beef - here to stay)



2. Answer the 5 big lies

- Beef is bad for your health
- Livestock farming is cruel
- Beef causes climate change
- Beef cattle eat soya & drink scarce water
- Beef farming is wasteful as only the meat is used

3. Understand the arguments.....Reading list:

- Free trade & monopolies etc.
- Read The Invisible Hand by Adam Smith (Penguin extract from The Wealth of Nations 1776)
- Green and Pleasant Land by Dieter Helm
- Go on YouTube and watch Boris Greenwich speech Feb 2020

CONCLUSION

An excellent meeting highlighting the key messages and outcomes from this three year project. The meeting rounded off with some very positive feedback from both the Community Group and the Business group members and Kate Rowell's video was also thought provoking and well received.

As a final point, a huge thanks must go to the Monitor Farmers themselves. Chris and Malcolm Cameron have been the core and focus for this project. They have got a lot out of the experience but have also put a lot of effort into the project for the benefit of the community group who attended.



28th February 2020

FACILITATOR CONTACT DETAILS

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