

ABOUT THIS NORTH AYRSHIRE MONITOR FARM

Farm name **Girtridge Farm, Drybridge Road, Dundonald, Kilmarnock, KA2 9BX**

Meeting Number **13 - Cattle rationing and performance and update on the beef industry (SAC)**

Meeting Date **Wednesday 30th January 2019, at Girtridge followed by The Auchans**

Next Meeting **Wednesday 27th February 2019 (open meeting)**

Girtridge Farm is run by the business of Messrs John Howie, a partnership consisting of John Howie, his mother Margaret and his sister Mary. The business farms a total of 140 hectares of non-LFA land and 35 hectares of LFA grassland.

Livestock

Finished Cattle: Approximately 250 finishing cattle purchased through the local market and direct off farm all year round. The aim is to sell cattle at R4L deadweight through either Stoddarts or Highland Meats.

Sheep Flock: 344 Aberfield and cross ewes put to Abermax and Texel cross rams. All lambs are sold finished either direct to slaughter through Farmstock or through the live market. All replacements are purchased privately.

Cropping

Barley: 19.32 hectares spring barley and 7.70 hectares winter barley grown. All barley and straw is used on farm.

Forage: 2 cuts of silage are taken with 7.13 hectares of hay also being produced.

The Management Group is chaired by Hazel Muir and includes John Howie, William MacTier, Andrew Welsh, Beth Errington, Gordon Walker, Louise Walker, Iain Reid, James Morrison, John Cowan, John Hunter, John Paterson, James Smith, Matt Mitchell, Philip Close, Robert Munro, Willie Campbell and David Young

KEY MESSAGES

- Easier to finish similar cattle (weights, breeds, types and gender) – aim for consistency.
- Change management system to make it more efficient and to suit different types of cattle.
- Weigh regularly and monitor performance – this will help aid management decisions.
- Challenges ahead may include: Brexit, US trade deals, climate change, life choices (e.g. vegetarians & vegans), cheaper meats on the market (i.e. chicken), and increase in dairy beef on the market.
- Industry update positives: 2018 was good for arable. Store trade is currently better than anticipated and good numbers scanned in-calf.
- Cost to finish cattle each year has been increasing £0.15/year to gain a kilo deadweight. However, average prices for finished cattle have not increased alongside this.
- Balance your ration to avoid rumen acidosis.
- Pay attention to feed labels and ingredients listed.

AREAS OF DISCUSSION

- Factors affecting finishing systems – breeds, ages, types, gender, etc.
- Growth rates – monitor and improving DLWGs.
- Nutrition & rationing in finishing systems.
- Beef Industry update – positives and challenges.

FARMERS UPDATE

- Water troughs have been added to the straw-bedded shed to help improve water intakes, resulting in higher feed intakes.
- Molasses was added to the ration to reduce cattle sorting through the ration (this will continue at 1 kg/hd once John has a tank to store molasses).
- Ventilation inlets have been improved by creating 2 inch gaps in side sheets in the cubicle shed. Time will tell if excessive rain will come in through these gaps.
- John did not 'Cydectin' cattle and a test showed that some had lungworm. This may have resulted in a growth check in 2018.
- Stocking density has been reduced in the cubicle shed to stop bullying and preferential feeding at the feed barrier.
- Improvements have been made to the cattle handling system with a concrete grooved floor, weigh bars in the crush, a holding area and a safe operator area. A secure area for loading cattle onto a lorry or stock trailer has been created.
- Ewes pregnancy scanned at 183% overall with only 2.3% of the flock barren (compared to 4.3% in 2018).

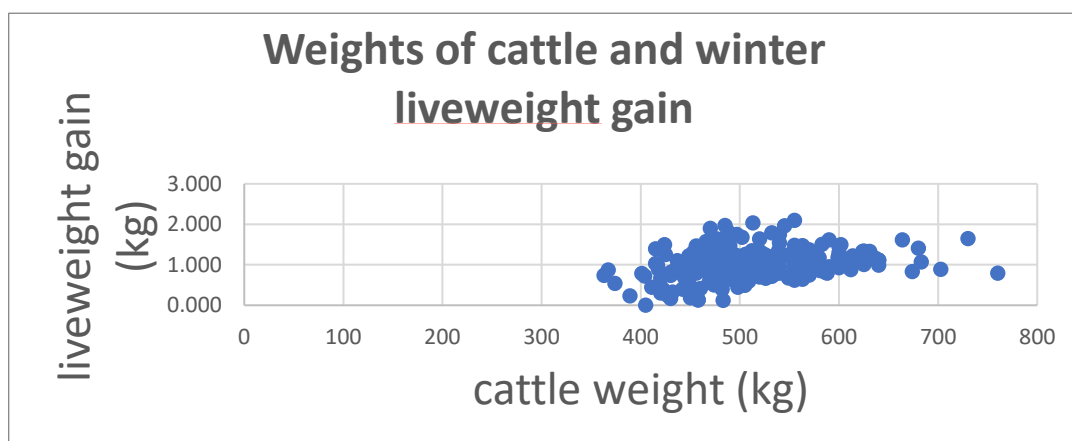
FACTS & FIGURES DISCUSSED

CATTLE PERFORMANCE

Range of DLWGs achieved by cattle at Girtridge:

- 9% > 1.5 kg/day
- 45% 1-1.5 kg/day
- 29% 0.7-1 kg/day
- 17% < 0.7 kg/day

However, some starting weights seem inaccurate. These could be average mart weights? And duration between weighing varies. Now that John has a secure handling area he can now gather more reliable data to monitor growth rates. Average summer DLWG was 0.5 kg/day and average winter DLWG was 1 kg/day so there is significant potential to improve



Weights and winter DLWG of cattle on Girtridge

The graph shows the wide range in DLWG and cattle weights, with 50 cattle ready to be sold.

Future thoughts for Girtridge:

- Finish similar cattle (weights, breeds and types) – this would also help reduce the number of rations.
- Lower numbers through the winter and higher through the summer.
- In the spring, only put the lighter cattle out to grass and keep heavier cattle inside to finish quicker.

NUTRITION & RATIONING - FINISHING SYSTEM

Rules of Thumb:

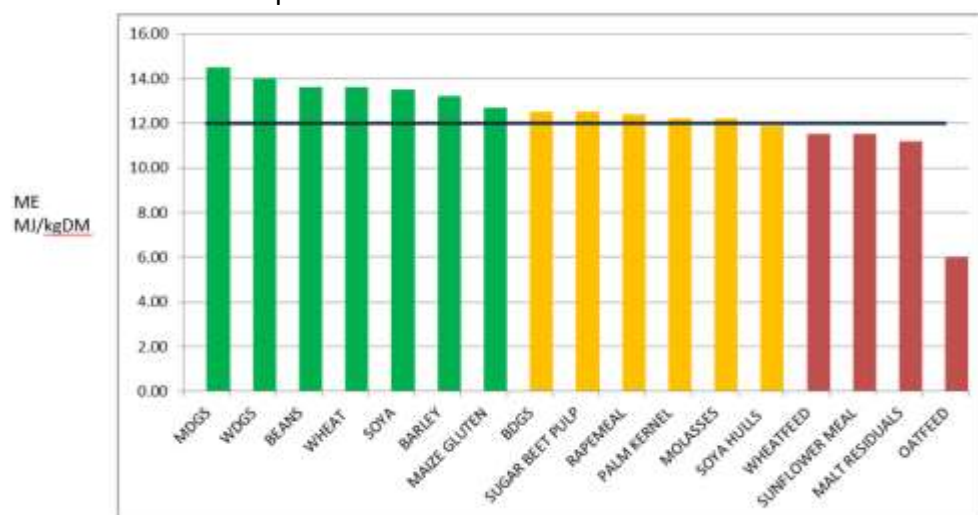
- Keep energy density of the ration above 12 MJ/kg DM.
- Keep starch above 25%.
- Keep protein in overall ration around 130 g/kg DM.
- Different breeds respond differently (continental vs natives).
- Remember the importance of fibre in the diet.
- Keep ration appetising to keep intakes up.
- Must have sufficient access to feed and water.
- Balance energy, protein and long roughage, manage diet acid load, and ensure minerals are provided.
- Water troughs must have sufficient capacity flow rate and must be kept clean.



John explaining shed alterations to the group

Rumen Acidosis – Dietary Causes:

- Over-feeding starch (i.e. cereals, biscuit, bread, potatoes) or very acidic, highly fermented grass silage.
- Diets too low in forage.
- Feeding large meals of cereals (infrequent feeds).
- Lack of rumen adaptation.



Graph 2: Energy level of common ingredients in compounds feeds

The first 3-4 ingredients on a feed label are a good indicator of energy level of the feed as they are listed in descending order according to inclusion weight. Fibre levels above 8% generally indicates a lower energy feed.

INDUSTRY UPDATE – Gavin Hill SAC Consulting

- The national trend of cow numbers reducing and herd size increasing continues with 16% of holdings having 54% of the cows in the UK.
- Other challenges may include: Brexit, US trade-deals, climate change, life choices (e.g. vegetarians & vegans), cheaper meats on the market (i.e. chicken), and increase in dairy beef on the market.
- Industry update positives: 2018 was good for arable. Store trade is currently better than anticipated and good numbers scanned in-calf in general. January store approximately £40-60 lower cf January 2018
- Cost to finish cattle each year has been increasing 15p/kg/year to gain a kilo deadweight but average prices for finished cattle has not increased alongside this, e.g. 380 kg DW = £60 extra cost each year.
- 90% of Irish beef production is exported – over 50% of this is exported to the UK.
- Market Specification: DW limits to 400 kg DW which is equivalent to 700 kg LW. These need to be set in stone with no fluctuation to avoid confusion.
- We are paid on grade currently (EUROP grade). However, in the future we may be paid on yield of different cuts of meat. Due to the most expensive cuts being along the back of the animal, longer cattle will be wanted with more loin. This may have an impact on the types of bulls being bred with less “extreme” bulls.
- Over the last 20 years cattle mature weights have become much heavier across all breeds. This results in it being difficult to finish cattle properly within the market specifications. Feed rations will help whilst the rise in fat levels in bulls will take time.
- More people are switching to maternal native type cows to get more fat cover on their calves.

OPPORTUNITIES/CHALLENGES

- Finish similar cattle (weights, breeds, types and gender) and change management system.
- Target different groups (e.g. only graze lighter cattle and keep heavier cattle inside to finish quicker).
- Suggestions for John included: weigh cattle more regularly (every 4-6 weeks); analyse his top-performing herd mark; reduce the number of different rations being fed; focus on types when buying cattle for consistency and beware of bargains.
- Challenges ahead may include: Brexit, US trade-deals, climate change, life choices (e.g. vegetarians & vegans), cheaper meats on the market (i.e. chicken), and increase in dairy beef on the market.

ACTIONS FROM LAST MEETING

- Please see Farmers Update section to see actions taken since the last meeting.

FACILITATOR CONTACT DETAILS

Raymond Crerar, Kirstyn Blackwood, Gillian McMillan
SAC Consulting, John F Niven Building, Auchincruive, KA6 5HW
Tel. 01292 525252 Email: frbsayr@sac.co.uk



