

ABOUT NORTH AYRSHIRE MONITOR FARM

Farm name	Girtridge Farm, Drybridge Road, Dundonald, Kilmarnock, KA2 9BX
Meeting Number	02
Date	Wednesday 31 May 2017
Next Meeting	Thursday 6 July 2017

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.

Finished Cattle: Approximately 230 finishing cattle are purchased through the local market all year round. The aim is to sell cattle at R4L deadweight through either Stoddarts or Highland Meats.



Sheep Flock: 140 cross ewes put to Suffolk, Texel and Beltex x tups. All lambs are sold finished through the live market. All replacement females are purchased through the market.

Breeding Cattle: 10 mixed breed spring-calving suckler cows running with a Limousin bull. Calves transition to the finishing cattle system.

Spring Barley: 28 hectares of Spring Barley. All barley and straw is used on farm.

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

KEY MESSAGES

- Use anthelmintics only when necessary.
 - Use faecal egg counts to determine the need to treat animals and to measure the effectiveness of any treatment. Samples showing high worm burdens post-treatment may indicate resistance to the anthelmintic used.
 - Consider the requirement to treat adult sheep. There is a strong case for leaving out the treatment of ewes at tugging. Healthy ewes in good condition should be able to manage their own worm burden at this time. Lean ewes or those demonstrating clinical signs should continue to be treated.
 - Consider using a group five anthelmintic late in the season and on purchased replacements to avoid buying in resistant worms.
- Cattle temperament is a 30% heritable trait. Do not retain the progeny of aggressive mothers.

- Research shows that aggressive suckler cows are not better mothers, with lower daily live weight gains recorded amongst their progeny. Similarly aggressive store cattle produce more methane and have lower growth rates than their contemporaries.
- New cattle handling facilities should be designed through the eyes of the animal. Avoid visual distractions such as baler twine and use stock board to limit the exits that can be seen.

AREAS OF DISCUSSION

Animal Health Session

- SAC vet Heather Stevenson led a discussion on BVD in cattle, highlighting that Girtridge Farm handled cattle from over 28 different herds this year alone. Could John be certain that he had not purchased a PI animal? Although purchasing from BVD negative herds, you can only be 100% confident when the animal has been tissue tested.
- She also tackled the subject of worm drenches for sheep and cattle. Healthy ewes in good condition require worming only at lambing when immunity is low and they shed worm eggs. Common practice on many farms is 3 or 4 treatments a year – think of the cost savings!
- Faecal egg counts were encouraged to highlight the requirement to worm lambs. Over-drenching livestock can lead to anthelmintic resistance (90% of white drenches across the country show resistance). The community group were shown how to take dung samples for testing and tackled an exercise showing the importance of calibrating your dosing gun.
- John Howie has recently started a rotational grazing system; Heather explained how rotational grazing can help to reduce the worm burden in cattle and sheep. Worm eggs are found in the upper soil and first few centimetres of grass, therefore pastures can be managed to limit lambs and ewes becoming infected with worm eggs.

Livestock Handling Session

- Dr Simon Turner from SRUC gave a presentation focussing on cattle temperament and handling facilities. He explained that cattle temperament is a heritable trait so retaining and breeding from aggressive cows should be questioned.
- Cattle handling facilities need to be designed and looked at ‘through the eyes of the animal’. Distractions such as baler twine, shadows, slopes/steps and clanging gates should be avoided. Animals should be given a clear exit route by utilising stock boards to block off alternative exits. Dead ends and 90 degree angles should also be avoided.
- John Howie gave details on his current cattle handling system and gave an overview on the requirements he has for a new one as well as giving 3 potential sites.
- Attendees were split into 3 smaller groups with each being given a different potential site for a new cattle handling facility at Girtridge farm. They were tasked to develop some ideas and recommendations for each site which would also meet John’s requirements.
- Each group then fed back their suggestions for a handling facility giving John ‘food for thought’.
- The group also enjoyed a demonstration of mobile sheep handling facilities and a combi clamp.

FARMERS UPDATE

- Records were kept of lamb mortality throughout lambing. Losses seem to indicate an underlying problem and the community group have advised bleeding affected ewes to identify the probable cause. Problem ewes were ear-notched at lambing to aid identification.
- Records of lamb birth weights were also recorded, allowing for more accurate DLWG to be calculated.
- Over 120 tonnes of lime have been applied since the last meeting based on soil testing results.
- The business had also trialled liquid fertiliser for the first time this year on the outlying fields at Ashyards.
- Paddock grazing of the store cattle has started. Sheep paddocks are still to be set up.

FACTS & FIGURES DISCUSSED

- Lamb mortality was recorded at Girtridge and is summarised in the table below:

	Girtridge	Target
Scanning (%)	196	195
Lambs born alive (%)	167	183
Lamb losses scanning to turnout (%)	16	12

- Recording lamb mortality has identified too many lamb losses between scanning and birth and too many lambs being born dead. The community group has advised blood testing the affected ewes to identify where the problem lies.
- Average lamb birth weights recorded at Girtridge:

Breed	Singles (kg)	Twins (kg)	Triplets (kg)
Suffolk	6.78	5.57	4.63
Texel	5.22	4.68	4.04

- The inclement weather has resulted in the ewes being in good condition and producing higher birth weight lambs than normal. This trend was replicated in the flocks of the community group members that attended the meeting. Recording birth weights will allow for increased accuracy when we calculate daily liveweight gains.
- Feeding soya (100 g/lamb carried) plus minerals (25g/hd) has saved £7.34/ewe (based on a twin bearing ewe).
- Extending sheep silage ring feeders using barriers and field gates to allow increased access to ad lib silage has reduced the incidence of Twin Lamb Disease

OPPORTUNITIES/CHALLENGES

- Rotational grazing has improved grassland utilisation affording the opportunity to look at increasing grazing cattle and sheep numbers.
- The management group are keen to explore whether there is a cost benefit of grazing finishing cattle when compared with intensive finishing indoors on a forage system.
- The Bruiser and mixer are in need of repair or replacement. The opportunity will be taken to look at alternatives for the storing and handling of home-produced grain.

ACTIONS FROM MEETING

- Pre and Post worming faecal egg counts will be carried out to ascertain the efficacy of the wormer used.
- Each of the community group members has been tasked with calibrating their own dosing guns and the results of who is over or under dosing their livestock will be heard at the next meeting.
- John will weigh his lambs at 8 weeks to allow for the calculation of daily live weight gains.
- Suspect ewes (ear-notched at lambing) will be blood tested to establish the cause of lamb losses.
- The sheep flock will be introduced to the rotational grazing system prior to the next meeting.
- Ewes nursing twins and those nursing singles are currently managed separately. They will be mixed under the rotational grazing system to avoid having two small groups of sheep on the rotation.
- The business will review their sheep handling options to decide whether to purchase a mobile handling system or build permanent facilities across the 5 different grazing locations.
- Different cattle handling systems and crushes will be costed to identify best value for money alongside ease of operation. John will identify his preferred location for this facility. The business will look into incorporating a weighing facility within any handling system to get a better handle on finished weight and DLWGs.



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