

ABOUT NORTH AYRSHIRE MONTOR FARM

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

Meeting Number **4/5 Selection of livestock for slaughter at Girtridge and at Stoddarts**

Meeting Date **Wednesday 20 September 2017 & Thursday 21st September 2017**

Next Meeting **Friday 1st December 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.

Livestock

Finished Cattle: Approximately 230 finishing cattle 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.

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

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

The Management Group is chaired by Craig Bryson and includes John Howie, Hazel Muir, 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



Listening to John's update



Colin Mair (Farmstock Scotland)



Visit to the Slaughterhouse



Lambs destined for Ayr Market and Scotbeef

KEY MESSAGES

- Know your end market and their requirements.
- Look for feedback from your local market or deadweight purchaser to determine whether animals are meeting their required specification and take advice on where improvements can be made.
- Avoid the costly process of over-finishing cattle and sheep increasing the cost of production and incurring the processor added costs to trim overfat meat.
- Be aware of processor premiums for certain breeds which can add value.
- It is impossible to accurately 'guess' live weights. Invest in a weigh scale to remove the guess work.

AREAS OF DISCUSSION

Cattle

- Jim Gibb of Stoddarts, Ayr gave an overview on finishing beef cattle to suit the marketplace.
- The importance of regular weighing and handling of cattle before slaughter was highlighted with Jim pointing out the key handling points on cattle to determine carcass classification.



- A:** Over the plates and on either side of the tail head (**Conformation**)
- B:** The round (hindquarter) (**Conformation**)
- C:** The transverse processes of the loin (**Conformation**)
- D:** Over the ribs (**Fat cover**)
- E:** The chine and the shoulder blade ridge (**Conformation**)
& the Brisket (**Fat cover**)

- The group discussed the upper weight limits for cattle carcasses (420kg/400kg) and the reasons behind this rule as larger carcasses give large steaks which the industry does not want. The ideal carcass weight is between 300 - 400 kg with the ideal specification being E, U or R 3-4L.

- Over finished cattle are not economic for the farmer or the abattoir, resulting in extra feed costs for the farmer and extra trimming costs of excess fat for the processor.
- The handling of cattle before slaughter was discussed with the importance of keeping stress to a minimum to avoid 'dark cutting meat' which reduces the sale value for the processor.
- Cattle should be presented to the abattoir as clean as possible to avoid carcass contamination. clipping charges are applied to dirty animals. Put cattle on straw and water prior to haulage.
- Jim highlighted the price premium for certain native breeds of cattle. The most common being the Aberdeen Angus premium which can be worth an extra 30p/kg.
- The group were given the opportunity to have a go at guessing the liveweight and carcass classification of ten cattle selected for slaughter the following day.

Sheep

- Colin Mair of Farmstock Scotland delivered some pointers for drawing fat lambs for the market.
- Colin advised that you should know your market. Do not produce a lamb and then look for a market. Find out what the market wants and produce the right specification of lamb to fit the market.
- UK Supermarkets look for a 16 – 21.5kg carcass grading at U or R 2/3L. UK butchers typically seek similar grades but with slightly higher carcass weights 20-24kg.
- To estimate carcass weight or deadweight, divide the liveweight by 2 & deduct 3-4 kg.
- The kill out percentage for lambs weaned off milk can drop by 5% from 49-51% to around 47%. Lambs on wet, late season grass can drop further to 43%
- Weight alone is not an appropriate gauge to readiness for market, to ensure accurate selection, handling the live animal is essential. A lamb's shoulder and loin give a good indication of the level of fleshing throughout the animal. To gauge fatness, feel over the loin, ribs and at the tail dock.
- Avoid bruising the meat by handling the live animal correctly, avoid pulling wool, watch for swinging gates, protruding hinges and biting dogs.
- Lambs should be gathered and allowed to 'empty' out before transport (approx. 12 hours) to avoid animals becoming dirty during transport.
- Slaughter reports can highlight underlying health conditions in the flock like fluke or tapeworm and so should be examined carefully for an indicator of the need to treat.

FARMERS UPDATE

- Luckily all baling and combining was completed the night before the meeting. Yields are still to be confirmed but John is relieved to have completed harvest when the weather has been so difficult.
- A second cut of silage was taken from about 22 hectares (54 acres) on the 12th of August, with no spare capacity in the pit, this has all been made into bales. The first cut silage analysis is 23% DM, 10.1 ME and 10.9 CP, poorer than anticipated, so a ration is being prepared to maintain growth rates.
- Around 45 cattle have been sold off grass since the last meeting. The latest batch of 5 heifers sold on the 7th September 2017 at an average of 580kg (deadweight 316kg) and R4L carcasses at £3.83/kg.
- The remaining finishing cattle at grass will be housed soon.

- The farm has invested in a new second-hand feed wagon following the demise of the old one.
- John has purchased 70 Aberfield gimmers from Lothians monitor farmer Peter Eccles. These will be compared with the Mules and Texel crosses that he traditionally buys through the market.
- Two Abermax rams were purchased at the Stirling Innovis sale at Duncan MacEwan's farm at Arnprior. John is keen to see what these new genetics can contribute to the flock.
- When the weather allows, winter barley will be sown. This new enterprise is being trialled at Girtridge this year to reduce the spring field work and allow better focus on the increasing sheep flock.

FACTS & FIGURES DISCUSSED

- The 19 lambs sold live through Ayr Market averaged 41.7 kg LWT for £68.90/head or £1.65/kg. The 10 Suffolk's were heavier at 42.8 kg at £69.16/ head or £1.63/kg. The 9 Texels averaged 41 kg LWT at £68.61/head or £1.67/kg. Deductions from selling through the live auction were £3.66/head.
- The 25 lambs sold on a deadweight basis through Scotbeef averaged 18.9kg DWT for £69.38/head or £3.66/kg. The Suffolks and plainer Texels in the batch graded at R3L carcass averaging 19 kg DWT. Better Texel and Beltex type lambs achieved E2 and U2 grades at a similar carcass weight. Deductions came to £2.84/head. The extremely positive feedback from Farmstock showed 84% of the lambs supplied to Scotbeef met the required specification. John has found this feedback beneficial and plans to sell more lambs on a deadweight basis.
- See the gross margins achieved on the 10 cattle sent to Stoddarts following the live assessment. Purchase price and days on farm are key to good gross margins. Shortening finishing times allow higher throughput of animals and increase business turnover.

OPPORTUNITIES/CHALLENGES

- The opening business group meeting will be held at the John Niven building training room on the 29th of September all interested individuals are encouraged to attend.

ACTIONS FROM LAST MEETING

- Silage bales to be analysed and rations formulated based on this and 1st cut silage analysis
- Tups will go out at the end of October/start of November for an April Lambing. Rams will be raddled to identify ewes mated on the second cycle so that they can be housed later as housing space is limited now the flock is bigger.

FACILITATOR CONTACT DETAILS

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