

ABOUT NORTH AYRSHIRE MONITOR FARM

Farm name	Girtridge Farm, Drybridge Road, Dundonald, Kilmarnock, KA2 9BX
Meeting Number	8 Beef Industry update (Gavin Hill SAC), Improving herd efficiency (Andrew Laird)
Meeting Date	Friday 9 March 2018 at the Auchans, Dundonald
Next Meeting	Friday 8 th June 2018

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 and direct off farm all year round. The aim is to sell cattle at R4L deadweight through either Stoddarts or Highland Meats.

Sheep Flock: 250 cross ewes put to Suffolk, Texel and Abermax rams. All lambs are sold finished either through the live market or direct to slaughter through Farmstock. All replacement females are purchased privately or 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 and Winter 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.

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

KEY MESSAGES

Beef Industry (Gavin Hill SAC)

- Now we have to develop a type of cow that suits the environment, is fertile and is capable of producing a calf (product) wanted in the market place.
- The bulls we use need to be matched to our breeding cows and capable of producing what is wanted.
- 6 to 8 weeks pre-calving move to a pre-calving mineral. Higher Magnesium (10%), higher Vit E, Selenium and Iodine (1000).
- Ensuring sufficient colostrum early ie in the first 2 to 3 hours is critical to ensure protection against scour and septicaemia.

Improving herd efficiency and productivity (Andrew Laird – Auchentiber)

- Focus on the long- term outcome of the farm. Make a plan and investigate where time and money can be spared.
- Choose your breeds to match the land.
- Rotational grazing is planned.
- Creep feeding calves for 6 weeks before sale has produced heavier calves at sale.
- Prefers to work with lower maintenance type of cow and cross to the Charolais bull to produce calves with good carcass for the store market.
- Crossed pure Blackface ewes with Swaledale tup to increase hybrid vigour.
- Lambs sold mostly store.

Lambing (Robert Ramsay – SAC)

- Glucose intraperitoneal injection (in addition to time in the warming box) is vital to recover comatose lambs over 6 hours old.
- Lambing jackets have had an impact on lamb survival, especially with the current climate.
- Dry and well- ventilated lambing buildings can prevent disease from spreading.



Gavin Hill SAC



Andrew Laird, Auchentiber

AREAS OF DISCUSSION

- Improving herd efficiency: Focus on the essential and reduce time spent on unnecessary tasks.
- Should the Girtridge suckler herd be kept or increased to make them more viable? It was decided to disperse the herd after calving when the unit value of the cows/calves would be at their highest.
- Changing your suckler enterprise is not about solely changing breeds. For many it is just about changing management systems of these breeds. No farms or herds are the same and everyone will have different results. Those achieving profitability often have resources that others do not have such as land type and capability, climate, production of feed including grain and straw and finance structure. Make the most of your resources.

FARMERS UPDATE

- The last of the equipment has been ordered for the cattle handling system and have decided to concrete the floor now due to the high volume of stock running through.
- Ventilation – shed alterations will be postponed until the summer.
- Leatherjacket test on four fields showed 378,000 to 505,000 which will make no difference to grass but the field with 505,000 was planned to be sown in spring barley. An additional cultivation should reduce the grub to an acceptable level.
- Hosted an SRUC student visit.
- Moles Caught -= 48
- Hedges cut and dung spread, waiting to spread slurry- no digestate or hen pen.
- Sheep - Triplets inside being feed ad-lib silage, soya and whole barley plus mineral tubs (due date 1/4/18). Twins just started feeding and singles are currently receiving none. Feeding 100g soya plus 100g whole barley per lamb carried.
- SERLP involved a trip to Holyrood, Westminster and Brussels.

FACTS & FIGURES DISCUSSED



Suckler Cows	2016	2017	QMS Av	QMS Top
Net Output	468.75	622.22	669.62	756.70
Note no Sub £80 or Replacement Cost £70				
Variable Costs				
Purchased feed	27.5	19.94	23.09	12.40
Home grown conc	-	-	18.99	17.58
Purchased Forage	-	-	30.66	32.64
Home grown forage	79.41	63.36	74.26	72.92
Total Feed+Forage	106.91	83.30	147.00	135.53
Vet + Med	35.00	16.54	44.21	49.95
Bedding	60.00	71.11	30.60	31.25
Other Costs	-	5.56	38.23	39.60
Total Variable Costs	201.91	176.51	260.04	256.33
Gross Margin	266.84	445.71	409.58	500.37

Farmbench figures for the suckler herd and the beef steers were discussed and compared with QMS average and top third

Benchmarking Figures



Beef Stores	2016	2017	QMS Av	QMS Top
Stock Sales	1205.11	1262.55	1285.47	1217.50
Less Purchases	846.83	855.89	838.51	683.57
Net Output	358.28	406.66	446.96	533.93
Variable Costs				
Purchased feed	25.31	33.14	108.01	70.97
Home grown conc	60.47	112.24	49.93	51.65
Forage	44.17	29.48	46.01	57.12
Total Feed+Forage	129.95	174.86	203.95	179.74
Vet + Med	17.43	12.66	11.38	22.60
Bedding	15.03	3.24	33.87	14.61
Other Costs	20.28	21.57	42.48	57.19
Total Variable Costs	182.69	212.33	291.68	274.14
Gross Margin	175.59	194.33	155.28	259.79

OPPORTUNITIES/CHALLENGES

- Dispersing the suckler herd to simplify the farming system.
- Increasing the number of finishing cattle on the year.

ACTIONS FROM LAST MEETING

- Completion of pipeline being laid throughout farm, allowing for draining and ploughing starting.
- Ewes vaccinated with Heptavac P Plus.
- Bought seed barley and fertiliser to be sown.
- Slurry sample analysed.
- Lambing and calving.

FACILITATOR CONTACT DETAILS

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