

ABOUT NORTH AYRSHIRE MONITOR FARM

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

Meeting Number **07 Cattle housing and ventilation.**

Meeting Date **Friday 26th January 2018 at Girtridge and then the Auchans, Dundonald.**

Next Meeting **Wednesday 28th February at the Auchans, Dundonald.**

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

Shed Ventilation

- Improving the outlet – cutting the required area out of the existing ridging (both sheds) saves £9,000 versus removing and installing a protected open ridge. Only the hire of a cherry-picker and labour is required.
- The inlet will be increased by removing a layer of blocks along the top of the wall in the straw courts.

Cattle Handling

- New facility will save approx. 100 hours per year in handling cattle providing a net benefit of £533/annum.
- It will give John the ability to handle cattle quickly and more frequently to monitor growth rates and treat.
- The reduced stress on stock (and operator) and improved health and safety benefits are priceless.

Agri-EPI

- Precision farming and innovation is a rapidly growing agricultural sector worth billions.
- Farmers should not be wary of innovation or new technologies. We should embrace it.
- New technologies identified that could be of benefit at Girtridge are a Ritchie Beef Monitor, implementing cattle EID and drone technology to monitor crop emergence and disease.

AREAS OF DISCUSSION

- Ventilation options for the cattle sheds
- Refinements to the cattle handling system
- Cattle finishing update
- New technologies and innovation in livestock farming – Stephen Burns, Agri-EPI Centre
- Agri Environmental audit feedback and options
- Enterprise performance for the last two years (FarmBench)
- SWOT analysis and options appraisal



Considering ridge options to increase the air outlet of sheds.



John demonstrating his new Vortex forcing pen.

FARMERS UPDATE

- Since the last meeting John has altered the finishing cattle ration to increase DLWGs -
- A recent break in the weather allowed some sheds to be mucked and dung spread on stubbles.
- Tups ran with the ewes for 36 days and were raddled only on the second turn.
- They were scanned recently and drenched with Flukiver for fluke.
- Lambs have nearly all now been marketed with only 15 remaining. These have mostly been sold deadweight and have been grading well.
- Farmbench has been updated for the 2017 year.
- General farm maintenance jobs have been carried out as the weather allowed – some fencing, machinery repairs and cattle handling unit installation.
- John spoke at the Isle of Cumbrae NFU meeting on the progress of the Monitor Farm and he hosted a visit by a group of chefs through Stoddarts.

- Mary Welsh (Howie) had a baby girl, Emily Margaret Welsh, who arrived safely in December.

FACTS & FIGURES DISCUSSED

A summary of the year, gross output analysis and enterprise margins were presented to the group. The group worked in break out groups to develop a SWOT analysis and options appraisal for the business. See below 2017 Actual Gross Margins for each enterprise:

	Beef Stores	Suckler Cows	Breeding Sheep	Lamb Finishing
Net Output	406.66	622.22	74.80	16.28
Feed & Forage costs	174.96	83.30	15.11	0.40
Other variable costs	37.37	93.21	24.10	8.00
Gross Margin	194.33	445.71	35.59	7.88

OPPORTUNITIES/CHALLENGES

<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skilled family workforce • Soil Type (Climate) • Age (youthful) • Good steading • Close to market place • Monitor Farm • Scale of farm • Opportunity to intensify • Owner occupier (security) • Home grown feeds 	<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dependant on John alone for labour • Beef cows overcomplicating system • No electronic cattle recording system • A significant area of un productive land (rushes) • High fixed costs- machinery • Distance to other farm • Scanning % of sheep
<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase output, spread fixed costs • Forestry options for wetter land • Renewables • More suckler cows • More grass and less grain • Finishing system change (intensive indoors) or all out • Greater use of grassland via more rotational grazing (i.e. currently set-stocked at Ashyards) • Simplify machinery fleet • Use contractors to alleviate labour pinch at peak times • Varied diversification options due to farm location 	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weather • Personal injury/illness • Brexit • Contract labour shortage • Livestock disease • Market crashes • Interest rate rise • Shortage of store cattle supplies
<p>Options Appraisal going forward</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Electronic computer system for recording cattle data • EID for cattle • Farm woodland options • Simplify the business by focusing on one enterprise (finishing cattle) • Disperse sucklers 	

- Grant scheme options for wetland area
- Automatic weigh scale (Ritchie Beef Monitor) to take the labour out of weighing cattle
- Winter forage crops for sheep
- Disperse sheep and buy in store lambs
- Diversification
- Blood tests for trace elements
- B&B Cattle
- Sell outlying land

ACTIONS FROM LAST MEETING

- Housing alterations considered to improve ventilation
- Rations formulated for store and finishing cattle to push DLWG;

	Store (430kg @ 1kg/day lwg)	Finishers (600kg @ 1.3kg/day lwg)
Silage	20kg	20kg
Barley	4kg	7.2kg
IMSA Soya	0.5kg	0.8kg
Minerals	Yes	Yes
Cost	£1.21/day	1.73/day (£1.30/kg gain)

Ewes scanned on 23/1/18;

Litter size	Aberfield Gimmers	Mule & Tex X Gimmers	Ewes	Total
0	3	3	5	11 (4%)
1	21	9	22	52
2	39	61	56	156
3	6	8	18	32
4	1			1
Total	70	81	101	252
%	173	191	186	184

The group decided that the barren rate of 4% was acceptable and was no real cause for concern. The consensus was to cull the barren gimmers.

FACILITATOR CONTACT DETAILS

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