

ABOUT NITHSDALE MONITOR FARM

Farm name **Clonhie Farm, Penpont, Thornhill, DG3 4NB**

Meeting Number **6- Will Case and Gavin Hill**

Meeting Date **Thursday 7th December 2017**

Next Meeting **Thursday 1st February 2018**

Clonhie is a tenanted farm on Buccleuch Estates run by Andrew and Aileen Marchant, new entrants to farming in 2012. Neighbouring Glengar was added to the farm business in 2016 taking the farmed area to 303ha (750ac), from 100m to 300m above sea level near Penpont in Nithsdale.

Sheep: 900 lambing ewes with 240 ewe hogs, not in lamb. Ewe breeds include North Country Cheviots, Lleyn cross and Texel X Beltex. 130 Texel crosses lamb from early March inside, with the remaining 770 lambing outside in April.

Cattle: A herd of 10 Luings with the first calves being born this year. However, summer grazing cows & calves are taken on and store cattle are wintered in the sheds as well.

Management Group: Colin Forsyth (Chair), Alistair Padkin (vet), David Wilson, Robert Osborne, John Wildman, Alisdair Davidson, Colin Cuthbertson and Andrew Best of Watsons Seeds.

KEY MESSAGES

- Herd Health Scheme worthwhile, especially if breeding own replacements. Be pro-active about health challenges such as fluke, Johnes, IBR and pneumonia
- Calculate winter diets for each group of cattle using forage quality & quantity, cattle LWT, & target body condition / target DLG. You can be fairly hard on dry spring calving cows during the winter period if they are in good condition, then just stop them getting too lean in Feb/March
- Operating conditions for Scotch beef producers are going to be tough, we need to be as strong, flexible and resilient as possible but there will also be opportunities for those able and willing to exploit them
- Building a strong and resilient business means using your skills and resources to the best of your ability to spread the income sources and risk

AREAS OF DISCUSSION

Our host for the morning, Robert Osborne, welcomed over 50 to Castlehill describing his farm business:

- 250 AAX & SimX, mostly spring calving cows, with a small batch of Autumn calvers. Spring calvers are housed on slats, their weaned calves on bedded courts. Autumn calvers are on slats with calves creeping onto bedded pens.
- 700 south & north country cheviots put to Blueface Leicester, selling cheviot mule ewe lambs and gimmers, with male lambs finished at home. Also ~100 pure texels to sell tups & some females.
- Grow 40 ha of cereals for our own use and cutting ~40 ha of silage and own most of the machinery for both.

Alistair Padkin, Nithsdale Vets, took the second group to discuss the herd health at Castlehill

- Robert has been a member of the SAC Heard Health Scheme for a few years now, primarily for Johnes Disease, which is seen as a greater risk in herds breeding their own replacements. Johnes disease takes several years to manifest in individuals and can spread throughout the herd if not monitored regularly and will cause loss of production if it reaches high rates in a herd.
- Current thinking indicates that such herds should be tested annually with those found positive isolated and calved away from the rest of the herd. Young calves are most susceptible to picking up Johnes in the first few weeks of life and cows shed most infection at calving time & would infect pens & bedding shared with other cattle. Cows can usually be allowed to rear their calves, so long as they don't start to lose condition, can be fattened for sale after weaning.
- In most herds Johnes does not become apparent until animal is at least 2 or 3 years, but some can perform normally into relative old age. They won't shed much infection until they begin to suffer, at which point they should be picked up by the annual testing cycle. The advice is that once identified as Johnes positive animals should be earmarked for culling and isolated. Her previous heifer calf, if retained for breeding, should also be removed from the herd.
- It is unlikely that Johnes can be eliminated from herds; the aim should be to keep levels to a very low level through annual testing, isolation of positive animals followed by a strict culling policy.
- **Pneumonia** - is usually caused by one or more of 4 different diseases including IBR, RSV, PI3, and Mycoplasma. The vaccines available for the viruses IBR, RSV, and P13 are effective especially if treated before housing / weaning when stress can allow these diseases to take hold. Castlehill has few pneumonia problems, and recent blood tests showed no presence of IBR, RSV or Mycoplasma and only limited exposure to PI3. Alistair was concerned that there was no presence of IBR. He has discussed the risk of a serious health breakdown if IBR does appear at Castlehill with Robert and recommended that he should consider vaccinating for IBR, which is relatively cheap and effective in preventing a serious outbreak.
- **Fluke** – Alistair discussed the fact that with the wet year and low temperatures fluke is likely to be a high risk on all local farms this year. We should all plan fluke control carefully, and preferably with veterinary input, as local vets are aware of what is happening in farms in your own area. Many farmers in high risk areas like this are now treating cattle for fluke twice a year, often at housing and again 7 to 8 weeks later – depending on the product/s used.

- **Worms.** - Most adult cattle don't need to be wormed as they have built up sufficient resistance; however young stock do need to be wormed. Spring born calves in particular are susceptible to lungworm, as well as stomach worms and fluke and should be treated for all. It is possible to use a longer acting product containing Doramectin like 'Dectomax' or 'Noromectin' up to 5 weeks before housing, which will keep the calves clear until housing time. Fluke and worm control should be part of animal health planning and be discussed with your vet to maximise livestock performance and minimise the risk of developing anthelmintic resistance. Don't forget to check treat for lice, which can be an issue in housing over the winter.
- The benefits to herd performance when disease challenges such as Fluke, BVD, Johnes and IBR are controlled were highlighted as it allows livestock to grow and perform to potential without having to fight disease.

FARMERS UPDATE

- Topping is almost over with 60% of ewes, Flock A going to maternal sires; 40%, Flock B, going to terminal sires and 70 ewe lambs going to a Highlander tup. This time last year Andrew had 41% of his prime lambs still to sell and little grass on the farm.
- This year he has 16% of his prime lambs still to sell and there is 26ha of quality deferred grass and 3.7ha of kale which measured at 10tDM/ha this week, for winter grazing – what a difference a year of Monitor Farming makes!
- The Clonhie herd passed its first TB test, were all scanned in calf and no Johnes was detected in their first Health Scheme test.
- The calves were weaned at an average of 225kg and 184 days old giving an average DLG of 0.98kg/hd/day with no creep feed.
- Andrew has also taken on a batch of young calves to rear in the lambing shed – since there will be no early lambing this year.
- Andrew & Rhidian also went through the plans for winter grazing

FACILITATOR CONTACT DETAILS

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