

ABOUT NITHSDALE MONITOR FARM

Farm name	Clonhie Farm, Penpont, Thornhill, DG3 4NB
Meeting Number	02- Alistair Padkin (farm vet), Rhidian Jones and Andrew Best (Watsons seeds)
Meeting Date	Thursday 2 nd March 2017
Next Meeting	Thursday 25 th May 2017

Clonhie is a tenanted farm on Buccluech 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 total farmed area to 303ha (800ac) running from 100m to 300m above sea level in the Marrburn valley, Penpont in Nithsdale.

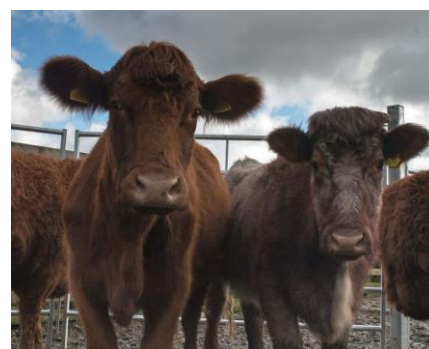
Sheep - numbers are now up to 900 lambing ewes in 2017 with 240 ewe hogs, which are not in lamb. The main breeds are North Country Cheviots, Lleyn cross and Texel X Beltex. 130 Texel crosses lamb from early March inside, with the remaining 770 lambing outside in April.

Cattle – a small herd of 10 Luings is being established with the first calves being born this year. However, summer grazing cows and calves are taken in and store cattle are wintered in the sheds as well.

Management Group is chaired by local farmer Colin Forsyth, Bennan, and includes Nithsdale Vet Alistair Padkin, David Wilson, Marwhirn; Robert Osborne, Castlehill; John Wildman, Glenkiln; Alisdair Davidson, Poldean; Colin Cuthbertson, Thripland and Andrew Best of Watsons Seeds



Alistair Padkin, Nithsdale Vets & Andrew Marchant



Two in calf Luing cows

KEY MESSAGES

- It is important to know forage analysis, target and actual body condition scores and liveweight when calculating diets for pregnant cattle
- Looking forward to comparing performance of different groups of lambs using new handling system
- Soils analysis is key to planning soil treatments and making the most efficient use of the fertilisers applied.

AREAS OF DISCUSSION

- Rhidian Jones (facilitator) demonstrated body condition scoring using the Clonhie Luing cows and heifers and explained how silages of differing qualities can easily lead to either overfeeding or underfeeding cows, which would lead to problems at calving time.
- An interesting competition was held for community group members to estimate both body condition scores and liveweights of the cows and heifers. Liveweights in particular, were consistently underestimated by the group.
- Alistair Padkin and Andrew Marchant discussed routine vaccinations and treatments carried out for the Clonhie flock along with the major challenges Andrew has faced in the past.
- Andrew's plans for closing the flock were discussed at length. It was agreed that this should be done, but questions were asked about breeding replacements from the NCC ewes, which did not seem to be performing as well as the rest of the flock.
- Andrew Best presented the soils analyses taken on Clonhie, which were better than feared. Lime is required in most fields and calcium lime was advised given the relatively high levels of magnesium present. If the calcium: magnesium ratio in the soil is corrected, then water drainage through the soil should be improved.

FARMERS UPDATE

- Most (653) of the 2016 lambs have been sold, with ~ 160 left to sell in the next month or so.
- The 'early lambers', in lamb to the Charollais, came into the shed just after the first meeting, settled down well and have started lambing, a day or two earlier than expected, but are doing fine.
- The main flock have been scanned with mixed results and are due to start lambing, outdoors in April
- Successful grant application for support in purchasing a new 'Racewell' sheep handling system, which will be key to all the monitoring and recording of sheep performance we plan to be doing over the next 3 years
- Andrew attended a Monitor farm reception at the Scottish Parliament, Holyrood, where Monitor Farmers met several MSPs from rural constituencies and with rural / environmental interests

FACTS & FIGURES DISCUSSED

Sheep Topic - Clonhie 2017 Scanning results:-

2017	Scan %	Yeld %
Early Texels	176 %	2.6 %
Lleyn Cross	184 %	1.5 %
Gimmers	161 %	1.9 %
NCC	132 %	7.1 %

- NCC scanning % and yeld % are very disappointing
- Did blood profiles to see if there was a problem but the tests showed nothing conclusive
- NCCs were the only group of ewes which didn't respond to treatment for lameness last back end. Eventually resorted to jaggging them all with micotil, which did improve things but perhaps the damage was done
- Some concern voiced by the community group as to whether it was a good idea to breed flock replacements from a group of ewes which are not performing as well as the rest of the flock and which Andrew doesn't like.
- No hoggs in lamb this year – after 2 disappointing years
- Andrew is very interested in using new, improved genetics to improve his flock
 - Has bought 3 Innovis Aberfield tups, which went to the NCC ewes to breed replacements
 - Community group are interested to follow the productivity of these lambs, and in time ewes, to compare with the existing flock
 - Need to EID tag lambs and use recording / monitoring equipment to make this possible
- Andrew has been keeping a record of all inputs for the 'early lambers' so that we can do a more detailed financial analysis to inform future decision making

Cattle Topic – Rhidian Jones (facilitator) did a session on forage analysis, Cattle liveweights and Body Condition Scores (BCS) :-

- Rhidian Jones explained that, depending on how good the silage is and her BCS, a cow can eat much more forage than she actually needs. Given the 19.9% DM content of the Clonhie silage, 10.1 MJ/kgDM and 11.4% Protien content Rhidian calculated that a 650kg cow could eat 13kg DM of silage but that she only needed 8.5kg to provide her with her actual dietary requirements.



Judith Hutchison, Rhidian Jones and Aileen Marchant



Rhidian, 2 piles of silage & community group members

- Rhidian went through descriptions of BCS 1 to 5 and target BCS at different points in the reproductive cycle, for spring and autumn calving cows, along with information on the influence BCS has on productivity and performance (see handout for details)
- Rhidian showed how, if Liveweight or BCS was not gauged correctly, cattle could easily be under or over fed, with consequences for calving, colostrum production, lactation, bulling success, and of course profitability
- A competition was held for community group members to guess the weight and body condition scores of 2 of Andrew's Luining cattle and the average weight of a group of Luining bulling heifers.

OPPORTUNITIES/CHALLENGES

- Flock has grown very quickly over 5 years – now need to focus on improving technical performance and weed out the worst individuals
- Soils and Grassland management and utilisation an important focus for this project to improve livestock performance at least possible cost
- Need to consider profitability of cattle herd compared to grazers and winter B&B cattle. Establishing own herd needs to be at least as profitable as current enterprises.

ACTIONS FROM THE MEETING

- Lambing management
 - Use wood shavings for bedding, dip navels in 10% iodine, use “Spectam” & jag with 0.5ml Betamox to prevent joint-ill and watery mouth.
 - Ensure all new born lambs receive 50ml/kg of bodyweight of colostrum in first 24 hours
 - Do financial analysis on early lambing flock to consider whether to continue or possibly change lambing dates for this early lambing enterprise
 - Keep some early singles entire to compare performance with castrated singles
 - Do comparison on creep fed and not fed early lambs
- Soils & Grassland
 - Spread lime as indicated by soils analyses done, starting with the best fields
 - Rake out trash from established swards to open out and give grass opportunity to thrive and grow better

FACILITATOR CONTACT DETAILS:-

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