

ABOUT NITHSDALE MONITOR FARM

Farm name	Clonhie Farm, Penpont, Thornhill, DG3 4NB
Meeting Number	11– Where’s the Profit in Sucklers? Held at Nethertown, Shawhead,
Meeting Date	Thursday 29th November 2018
Next Meeting	Thursday 7th 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 total farmed area to 303ha (800ac) running from 100m to 300m above sea level in the Marrburn valley, in Nithsdale.

Sheep - 900 lambing ewes in 2017 + 240 ewe hogs [not lambed]. 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. From 2018 all 900 ewes and half the hogs were lambed outside from 1st April

Cattle – a small herd of Luings is being established with the first calves being born in 2017. However, summer grazing cows and calves are taken in and store cattle are wintered in the sheds as well.

Red Deer – Deer fencing was completed, and 60 red deer hinds introduced to Clonhie in February 2018. This enterprise is a joint venture with Buccleuch Estate. The plan is to increase breeding hind numbers to 200 in the first instance.

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.

Over 70 people attended the 11th meeting of the project, which was held at Nethertown, Shawhead, Castle Douglas by kind permission of Glenkiln Estates and hosted by farm manager, John Wildman.

The focus for the day was “Where is the profit in suckler cattle?”. John Wildman took attendees round Nethertown steading discussing recent investment in new cattle housing, handling facilities and herd breeding choices. Alastair Padkin, Nithsdale vets discussed cattle health issues and Steven Sandison from Orkney talked about the findings of his Nuffield Scholarship studies in UK, Ireland, Norway and Canada.



Host, John Wildman, discusses the new handling system



Guest speaker Steven Sandison



Community Group members listening to Alistair Padkin

KEY MESSAGES

- No matter which enterprise you are in, if you can perform in the top 25%, then you have a good chance of surviving any challenges that come your way.
- Management of herd health is key to herd performance
- System choices such as breed/type and housing are fundamental for livestock welfare and for staff efficiency (and enjoyment for the job).

ANDREW'S FARM UPDATE

- Lambs are finishing OK, but we have put those nearly ready onto feed creep for the last bit just to get them away.
- Grass has been a real issue this summer and back end. We thought that when it started to grow that we would have plenty, but it just hasn't come in the quantities we needed. As a result, everything has been on rotation since late summer just to eke grass out. We have no winter forage crop, so planning is going to be essential and challenging for the winter to come.
- Tups are all out.
 - 600 ewes went to Aberfield & Highlander tups
 - 400 ewes/gimmers went to Primera, Beltex & Texel tups
 - 300 hoggs went to Shetland tups
- Cattle – 18 cows [all in calf] will be outwintered on Glengar
 - We will have 12 heifers to go to the bull next year
- Deer – We have purchased some more red deer, which means we have put 145 hinds to the stags this year.
 - Young stock are all weaned and housed in the shed, which has been altered to suit

AREAS OF DISCUSSION

Steading tour round Nethertown – John Wildman discussed the decisions he and the estate have made since his arrival in summer 2016

- Cattle housing has been / is being built to house the 400 head spring calving and 200 head summer calving herds. The main considerations have included: -
 - Cattle health and welfare, (replacing older low roofed buildings with ventilation issues).
 - System simplicity and safety for both daily feeding and handling of cattle to make work efficient and enjoyable for staff.
 - Had to work around a small burn, which is piped under/through the steading and has meant slats were not possible in some areas.
 - New slats have been fitted with mats, which John has found to be well worth the considerable investment involved.

- The housing is planned to allow some of the later born spring calves remain with their mothers at housing, while younger summer born calves are provided with straw bedded calf creeps in 'lean-toos' added to an existing shed.
- Calving pens have been planned to work easily for both cows and calves and the cattle man and staff helping out.
- Breed choices - The herd contained Simmental, South Devon and AA cross cows put to various bulls.
 - After much research and a lot of thought John has opted to use both AA and Salers bulls selected to produce replacement heifers.
 - Charolais have been chosen as terminal sire breed. John believes that as a producer of store cattle he has to produce what the market is looking for and that the Charolais breed has improved considerably in recent years, with fewer calving difficulties whilst maintaining excellent growth and beef performance levels. He pointed out that use of EBVs is important in his selection of bulls, but they also had to look right and walk well.
 - Calving twice a year does allow heifer replacement selection to calve heifers down at 2.5 years old.
 - There is also an aim to reduce cow size to around 600-650kg, but this is a longer-term project. Longer term aim being to have a more uniform herd that should ensure a more uniform crop of calves to aid herd management and produce easily grouped calves at sale.
- Management of cattle work and handling system have also been an important consideration ensuring that work can be carried out quickly, safely and easily and with emphasis on work not being onerous on staff, with the aim of building and maintaining a strong, stable and experienced team. For example, the spring calving cows are calved by the main cattleman with help from other members of staff to feed and move cows and calves out (once they are established).

Alistair Padkin of Nithsdale Vets discussed the main diseases encountered in young calves: -

- **E. coli** - usually under 3 days old, sudden onset – cold mouth watery diarrhoea and rapid dehydration, which is generally fatal due to septicaemia.
- **Rotavirus** – typically a sudden and severe watery yellow/green diarrhoea at 8 to 14 days of age. Early sign also include reluctance to suckle and salivation and the calf will become dehydrated quickly and should be rehydrated with electrolytes. Antibiotics are not recommended unless there is secondary infection.
- **Coronavirus** – (is less common than rotavirus) appears similar to rotavirus, with mucus and milk curds in faeces, and can affect calves up to 3 weeks old. Treatment is similar to that for rotavirus. Combined vaccination against rotavirus, coronavirus and K99 (E. coli) is an effective preventative.
- **Cryptosporidia** – is a protozoan infection which usually infects 7 to 21-day old calves causing yellow/green faeces with mucus, a tucked-up stance, reluctance to feed and mild dehydration. Preventative/treatment includes rehydration and dosing with Halofuginone lactate (halocur) or Paromomycin (Parofor) daily for 7 days, no vaccination is currently available.
- **Coccidiosis** – is a protozoan infection causing a very dark diarrhoea at about 6 to 12 weeks of age and can be fatal or cause permanent damage, which compromises growth and performance. Dosing with Diclazuril (Veccoxan) or Toltrazuril (Baycox) is an effective treatment.
- **RSV / P13 / IBR / Pneumonia** – vaccination protocols are the best route for any challenges.

Prevention – the best option is preventing disease in the first place.

- Colostrum plays a central role in this. Feeding an extra rumen bypass protein source in the last 3 or 4 weeks before calving supports the cow to provide improved colostrum quality and quantity.
- Timely vaccinations also ensure colostrum contains excellent immunity against important diseases
- Selection of breed types that are easier calving along with management of cow body condition can also improve the calf's ability to get up and suckle quickly. Ideally calves should be suckling within 2 hours of birth in order to get enough colostrum and then absorb high enough levels of immunoglobulins, which give the calf resistance to early infections.
- Powdered colostrums – most of these products are really just supplement boosters with good energy levels. The truth is very few of these products have much in the way of immunoglobulins in them at all. Most are of little use where there is a real shortage of colostrum. Colostrum saved from other cows will be of much better value (need to be aware of Johnes risks with this). Alistair advised that 'Immucol Platinum' colostrum replacer products contain the highest immunity levels he knows of.

Further information is available on the NADIS website - <http://www.nadis.org.uk/disease-a-z/cattle/calf-scour-suckler-herds/>

OPPORTUNITIES / CHALLENGES

Steven Sandison – gave a clear and enjoyable report on the findings of his Nuffield study “Are benchmarking targets for suckler cows achievable? – please see his PowerPoint presentation and link to his Nuffield scholarship.

Steven’s main focus for his study was

1. Is 92% weaning possible?
2. What do the best guys have in common?

His findings included: -

- Top 7 UK & Ireland farms visited averaged 93% weaning with an average 9.5-week calving spread (so it is possible). - 6 were profitable (before subsidy), 1 was breaking even.
- Bottom 7 averaged 84% weaning with an average 28-week calving spread - 6 were not profitable (before subsidy), 1 was break even.
- Those calving at 2 years were weaning at 89% and 62 % were profitable before subsidy.
- Those calving at 3 years were weaning at 87% and 36% were profitable before subsidy.
- Cow type did matter – see table below: -

Herd type	Weaning %	Calving Spread	Calving Age
Continental herds	86%	16 weeks	2.5 years
Native breed herds	89%	13 weeks	2.2 years
Continental X Native	90%	11 weeks	2.1 years

Most important quote “It doesn’t matter what enterprise you are in, if you are operating in the top 25% you have the best chance of surviving whatever challenges your industry might face”

THE NEXT MEETING – 7th February 2019

Enterprise choices, Speaker Sion Williams, Buccleuch Estates Farm Manager, Selkirk

FACILITATOR CONTACT DETAILS

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