

ABOUT SHETLAND MONITOR FARM

Farm name	Bigton Farm, Shetland Monitor Farm
Meeting Number	16th
Meeting Date	Sunday 13th October 2019
Next Meeting	Saturday 30th November 2019
Report date	Monday 14th October 2019

Kirsty and Aimee Budge are our Shetland Monitor Farmers, at Bigton farm on the south west of the Shetland mainland.

Land: Two units are run together, covering 305 ha of in by and rough grazing.

Crops: Around 25 ha of spring barley is grown, 4ha of forage rape and about 40ha of silage cut.

Cattle: 82 Shorthorn x Saler cows producing Saler or Charolais x calves which are sold store or finished.

Sheep: 350 Shetland x Cheviot breeding ewes which are put to a Suffolk tup. Replacements are bought in.

Management group members are:

Jamie Leslie (Chairman): Scholland Farm, Graham Fraser: SAC Consulting, Kirsty Budge: Bigton Farm, Aimee Budge: Bigton Farm, Lauraine Manson: Hestigarth, Walls and Shetland Livestock Marketing Group, Hilary Burgess: Quendale Farm and Shetland Animal Health Scheme, Eric Graham: Gremista Farm, Jim Tait: Shetland Vets, John Abernethy: Verdahill, Twatt, Johnina Henderson: Breckon, Yell, John Sandison: Parkview, Bigton, Aaron Sinclair: Sandlodge Farm, Jacob Eunson: Uradale, Matthew Westmoreland: Hoversta, Bressay



35 farmers and crofters came along to hear Dr. Trevor Cook. Trevor previously spoke at the 9th Shetland MF meeting in June 2018 and the members were keen to get him back again. Trevor has worked as a registered veterinarian for 43 years. Most of his time is spent as a sheep and beef production consultant, working one-on-one with farm owners and managers around New Zealand and more recently in the UK.

KEY MESSAGES

- *Most profitable use of available feed is to lift ewes in Body Condition Score 2 to BCS3*
- *In the Golden 20 days around tugging move stock more frequently, which gives them a greater chance to select a high sugar diet, avoid toxins and avoid worms.*
- *Avoid anything such as transportation that might spike tup's temperate 7-8 weeks before tugging as it would be likely to lower their fertility*
- *Feed extra to ewes carrying multiples from 35 days before lambing to ensure a good colostrum supply, a good milk yield and ensure lambs are quick to stand.*
- *Lambs that stand quickly have a 95% chance of still being alive 90 days later*
- *Overgrazing has the biggest negative effect on spring growth and rotational grazing generally promotes better spring growth*
- *Rotational grazing increases productivity by 70% on average compared to set stocked pasture*
- *Biggest and best return from pasture related investment is from putting in sub-divisions*

FARMERS UPDATE

Kirsty and Aimee gave an update of what had been happening on the farms this year. As last year they made small bales of hay on some seasonally rented ground having sprayed first for weeds. This has kept the hay clean but it has been slow to sell so far but will sell in due course

This year lambs were weaned 2 months earlier and 260 lambs have been sent to the Monitor Farm in the Borders shipping them out on 20th August. The lambs have been initially slower to finish that had been hoped with only 6 way finished to date at a £66 average. At a cost of 60p/lamb per week plus the shipping costs the remainder will have to sell well for this to have been a worthwhile exercise compared to having sold them store locally. The farm has retained 138 lambs for finishing at home. 60 smaller lambs under 31 kg liveweight have gone to Toab onto a forage rape/swede mix. In hindsight the swedes were sown too thick and are quite small making them unattractive to the lambs as they tend to be uprooted and roll around on the surface. The remaining lambs over 31kg are at Bigton and have been gaining 200g/day on grass.

The ewe flock has been increased to 400 cross ewes. Making more use of grazing at Toab and reducing the grazing pressure on St Ninian's Isle has reduced the number of sheep being lost over the sea banks. It is hoped to move to a closed flock breeding all replacements at home. It is planned to run the 120 Shetland Gimmers that have been bought this year putting the smallest gimmers to Shetland rams with the others to a Cheviot along with around 50 of the smaller cross ewes. The resulting ewe lambs will be retained reducing the need to purchase replacements next year. 150 cross ewe lambs have been purchased to gimmer with some to be retained and the remainder to be sold privately. The day after the meeting a further 85 Shetland ewe lambs have been purchased to keep on as gimmers.

Their herd size has risen from 69 in 2016 to a current 82 calving in 2019 and now 92 have been bulled this year. The aim is build up to 110 cows and the option to wean calves earlier onto forage is being considered. In calf heifers are being kept out longer this year as in previous years they have been getting overfat. They are being strip grazed at Toab and would normally have been housed and fed silage. Trevor has suggested paddock grazing them at Bigton for 2 months around approximately 13ha before they are housed.

Harvest was difficult this year. The amount of nitrogen applied was doubled compared to traditional levels at Bigton and applying the growth regulator at the wrong time resulted in a lot of the barley going flat. Straw yields were good and from what didn't blow away 375 large round bales were made and 150 of these have been sold at £35/bale. In addition there are 40 bales from the undersown barley and with a good grass content these have been wrapped.

Overall the thousand grain weight of the spring barley has been a lot poorer this year compared to 2018 probably due to the lack of sunshine when the grains were filling. The crops got a much more intensive spraying programme this year getting manganese, two herbicides then a further spray for manganese plus copper and a fungicide. The crop was kept very healthy which increase the yield but without the PGR at the correct time this made the crop more prone to lodging. Aimee said "Every year is a learning year and this year was a completely season to last year"

Salome stood well and had the highest straw yield. Irna stood well and had a high yield and might be considered again for next year. Waggon looked the hardiest and established well but did lodge badly. Planet and Fairing both lodged badly. Most of the worst affect field for lodging had to be baled and wrapped as whole crop

AREAS OF DISCUSSION

Trevor Cook, Totally Vets Ltd.

Trevor Cook gave a presentation which he titled “Now until next Spring”. In NZ he was used to being asked why he comes to the UK to help improve our efficiency. In the UK lamb from NZ is seen as a direct competitor to our own but things are changing. Most of NZ exported lamb now goes to China rather than Europe and the total lamb production in NZ is reducing. There is a big push towards afforestation and a methane tax that is being applied at slaughter gives no reward in terms of reduced tax by increasing efficiency.

Preparation for Topping

The first thing that Trevor stressed was that the most profitable use of feed is to lift ewes from BCS2 to BCS3. You should be going through your flock now and pulling out the thinner ewes for preferential treatment. This could be done by giving them preference within a rotational grazing system or by giving supplementary feeding although supplementary feeding would always be a last resort due to the high cost.

Also of great importance is the 20 day golden days around topping. If they are on rotational grazing at this time aim to move them more frequently. For example if paddocks were set up to normally allow 4 days of grazing to leave residuals of 1200 kg DM/ha then moving the sheep every 2 days would allow the sheep to select a higher quality diet with higher sugars and allow them to more easily avoid toxins and avoid worms. This has the potential to increase scanning by 20%.

Don't forget the tup and make sure they are kept healthy and avoid any stressors such as transportation 7-8 weeks before topping. It takes those 7-8 weeks for sperm to be produced start to finish and stress or disease can cause a spike in body temperature which in turn lowers fertility all those weeks later.

He also touched on trace elements and noted that selenium in particular is important in terms of the ability of the egg to implant.

Watch out for worm burdens in gimmers in particular as they have the ability to reduce appetite and impact on performance. Also be aware that anthelmintic resistance to multiple products is becoming a major issue throughout the world.

Pre Lambing

Ewes carrying more than one lamb must be fed a higher plane of nutrition for the 35 days pre lambing in particular. If you get it wrong they will have less colostrum, lower milk yields and their lambs will be slower to stand.

Ewes that are not being fed sufficient will be forced to utilise body reserves to meet the demands of their pregnancy and during that process beta hydroxybutyrate will be produced in the liver and released into the bloodstream. In extreme this can cause pregnancy toxemia (twin lamb diseases) but this compound can also make the ewes sleepy and can cross the placenta and result in sleepy/dopey lambs that are slow to stand. Trevor referred to research by Cathy Dwyre, SRUC who researched lamb survival that indicated that how quick a lamb stood was of critical importance to its survival. 95% of lambs that stood quickly were still alive 90 days later.

Check the condition score of ewes when scanning and pull out light thin ewes for extra feeding.

Improving Spring Growth of Pasture

- Avoid overgrazing as it has the biggest detrimental effect on spring growth.
- Rotational grazing generally encourages improved spring growth
- Rotational grazing has the potential to produce 70% more dry matter than a similar set stocked pasture
- The levels of residual DM in the pasture indicates how well the animals are being fed. The greater the residual DM when the animals are moved on to the next paddock the greater the opportunity they are being given to select the best of the pasture. This can improve animal performance although it does have a cost in terms of lower pasture utilisation.
- Putting in sub divisions has the potential to give the biggest and best return of any pasture related investment.

After the session in the hall the meeting moved down to the farm to discuss the possible rotational grazing of the parks to be used for the in calf heifers



Aimee then demonstrated the new weighing equipment that electronically records the lambs and calculates weight changes since the previous weighing

ACTIONS FROM MEETING

- Review autumn grassland and make a plan to set up grasslands for spring 2020
- Undertake a winter feed budget to match winter feed availability with livestock needs
- Start recording and weighing growing livestock to track performance
- Subdivide pastures to improve returns

FACILITATOR CONTACT DETAILS

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