

ABOUT SHETLAND MONITOR FARM

Farm name **Bigton Farm, Bigton, Shetland, ZE2 9JA**

Meeting Number **10**

Meeting Date **Saturday 25th August 2018**

Next Meeting **Saturday 7th October 2018**

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

Sheep: 240 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

For this meeting, we went to Jamie Leslie's farm, to look at rotational grazing in practice. Over 60 farmers and crofters came along to hear Michael Blanche, Jamie Leslie, Eric Graham and an update from Kirsty and Aimee.

KEY MESSAGES

- Grow more grass through management rather than by spending money on inputs
- Look at profitability rather than production
- Pasture utilisation is often overlooked
- Managing pasture can increase stocking rate and spread fixed costs
- Rotational grazing will result in higher yields
- Setting up rotational grazing can be easy
- Make sure pH is on target to make sure fertiliser is utilised

FARMERS UPDATE

Update:

- Cows – More cows went to the bull this year – 77, of which 27 are heifers. Cull cows were sold at ave 662kg and £866. Charolais heifers didn't grow as quickly as expected, probably due to low protein level in the diet, and poor grass growth this year.
- Sheep – did a worm check which was clear in July and lambs will be weaned soon. All lambs are to be sold fat, and cull ewes to go off asap.
- Silage and hay – 1000 small bales hay made for selling plus 82 big bales. Like elsewhere, silage yield was low.

Change:

- After looking at grass utilisation with Farmax, there will be a discussion on increasing sheep numbers up to 500.
- Eric Graham chairs the Shetland Hill Lamb Group and he gave a brief outline on the prospects for selling batches of Shetland hill lambs in the run up to Christmas. There is a demand for good quality small lambs in that period, so long as they can be batched and supplied in large enough numbers to make it worthwhile for the mainland abattoir and to ensure shipping costs are economic. Anyone interested in finishing lambs for this market should speak to Eric.

AREAS OF DISCUSSION

- Michael Blanche emphasised that grass productivity and profitability are directly linked and that farmers and crofters should concentrate on managing grass (this described through the medium of tennis balls).
- Managing grass and grazing is more cost-effective than spending money on inputs.
- Rotational grazing can start with simple shifts over longer periods, this depends on mob sizes, access to water and fencing.



Michael Blanche explains grass growth

- Using rotational grazing will extend the grazing season.
- Leaving solar panels (leaves) on grass will bring forward spring growth.
- Consider winter forage crops – mixes, fodder beet, neeps, kale, hybrid rape

- Jamie Leslie (management group chair) has been working with rotational grazing for a few years and has been experimenting with crops such as plantain and now fodder beet.
- Jamie demonstrated how quick it was to put out electric fencing for sheep.



- Differences at Hestingott between set stocked area and rotationally grazed areas showed an increase in protein and energy levels:
 - Set: 15.1 Crude Protein Rotational: 20.8 Crude protein
 - Set: 10.4 ME Rotational: 11.3 ME
- Likewise, using rotational grazing with the stirks, with a back fence, resulted in doubling of the stocking rate, plus a third increase in daily liveweight gain 0.93 to 1.35kg/day

ACTIONS FROM MEETING

- Kirsty and Aimee are going to discuss increasing ewe numbers to make use of grass potential.
- It is also hoped to follow what was discussed at the meeting and increase the use of rotational grazing on the monitor farm.
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FACILITATOR CONTACT DETAILS

Graham Fraser, Siobhan Macdonald & Jocelyn Clapp
SAC
Agricultural Marketing Centre
Staneyhill, Lerwick, ZE1 0NA
Tel:01595 693520
Email: fbslerwick@sac.co.uk

