

## ABOUT SHETLAND MONITOR FARM

Farm name	<b>Bigton Farm, Bigton, Shetland, ZE2 9JA</b>
Meeting Number	<b>17th</b>
Meeting Date	<b>Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> November 2019</b>
Next Meeting	<b>Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> February 2020</b>
Report date	<b>Friday 31<sup>st</sup> January 2020</b>

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:**

Jamie Leslie (Chairman): Graham Fraser, Kirsty Budge, Aimee Budge, Lauraine Manson, Hilary Burgess, Eric Graham, Jim Tait, John Abernethy, Johnina Henderson, John Sandison, Aaron Sinclair, Ronnie Eunson and Matthew Westmoreland

On this occasion the management group decided to move the meeting to Yell on end of the northern isles in Shetland. This was to hopefully make community group members from the more remote islands in Shetland feel more included and to give us a chance to visit the farm of Breckon run by the Nicholsons who have been regulars at our meeting and James Nicholson is a member of our management group. 22 farmers and crofters came along to hear Steven Thomson SRUC Agricultural Economist and all about Breckon Farm.



James Nicholson ably assisted by his 12 year old son Ollie gave us a history of the Nicholson family at Breckon and outlined their farming system and what use they are trying to make of modern technology.

We also had a session on successful ventilation of livestock buildings including a practical session in the cattle shed at Breckon Farm

## KEY MESSAGES

- ***“Brexit Need to Knows” about deal v no deal***
- ***Sheep farming gets a lot of political attention yet only 7% of Scottish Agricultural Output***
- ***Factors influencing future Policy and Land use***
- ***Need to better inform and educate the public about the importance of locally produced food***
- ***35% of agricultural businesses make a loss even with CAP support, 79% would have made a loss without CAP support***
- ***Must improve efficiency to survive***
- ***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 farm since the previous meeting.
- The suckler herd had scanned at 94% in-calf which is the best result over the 3 years of the MF programme and is marginally above the industry target/standard of 93%.
- Store lambs were shipped south for finishing at a cost of 60p/lamb /week. This did not work very well with the lambs failing to grow as expected. A visit to the unit found that there was insufficient grass for the number of lambs being kept (from Bigton and other farms). The lambs were moved to another unit where they have performed better and returns have probably been helped by the improvement in the price/kg as the season has progressed.

## AREAS OF DISCUSSION

Steven Thomson gave a presentation which he titled “The Changing Context of Agricultural Support”.



### Brexit

Steven outlined the possible effects of Brexit on the existing support schemes with the “Need to know” if we leave the EU without a deal

### Policy

Steven asked the question “Policy for Who” He outlined the make-up of the agricultural sector and compared the outputs per enterprise across the UK regions.

~54,000 agricultural holdings

~19,500 farm businesses claiming Pillar 1 CAP support

~19,400 registered crofts with ~13,000 crofters and ~1,100 common grazings

Steven explained how the choices made by an uninformed public might not always match the priorities of the agricultural sector.

The new mantra is **Public Money for Public Goods**

And the main things driving Scottish Government policy going forward are:

- **food production** must be at the heart of policy
- **Climate change mitigation** will become a driver
- Wider **rural economic development** will also become important
- **Scottish Govt committed to “stability”** until 2024.....BUT...

### Climate & Biodiversity “Emergencies”

- **Net Zero Emissions** by 2045 is a massive task
- **Carbon Audits** and improving GHG is likely to be a future priority
- What is the **appropriate level**
  1. Croft/Farm
  2. Region
  3. Scotland

There are some simple steps you can take such as soil sampling to ensure your pH is at the optimum level

- **10,000 field soil samples in 2015-16, 34% were below pH6 with 40% between pH6 and pH6.5**

### The public are easily swayed!

Recent television programmes gave a correct portrayal of farming in the Americas but gave no balance with no mention of low impact extensive grass fed systems.

Steven referred to an Australian advert about beef and asked the question **Do we need to be more Ausie?**

Have a look at the video via this link [https://youtu.be/-j\\_HlbNjn6A](https://youtu.be/-j_HlbNjn6A)

### Need to Improve Returns

In 2016 based on the Scottish Government’s Farm Business Survey:

- 35% loss making with CAP support
- 79% loss making without CAP support

Need to improve efficiencies and be in the top third of businesses in your sector

## The Brexit puzzle

Remains a considerable challenge for agri-food sector:

- Workforce?
- Trade & Tariffs?
- Agricultural policy support?
- Regulations and standards?
- Wider Rural Businesses?

## Everything changes – but nothing changes

### EU in process of CAP reforms



Will SG want to deviate too far from this model??

### Steven went on to speak about possible tariffs and a sobering thought was:

To deliver lamb at the same price to EU under EU tariffs the UK price would have to fall (e.g. from £3.50/kg to £1.75/kg)

Much more information can be found in the pdf of Stevens presentation on the Monitor Farm hub

## Breckon Farm

Olie Nicholson gave an outline of his family’s history at Breckon Farm and illustrated his talk with a series of slides taken around the farm

Olie’s father James Nicolson then gave an outline of the farming system at Breckon 27 cow's including 5 in calf heifers.

4 retained heifers calves to come into the heard.

Most of the cattle are Belgium Blue crosses of Shorthorn or Angus cow's.

There are also some shorthorn and Angus cow's.

Cow are mated by AI using BB and Limousine semen and the farm bull then mops up when the cows go outside.

Breckon has:

220 inbye ewes mostly first cross cheviot and first cross Lley n put to Suffolk tup.

630 hill Shetland ewes.

Land type

295.1 Hectares permanent

7.95 Hectares seasonal

740.47 Hectares common grazing

Land use

98.40 Hectares permanent

943.69 Hectares rough grazing

1.07 Hectares trees

11 Hectares silage

With the help of a crofting grant Breckon Farm has recently invested in Smaxtec boluses. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G0cbIUvXcAI> These consist of a bolus that's small (105 mm x 35 mm), and that keeps track of the bovine's critical physiological data, such as pH, activity levels, and temperature. Beyond the ability to track the animal's well-being, it can determine when the cow is in heat, therefore significantly increasing the chances of fertilizing it. This system can also give calving alerts.

Breckon continues to use a "Moo Call" which is a tail mounted, non-invasive sensor that monitors contractions in cows and heifers and alerts you approximately one hour before active calving. They only have one Moo Call and it isn't always on the correct cow.

With the help of the Crofting Grant Breckon have managed to put a Smaxtec Bolus into all but a handful of cows that are due to be culled in the next year or so. They will add a bolus to each replacement heifer as they are introduced to the herd. It is hoped that the use of the system will increase the number of cows successfully mated to AI thus improve average calf values and tighten up the calving interval as well as giving calving alerts.

James also makes use of cameras in his cattle accommodation which he can monitor from his computer tablet.

The Nicolson's are managing to make excellent use of modern technology and the visit to Breckon proved to be very interesting.

## Ventilation

Before leaving the hall a series of videos were shown with smoke released in a variety of livestock buildings in Shetland and elsewhere each with different types of ventilation. Not all of them worked as well as they should. These videos made it clear that buildings need adequate inlet and outlet to ventilate efficiently.

After Lunch we visited Breckon Farm and set off smoke pellets in their well ventilated cattle accommodation that has adjustable space boarding along the side and a protected open ridge as an outlet. The building ventilated very efficiently.

During the visit we got to see the Breckon cattle and see the Smaxtec system in the byre that picks up the data from the rumen boluses and send it to Jame's phone or tablet.

## ACTIONS FROM MEETING

- **Know where your business is exposed to Brexit consequences / policy changes**
- **What are your mitigation strategies if the different Brexit scenarios play out?**
- **What new funding opportunities may fit your system?**
- **Take soil samples to check your soil PHs**
- **Need to improve efficiencies aiming to be in the top third of businesses in your sector**
- **Consider the use of modern technology**
- **Ensure your livestock buildings are well ventilated with an adequate outlet at the ridge**

### FACILITATOR CONTACT DETAILS

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