

## ABOUT SHETLAND MONITOR FARM

Farm name	<b>Bigton Farm, Bigton, Shetland, ZE2 9JA</b>
Meeting Number	<b>03</b>
Meeting Date	<b>Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> June 2017</b>
Next Meeting	<b>Thursday 10<sup>th</sup> August 2017</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 inbye 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.

**Sheep:** 240 Shetland x Cheviot breeding ewes which are put to a Suffolk tup. Replacements are bought in.



- 38 farmers and crofters came along to the third MF meeting, joined by Colin Bowers from Dow AgroSciences.
- Kirsty and Aimee started the meeting with an update on calving and lambing, including lambing losses. John Abernethy had kindly (and bravely) provided his summary of losses at lambing and lambing figures.
- Out in the field, Graham dug some holes to look at compaction; Aimee and Kirsty took us to where they had split a field and put cows on a paddock grazing system; Colin discussed weeds in grassland and for those interested, arable weeds.

### A management group has been formed, and the members are:

Jamie Leslie (chairman), Scholland Farm; Graham Fraser, SAC Consulting; Kirsty Budge, Bigton Farm; Aimee Budge, Bigton Farm; Lauraine Manson, Hestigarth Farm; Hilary Burgess, Quendale Farm; Eric Graham, Gremista Farm; Jim Tait, Shetland Vets; John Abernethy, Verdahill Farm; Johnina Henderson, Breckon Farm; John Sandison, Parkview Farm; Aaron Sinclair, Sandlodge Farm; Ronnie Eunson, Uradale Farm; Matthew Westmorland, Hoversta Farm.

Anyone with suggestions regarding issues the Monitor Farm should be looking at, should contact one of the management group to feed in their ideas.

## KEY MESSAGES

- Lambing losses are worth recording to see when and how losses occur, and whether it is above or below similar other farms and therefore worth tackling.
- Rotational grazing has the benefits of allowing the grass a rest period to regrow before being grazed again. Other advantages include: livestock will be on a more even plane of nutrition as compared to continuous grazing; more kilos of dry matter produced in a season compared to continuous grazing,
- Disadvantages for rotational grazing are: more work to set up paddocks/move fences; cost of electric fencing; and can be difficult to provide water in all paddocks.
- Whether to control weeds depends on the nutritional value of the weed compared to grass and the cost of control compared to the benefit.
- Control of weeds can be done through grazing, or by cropping, or by sprays, or by mechanical control and it is worth thinking about which weeds are a problem before drawing up a plan of attack.
- Dig a hole at the edge of your field (eg, beside a dyke) and another hole in the field to compare soil organic matter and look for issues of compaction.

## AREAS OF DISCUSSION Expand on two of the key messages discussed and what were the key concerns or innovations



**Rotational Grazing:** Kirsty and Amy explained how the rotational grazing was working for them. They had split one field into three; and had found that it had worked except for the cows escaping and moving themselves to the next paddock; because of the good weather they had found that they had too much grass and so had shut up one area for silage. They were lucky in that the water supply was easy to put to both paddocks.

From the previous meeting, at least one other member of the group had tried mob grazing a paddock at a time, in order to graze down rank grassland.

**Weeds in grassland:** Spraying docks works best when they are young, healthy and actively growing, about dinner-plate sized. Spraying is likely to be economic when docks cover at least 10% of the field area. To calculate the dock cover, count the number of docks in an area stretching 2.5m either side of you and 7m in front of you (35m<sup>2</sup>), as the number of docks in this area is equal to the percentage cover of docks.



Spraying grassland with herbicide either a week before or a week after a nitrogen fertiliser application can boost its effectiveness, as the weeds are growing more quickly which enhances the effect of the herbicide.

## FARMERS UPDATE Summarise the development of the initiatives on the farm

- Aimee said calving had gone fairly well with 70 calved and 2 to go, in less than 10 weeks. There were a few problems; a Caesarian, 2 abortions, and 2 cows died. Joint ill was an issue at the start but other farmers had suggested taking up dipping navels rather than spraying with iodine, and to repeat dipping, and this had helped reduce incidence of joint ill. 5 cows had retained cleansing, not sure why, this can be due to vit e/selenium deficiency but Jim Tait the vet suggested that as a percentage of the herd, 5 was not a figure to worry about.
- Lambing had gone really well and had finished early too. The gimmers and thin ewes had been inside since scanning, but everything else was lambed outside in fairly good weather. Kirsty thought that their management had improved as they had moved lambed ewes to new grass and thought the ewes were milkier. Once a bit older the ewes and lambs had been moved across to the isle, which meant the isle had been rested for longer too and had more grass.
- 6 acres of silage cut to date out of 100 acres. There are 62 acres of barley: 36 is Wagon and 26 is Propino which is undersown. The undersown will be combined and the straw and grass baled and wrapped to be fed to calves at weaning and cows at the start of winter.

## FACTS & FIGURES DISCUSSED Provide more detail on the farmer update, whether this is around financials/yield/health

Lambing losses were recorded by the MF and by one of the management group members. It is hoped that some of the community group will record losses next spring.

At Bigton, the weather was good at lambing time and lambing results were better than previous years. 210 ewes lambed and 308 lambs were born. Lamb deaths came to 18; 12 at lambing and some predated by bonxies, 5 died later and 5 were lost over cliffs

John Abernethy from Verdahill Farm shared his lambing losses for 2017. Note that John's figures aren't comparable to Bigton as John had a high percentage of 1<sup>st</sup> lambers in his flock this year. 70 ewe lambs were tupped and 80 gimmers lambed ewe lambs.

### Lamb Losses at Verdahill 2017

Total Scanned: 489 lambs from 334 ewes (146%)

Total drenched etc. on 10<sup>th</sup> June: 419 (125%)

(At scanning 17 yield ewes of which 12 were ewe lambs)

A full breakdown of causes of lamb losses at Verdahill are given on the next page

Reason for 2017 lamb losses at Verdahill Farm	Lambs lost
Ewes deaths 4 ewes scanned carrying	8
5 Ewes scanned in lamb but yeld	8
Premature/stillbirths/decomposed	6
Died during labour	5
Hypothermia at lambing	1
Accidents/unexplained	5
Digestion problems/failure to pass faeces	2
Malformed lambs unviable	2
Deaths after 24hrs in pens	7
Deaths after turnout (including hypothermia)	20
Unaccounted losses	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>70</b>

**OPPORTUNITIES/CHALLENGES** Highlight one specific opportunity or challenge, or two or three smaller ones

- Paddock grazing will be continued, with some refinement. Training in how to use a plate grass meter and interpret results, along with matching to cattle intake and nutrition requirements would be useful to manage quantities of grass.
- Keeping a record of lambing losses will allow targeting of preventative measures in following years.

**ACTIONS FROM MEETING** Bullet points outlining what will be done between now and the next meeting

- Considering selling lambs earlier
- Continue to monitor lamb losses

**FACILITATOR CONTACT DETAILS**

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