

## ABOUT SHETLAND MONITOR FARM

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

Meeting Number **04**

Meeting Date **Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> August 2017**

Next Meeting **Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> October 2017**

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 fourth MF meeting, joined by Ian Eadie of Germinal Seeds, and John Scott of Fearn Farm.
- Kirsty and Aimee started the meeting with an update on silage making and machinery troubles.
- Eric Graham introduced John Scott who told his story of being a Monitor Farmer, being taken aback at first, and learning better staff management

## KEY MESSAGES

- Benchmark – important to benchmark farm figures to know true comparisons.
- Is there an opportunity on Shetland to share machinery?
- Modern shepherds should be using EBVs.
- When reseeded don't go on age – assess on weeds and productivity.
- The harder the seedbed for grass – the better.

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

### Being a Monitor Farmer:

Eric Graham from Gremista Farm introduced John Scott, a previous Monitor Farmer and Sheep Farmer of the Year. Eric had sourced the 1,900 Shetland lambs that John Scott tried finishing on forage crops and grass last year.

John described how being at the mercy of the Community Groups had made him question how and what he and his family did on the farm. He made some significant changes after suggestions from the Community Group, such as repositioning a new shed. He also had to take a good look at his machinery costs – amount of kit, the depreciation costs and the cost of repairs.

John is now passionate about benchmarking, which he and other community group members undertook to really understand where they stood and what could be improved on similar units. He used EBVs in his sheep and believed that they now also looked as good as their EBV figures.

Since being a MF, he has changed his operation and expanded, especially the sheep enterprises.



### Grass reseeding:

After a quiz on what drove the choice to reseed, out in the field, in the rain, Ian Eadie from Germinal Seeds (wholesalers, who supply some of the local seed merchants) discussed choice of grass seed for enterprises in Shetland.

There was a discussion on diploid versus tetraploid grasses. Tetraploids give high yield and high sugars, but diploids give a denser sward and are better in wetter conditions.

When sowing, Ian described how the seed should be placed as deep as the length of the seed, with as firm a seedbed as possible and ensuring adequate P&K.

Leatherjacket problems can be lessened with a brassica crop to break the lifecycle.

Some of the community group had successfully used the method of feeding clover seed to stock to spread seed on hills.

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

- Soil sampling undertaken on the barley fields indicated low potash – remedies to be put in place for next year.
- Recording of the lambing indicated fewer lambs went over the banks this year, probably due to better growth rates and taking the ewes off the isle regularly to eat new grass at home.



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

Finishing beef -to Scalloway butchers averaging 322kg deadweight. On grass since April and fed 1kg/hd/day barley for a month.

Bulls out - Ch bull out 3<sup>rd</sup> June, onto rotational grazing. SH bull out end of June on rough grazing. SA bull out start July with heifers on young grass ley.

Silage – 100 acres cut into two pits in July. Some of the rotational grazing that grew too fast for the cows was cut and baled as silage. The farm also made 500 bales hay and 180 bales haylage to sell.

Emily Smith and Gavin Dick from AHDB Cereals and Oilseeds were up and visited the farms in June. They were generally impressed with the barley crops but commented on a degree of floppiness and slight yellowing and suggested taking tissue samples for analysis. At the time manganese deficiency was suspected. The samples from the crop were a bit late to be sure if manganese was an issue but the suggestion from the Crop Clinic was it was more likely to be a lack of potash that was causing the symptoms. Emily and Gavin discussed the possibility of getting involved in a UK wide trial of barley varieties including a fresh look at an old variety Golden Promise that has been making a comeback recently and it's early maturity can be a distinct advantage in the northern isles.

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

- Couch grass – at Toab, going to spray with glyphosate pre harvest.
- Storage of barley crop will be a problem so surplus will need to be sold asap.

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

- Barley trials for 2018 as per the visit from AHDB – The management group Chairman Jamie Leslie may also try out some of the varieties being considered.
- It is hoped to present actual sheep figures for Bigton Farm , to scrutinise these and for discuss the best way forward for the sheep enterprise at the next meeting.

### FACILITATOR CONTACT DETAILS

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