

ABOUT SHETLAND MONITOR FARM

Farm name	Bigton Farm, Bigton, Shetland, ZE2 9JA
Meeting Number	05 – Preparing for Topping Season
Meeting Date	Sunday 8th October 2017
Next Meeting	Saturday 2nd December 2017

Kirsty and Aimee Budge run 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.



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

We could not have been luckier with the weather with the day of our meeting being about the only decent day in weeks of unsettled weather.

- 37 farmers and crofters came along to the 5th Shetland MF meeting, joined by Poppy Frater, a sheep specialist from SAC and Jim Nicolson from Shetland vets.
- Kirsty and Aimee started the meeting with an update on the livestock and the harvest.
- Poppy Frater gave a talk on “Targeting the 2018 lamb crop”
- Jim Nicolson demonstrated how to MOT your tups

KEY MESSAGES

- Condition score ewes at critical points and act on the information to improve productivity
- Importance of post weaning management of the ewes
- Importance of a pre- topping MOT of rams
- Efficient utilisation of grass key to reducing costs

FARMERS UPDATE

Kirsty and Aimee gave an update on what had been happening on Bigton Farm since the previous meeting. Hay was not very successful as it was too wet when baled – more patience needed next year! Aimee had been away helping with the harvest on an Aberdeenshire farm to get experience of carting grain with a 14t trailer.

Cattle:

- Finished cattle have been sold to local butchers Scalloway Meat and Anderson via the Shetland Abattoir. Happy with the KO% and weights.
- The Saler and Charolais bulls were removed from the cows earlier than in 2016 to shorten the calving period.
- The bulls are now inside and the hired shorthorn bull from Troswick was brought in sooner than last year to reduce the risk of serving unweaned young heifer calves. Cull cows were shipped away to Thainstone and the farm settled into the routine of the winter jobs!

Sheep:

- The girls picked out 20 cast ewes, checking teeth and udders. Currently keep ewes until they are well and truly done but are reviewing that policy and only keep them for 5 years. May keep the cast ewes until price increases. Ten cast ewes will be kept to run with the ewe lambs to encourage them to eat supplementary feed.
- Picked 83 gimmers from ewe lambs bought last year at marts that had been reared at Toab. Including the gimmers from Oxna this enables the farm to increase the ewe flock by around 50 after allowing for losses. Ewes and gimmers to back of isle to dry them off on the lower quality grass.
- The farm sold the first batch of 30 store lambs at Lerwick at £60 each and another batch of 23 made £58.30. They were sold a month earlier than in 2016 and achieved an average of £2/head higher price. The plan is to sell the rest at Thainstone later when hopefully the price will have improved. Gimmers bought in as ewe lambs were sold as gimmers to John Sandison for £90 /head.

Harvest:

- All 50 acres were eventually cut having started at Bigton and then Toab. It was a 'stop and start' harvest, but the grain was in over 3 working days. Neighbour John Leslie came to the rescue when the combine broke down at Toab. Moisture ranged from 19-25% Last year the moisture was at 30%.
- It all fitted in the barn/grain shed with different rates of propcorn applied depending on the moisture. The straw on both undersown fields baled as soon as possible with the help of John Sandison and his baler as a bearing went on the farm's baler.



- Surplus straw bales were sold straight off the field. A device called a Liftlog 100+ was acquired to calculate the weight of grain in a trailer using the pressure in the hydraulics. It was originally designed for a forklift but without sufficiently large known weights available on the farm it could not be calibrated accurately and was giving misleadingly low weights.
- It is hoped that the farm was hitting the 2ton/acre mark at least! If the Liftlog cannot be more accurately calibrated, an alternative method of weighing the barley trailers will be looked for next year, possibly weigh pads under the trailer wheels.

AREAS OF DISCUSSION

Sheep Nutrition and Management

Poppy Frater gave a presentation titled “Targeting the 2018 lamb crop”. She went through the QMS “Ewe Nutrition and Body Condition Scoring TimeLine” highlighting the important dates in the sheep year.



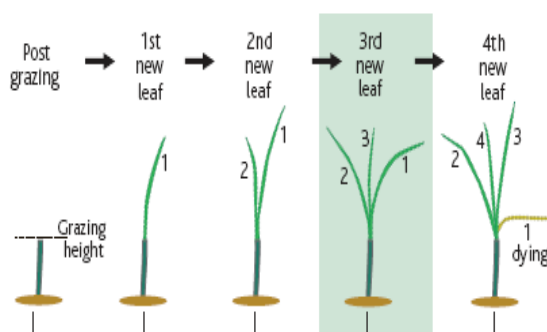
Managing grass and condition scoring (BCS) ewes
 6-8 weeks Pre- Topping Grazing & Feeding options
 Target BCS is 3

Sheep keepers were encouraged to condition score and provide those below the BCS target with more feed of better quality by feeding/grazing

- the youngest grass
- forage crops
- pasture with least dead material

Late Pregnancy Feeding Options:

- Target BCS is 3
- Grass (grass > 4cm)
 - Silage (10.5 MJ ME/kg DM) plus 100g soya/lamb or 50g protected soya/lamb
 - Silage (<10.5 MJ ME/kg DM) plus sugarbeet pulp/oats/whole barley plus soya



Poppy outlined rotational grazing and efficient grass utilisation during the year. Although it depends on grass growth, rotation length is typically:

- Spring – 15-20 days
- Summer – 25 days
- Autumn – 30-40 days
- Winter – 90-100 days

Poppy also covered the principles of Body Condition Scoring and led a practical refresher on some of the Bigton ewes.



Tup MOT check

Jim Nicolson of Shetland Vets gave a talk on the importance of checking your tups at least 6 weeks before the start of tugging. On the farm, Jim gave a practical demonstration of how to MOT a tup using Bigton Farms Suffolk tups.



How to check your rams:

Toes - Check his locomotion, arthritis and feet

Teeth - Check for under or over shot teeth, gaps and molar abscesses

Testicles - Measure & check firmness (flexed bicep) with no lumps or bumps

Tone - Aim for body condition between 3.5-4.0 (spine well covered)

Treat - Vaccinations (Clostridia, Pasteurella, Louping Ill), Parasites, Lameness etc

Sheepkeepers can consult their vet to arrange a thorough Ram examination

Soil my Undies

- The Shetland Monitor Farm joined in the #soilmyundies craze and Kirsty And Aimee buried a pair of undies that will be dug up just before the next MF meeting.
- A simple visual experiment, #soilmyundies involves burying 100% cotton undies. Once dug up, their condition reveals the level of soil microbial activity and can be used to pinpoint ways to improve soil health.
- Five members of the Community Group took away undies to bury on their own farms and crofts. These will be dug up and brought to the next meeting along with a soil sample to assess soil structure.



ACTIONS FROM MEETING

- Bigton is going to bring the ewe flock home from St Ninians Isle, condition score the ewes and give any thinner ewes preferential grazing to help boost their condition before tugging.
- Everyone to check their tups as soon as possible.
- Six pairs of undies buried for the next Shetland Monitor Farm meeting and field used to be soil sampled.

FACILITATOR CONTACT DETAILS

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