

## ABOUT THIS MONITOR FARM

Farm name	Clynelish Farm, Brora, Sutherland, KW9 6LR
Meeting Number	18- Final Meeting – Recap of Three Year Programme
Meeting Date	Tuesday 12th December 2019
Next Meeting	NA
Report date	Wednesday 13 <sup>th</sup> December 2019

Clynelish Farm is a 125-hectare farm run by Jason Ballantyne and his wife Vic, in partnership with Jason's dad Murdo.

**Cattle:** The family run 80 suckler cows with calves sold store at 10 months of age. Cows are all out-wintered.

**Sheep:** There is a flock of 900 breeding ewes, of which about half are Lairg type Cheviots and the other half Lleyn cross, currently lamb outdoors at the end of April.



Unusually for the area, the cattle and sheep enterprises are both on forage based diets with virtually no concentrate feeding.



### Management Group:

John Scott (Chair)  
Rory MacKenzie, Sheena MacKenzie, Brian MacLeod, Danny Miller, Iain MacKenzie & Donald Ross



## KEY MESSAGES

- Being a Monitor Farm has pushed us to do things we probably would not have done otherwise and it has been a great way of connecting with other farmers from all over Scotland
- If it does not challenge you, it will not change you.

## AREAS OF DISCUSSION

This meeting was the final meeting of the 3 year monitor farm programme at Clynelish. The agenda was to recap on the full 3 years and look at the highs and lows and summarise the changes that have been implemented on the farm as a direct result of the programme.

Kate Rowell, chair of QMS gave the attendees an overview of her past experiences that led her to her role today. Kate along with her husband had previously been monitor farmers in Peeblesshire when the programme ran in 2012. She shared her journey and how much she enjoyed her time in the programme and the impact this had on their business. She loved the challenge and confidence this gave them to change their mind-set and try new things. One of the key wins for Kate and her husband was to make a better quality silage, in doing so they saved £6000 to the business and received 2<sup>nd</sup> place in the AgriScot silage awards. This was as a direct result from being monitor farmers and being pushed to make changes by the wider community group. Along with the silage, they changed their feeding system for their black faced sheep which helped see their scanning rates improve from 80% to 120%. They also changed their cow breeds, they carried out trials, not all successful but it gave them and the community group a chance to learn and share ideas on how to improve their ways of working. Following the silage changes, the larger group then all tried to compete and outdo each other to make some of the best silage in the country.

Kate found the experience of being in the monitor farm programme to be a very positive one and loved all the networking and connections she made throughout Scotland. It also helped them to collaborate and share resources. The overall experience saw her confidence grow which inspired her in 2015 to apply for the Scottish Rural Leadership, which she says was life changing, this then gave her encouragement to apply for the position of chair at QMS.

Kate finished by asking everyone to share their thoughts and feedback to others in the industry and encourage them to get involved with the programme.

Willie Budge gave an end to end review of the programme and highlighted the main aspects that were discussed and carried out over the 3 years.

Topic	
Fertility	Grazing & Ewe Management over lambing period Herd Fertility Ewe & Tup condition pre-tupping
Grazing Management	Drivers of profit in a grazing system & how to set up rotational grazing Managing Summer Pastures Fodder Beet Autumn grazing

Innovation & Collaboration	Innovation Farming Clipex Fencing, Drones, Silo stop & Handling systems Co-operation in Practice Drone, weighing Kit and Vetmarker
Succession	Lifestyle Balance & Succession
Nutrition	Feed Planning & Tools to consider
Soils	Soil Management & nutrition to maximise grass production and animal health What Lies Beneath/Soil Clinic/Rush Control
Systems	Farm systems – Pirnaton, Drumdow, Bilbster Mains
Personal Development	Health and well being Personal Development
Marketing & costings	How to market your product Clynelish Costings

Willie expanded on the “highs” of the programme which included the implementation and the success of the rotational grazing, the early weaning methods, and improvement in herd fertility, the growing of fodder beet, and innovative ways of working and the introduction of collaborative working. He also went on to discuss the excellent specialist speakers and farmer led sessions that proved to be extremely positive. The session ended with the Willie thanking Jason & Victoria Ballantyne for being such open host farmers and working with us and the extended community group and management team to make the monitor farm such a success.

3 of the regular meeting attendee’s gave an overview on their personal feedback on the meetings and why they have supported the programme. They also shared what changes they have made and the highlights.

- Danny Miller from the management team explained that he has come away from every meeting having learnt something. He loves to be challenged and open to trying new ideas. On the back of the meetings he had nothing but praise for Trevor Cook and Michael Blanche who both, as a result of the meetings encouraged Danny to change his weaning methods and implement rotational grazing, which he has done and is proving to be successful. In addition after hearing Robert Parker and how effective his out wintering system is, Danny is going to reduce his creep feeding system. He is also going to try growing fodder beet. Danny finished by summing up that “If you cannot make it better, what’s the point? We have to get better”.
- David Girvan from the community group, would be one of the further travelled attendees of the group and he chose to attend the Clynelish meetings as he was interested in the Clynelish farming system. David enjoyed the farmer led meetings, with Jim Logan, Robert Parker and Trevor Cook, he gained the confidence and skills to try growing fodder crops and now has swedes and he plans to potentially introduce fodder beet. Like Danny he too has implemented rotational grazing. David

found the community group to be very welcoming which helped everyone contribute at meetings and speak up with questions and thoughts. He has enjoyed the new connections he has made and the networking. David also worked in collaboration with the Ballantynes and bought calves from them directly, this is something he hopes to do again in the future.

- Graeme Bethune from Caithness Yarns came along to his first monitor farm meeting as he felt his business had gone into a 3 year limbo and his croft had become less effective. He was looking for some support to help him turn his croft around and try to farm without the financial support of subsidies. Through attending the meetings, Graeme found he changed his mind-set and planned to make money from his sheep, this resulted in him diversifying (but not stop farming) to create a luxury yarn through the wool from his flock. The quality of his yarn and wool is a direct reflection on the flock health changes he made from attending the Clynelish meetings. By increasing his flock health management, it has increased his yarn product. Through the information Trevor Cook provided Graeme introduced rotational grazing last which has given him the grass growth to increase his stock numbers by 25%. Graeme thanked the support of the monitor farm for helping guide him to making the business decisions he has made to date.

A breakout session then followed where all the attendees were split into groups and asked to document and feedback their own thoughts and highlights of the programme and what they have gained from the meetings:-

- Broaden thoughts and skill level through special speakers
- Knowledge transfer from farmer to farmer, farmer led sessions & speakers
- Improvement in soil knowledge and the importance of looking after your soil
- Social element and networking
- Practical demonstrations
- Linking change to profitability (how a little change may have a big impact)
- Learning the change habits (not just doing something because that's the way its always done)
- Having the encouragement to try new ideas and not being afraid of making a mistake
- Trying to do better and improve skill level
- Succession planning
- Excellent speakers providing food for thought

The session and feedback provided, showed how valuable the monitor farm meetings have been not only for Clynelish but all those that attended the meetings. Cat MacGregor wrapped up by saying that it did not matter what scale of farming individuals farmed, there was something for everyone at the monitor farm meetings.

Sarah Millar of QMS closed the meeting by thanking everyone involved and the passion Jason & Vic have shown and how they embraced their roles as the monitor farmers in what is a tough industry and potentially tough times to come.

## FARMERS UPDATE

As this was the last meeting, Jason & Vic shared their personal thoughts on the programme and what they have enjoyed and achieved.



At the start of the monitor farm journey, the Ballantynes were concerned that they may be over stocked, however with the implementing of the infrastructure for the rotational grazing being pushed on as being part of the programme, this proved not to be the case. Stock numbers and the amount of grass now being grown is more than enough to cover all the mouths needing fed and more.

Along with the grass grown, Jason is now actively working to increase the farm PH in the soil to 6.2 as advised by the specialist soil speakers.

Testing and vaccinating the cattle to improve the herd fertility has shown a lift in the bottom 10% of cattle. Vic stressed that she no longer compares daily live weight gains to other farms as everyone farms different systems and the results will vary, they are happy with their weights and the streamlining of breeds that is now taking place on the farm.

The collaboration generated through the monitor farm programme has been excellent, in addition to what had already been discussed, calves have been bought and sold privately to two other community group members and the hope is that this level of collaborating will continue to grow out-with the programme. Vic highlighted that they do not plan to feed any soya this year from South America as they are keen to improve the farms environmental carbon footprint, they also plan to rejuvenate the large hill areas by introducing strip grazing next year.

The whole experience of being monitor farmers has been most enjoyable for the Ballantynes, Jason's confidence to speak in front of group of people has improved and they have been pushed to try new ideas and make changes that they may not have done if they were not part of the programme. The networking and meeting new people and sharing experiences and trials and tribulations, has been great. Vic then went on to thank everyone who has been involved in the whole end to end Clynelish Monitor Farm journey.

## FACTS & FIGURES DISCUSSED

- Youngstock all scanned in calf
- Weaning weights at 158 days – 230kg-242kg
- 1000 lambs sold at an average of £60 before costs
- Ewes all looking in good condition, tups went out on the 25<sup>th</sup> of November
- Daily live weights are coming in at 0.8kg per day all off forage
- Plan to wean lambs early again next year as the ewes do better
- So much extra silage this year, 33 extra calves have been bought in to finish

## FACILITATOR CONTACT DETAILS

Willie Budge & Cat MacGregor

SAC Consulting

Industrial Estate, Janetstown, Thurso, Caithness, Kw14 7XF

01847 892602. Email: [fbsthurso@sac.co.uk](mailto:fbsthurso@sac.co.uk)

