

ABOUT SUTHERLAND MONITOR FARM

Farm name **Clynelish Farm, Brora, Sutherland, KW9 6LR**

Meeting Number **04 – Sheep Market Outlook**

Meeting Date **Friday 28th July 2017**

Next Meeting **Wednesday 13th September 2017**

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, Joyce Campbell, Danny Miller, Iain MacKenzie, Donald Ross

Picture: Robert Parker of Drumdow Farm, Stranraer (guest speaker) Scotch Beef Farm of the Year 2016.

KEY MESSAGES

- You need to find a system that suits the farm, and then use breeds that suit the system.
- Finding the right balance between the ideal cow and the ideal steer
- Biosecurity in terms of vaccination, buying from hi health herds or closed herd breeding own replacements.
- Simplicity is the key to a successful beef system
- Lamb producers need to stimulate demand in their product by connecting with consumers.
- 75% of new season lamb quality at R3L or better
- New markets required to be found at home and abroad

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

- Nearly 40 farmers enjoyed some lively discussions within two breakout sessions at Clynelish farm for the 4th meeting of this Monitor Farm project.
- Robert Parker, the reigning Scotch Beef farmer of the year talked through his award winning system at Drumdow, Stranraer. With a similar type overwintering system as Clynelish, the attendees were then asked in the breakout session to pick parts of Roberts system they would introduce to Clynelish:-
 - Simplify system
 - Calf Creep Feeding
 - Biosecurity
 - Closed herd
 - Consistency of product
 - Breed type
- Stuart Ashworth, Head of Economic Services with Quality Meat Scotland gave a very informative presentation to the group on the sheep market outlook and questioned the attendees on what markets they were aiming for and how they could increase demand for their product. In a further breakout session Jason and Victoria had pens of lambs of different weights and breeds. The groups were asked to assess each pen and decide how they felt Clynelish should market each pen. The general feedback was:-
 - Lighter lambs store to ensure more grass at tugging
 - Finish meatline types
 - Creep and finish heavier lambs on grass if confident grass plentiful
 - Finish everything over 35kg at present, mindful of festival early September

- Jason and Victoria updated the meeting on what had been happening on Clynelish since the last meeting, detailed later in this report.
- To finish off the day, the attendees enjoyed a taste the product session with a spit roasted lamb which it is fair to say went down very well, with even a couple of converts to lamb!

FARMERS UPDATE Summarise the development of the initiatives on the farm

- Worm egg counts have been carried out.
- Vitamin B12 to ewe lambs on good clover swards.
- Lambs part of the Sheep stock club contract have been weaned and put on good grass.
- 14 acres of swedes sown before highland show with precision machine.
- The reseeding programme has been continuing over the summer.
- All cattle have been bunched for grazing and fields spilt for grazing management.
- Half of the farm is now electric fenced with the remainder soon to be completed to allow improved grazing management.

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

- Worm egg counts were low
- Lambs were all dosed with Cydectin

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

- One of the main challenges for Jason and Victoria from the meeting is to look at their beef enterprise and to take into account the recommendations from the community group regarding the points raised in Robert Parkers presentation along with the break out session feedback.
- The other challenge is to decide their marketing policy for their lambs. Based on the talk from Stuart Ashworth and also the feedback from the groups they have a number of points to consider as they look to market their lamb crop in the coming weeks and months.

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

- To assess the points raised from the breakout session on the cattle enterprise.
- Testing Cows for IBR and Leptospirosis
- To decide on a marketing strategy for the lambs, based on weight, breed, grass availability and supplementary feeding.
- Completion of electric fencing

FACILITATOR CONTACT DETAILS

Willie Budge & Cat MacGregor
SAC Consulting
Industrial Estate, Janetstown, Thurso, Caithness, KW14 7XF
01847 892602. Email: fbsthurso@sac.co.uk

