

ABOUT SUTHERLAND MONITOR FARM

Farm name	Clynelish Farm, Brora, Sutherland, KW9 6LR
Meeting Number	03 – Herd Fertility Issues
Meeting Date	Thursday 8th June 2017
Next Meeting	Friday 28th July 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: Kenny Johnston of Johnston & Farrell Veterinary Surgery (guest speaker) discussing herd fertility during the meeting.

KEY MESSAGES

- The real advantage of bull fertility testing is finding bulls that are infertile not that they are fertile.
- A fully fertile adult bull should be capable of serving 50 healthy, cycling cows so that 90% are in calf after nine weeks and 60% of those calve in the first 3 weeks.
- Massive potential cost benefit in identifying and replacing subfertile/infertile bulls.
- The cost of a subfertile bull on calf sales based on a 50 cow herd could be up to £4,000.
- Ideally bull testing should be done 2-4 weeks prior to bulling.

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

- Over 50 farmers enjoyed good discussions on herd fertility, cattle wintering options and weaning techniques at Clynelish farm for the 3rd meeting of this Monitor Farm project.
- Kenny Johnston of Johnston & Farrell Veterinary Surgery led a discussion on herd fertility centring on the fertility of bulls and their management and testing. Interestingly only two of the farmers attending currently test their bulls before service. Some were using multiple bulls in groups and/or rotating bulls.
- The attendees then enjoyed a farm tour on trailers where Jason and Victoria took questions on cattle, sheep and grazing. It also gave the community group a chance to see the scope of Clynelish from its highest point.
- Danny Miller, a member of the management group, also led a discussion centred on the different wintering options he undertakes on his farm in Caithness incorporating all the following options:-
 - Stubble turnips
 - Away wintering bed and breakfast
 - Hill grazings
 - Home housed
 - Environmental scheme land after 1 March
- To finish off the day, Jason and Victoria led a discussion on weaning techniques. More details are later in the report.



FARMERS UPDATE Summarise the development of the initiatives on the farm

- 1cwt fertiliser has been applied to all grazing mainly due to the distillery still being closed.
- Blood testing results of ewes for energy (beta hydroxy buturate) and protein (blood urea) returned satisfactory results
- Herbage tests on early spring grass also returned satisfactory results.
- Bulls were tested for campylobacter and no issues were found.
- Calving is well underway and 50% of herd calved in first 17 days.

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

- Calves were sold on 24 March 2017 at Thainstone Mart
- The average was £47/head up on 2016
- The average weight was 14kg down on 2016
- Full details are annexed to this report.

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

- The recommendation from the community group regarding the Clynelish cattle enterprise and specifically to weaning followed on from Jason and Victoria's discussion with the group and a questionnaire put to all attendees regarding the weaning on their own farms with the main findings below:-

- Do you creep feed

YES	71%
NO	29%

- Methods used to wean

Cows outside, calves in shed	43%
Cows in shed, calves outside	7%
Sell weaned	29%
Gradual weaning techniques	21%

- Period from mean calving to weaning

240 days or more	43%
210 days	43%
180 days or less	14%

- While they were hesitant to go back to creep feeding calves to reduce weaning stress Jason and Victoria they were interested to hear of alternative practices used to reduce the weaning check on the calves. After much discussion it was decided to experiment with a gradual weaning system, with an electric fence where the calves would have access to the new reseed and clover.
- During the farm tour the culling policy of cows on age was discussed at length. The community group were asked their views on culling cows at a certain age, therefore taking a proactive role in the cow's productivity rather than a reactive view once her productivity had dropped with a poor offspring weaned. It was decided that the culling policy on Clynelish should be cows culled at 12 years of age.

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

- Pre-breeding examination of bulls
- Field to be ploughed for swedes as opposed to direct drilled previously
- Testing Cows for Leptospirosis
- To continue to look at a combination of management practices, vaccinations and testing to improve herd fertility.

FACILITATOR CONTACT DETAILS

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