

ABOUT SUTHERLAND MONITOR FARM

Farm name	Clynelish Farm, Brora, Sutherland, KW9 6LR
Meeting Number	10 – Technology Opportunities – Community Group Visit to Taldale, Forss.
Meeting Date	Wednesday 25 th July 2018
Next Meeting	Tuesday 11 th September 2018

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.

For this meeting, the group visited Taldale Farm near Thurso to look at opportunities and ideas on how Jason & Vic could improve the current handling facilities and future fencing plans and innovation for the farm.



Management Group:

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

KEY MESSAGES

The visit to Taldale, Forss courtesy of Donald MacDonald, gave the Monitor Farm and other attendees a chance to look at how another business uses new technology to benefit their business. The group the opportunity to look at several areas: the Shearwell race, clipex fencing, drone and silostop wrap are all practical, workable and affordable investments to any business.

AREAS OF DISCUSSION

Automated Handling System

- Jane Thomson from Shearwell gave the group a demonstration on the Shearwell race and automated handling system. The system is available as static or mobile. Donald uses the race and handling system to dose ewes and lambs, feet paring, checking udders, dagging and various other routine tasks. As the race restrains the animals and then can tip and tilt an animal it allows easy access to the animal.
- The system automatically clamps the sheep and releases (time held can be changed- or can be over ridden by the operator) it. The race has an automatic shedder which can be used in several different ways including separating by weight, breed, age, sex and comments can be entered about the animal e.g. lameness.
- The main benefit to Donald's business is the time saving as he estimates that he can dose 500 ewes an hour and sort and weigh 600 lambs an hour. He can also dose more accurately based on the weight of the sheep. Donald also sees a benefit when ewes are heavily in lamb and require to be dosed and can be restrained without undue pressure compared to in a sheep ring or race.

Fencing System

- Donald took us a short drive to a new clipex fence he erected in Spring 2018. Geoff Goodfellow then explained what Clipex fencing was and the benefits:
- Clipex fencing is a system which has been on the Australian market since 2007. The system is faster to erect, stronger and more cost effective than the traditional timber and wire fence. Clipex uses metal posts with rylock, line wire and barb wire dependent the type of fence required and comes with a 30-year manufacturer's guarantee. It is estimated that Clipex fencing over a 30 years period is 50% cheaper than a timber fence and can be erected 50% quicker.

Drones

- Craig Macintosh from Highland Drones gave an introduction to drones and potential uses in agriculture. Farmers using drones to check on stock can be classified as hobbyists. Drones can also be used in agriculture for a wide range of uses from checking a shed roof to herding sheep.

- Craig played a video showing sheep being herded through a gate using a drone and showed how it was used to check on growing crops. Craig told us of a customer who uses the drone to check on his cows in a shed.
- Craig then demonstrated on the drones, with footage being relayed to a screen in the shed. He also used it to show us how it could be used to look at ewes and lambs., which were not bothered by the drone, the picture was very clear which just emphasised the benefits a drone would be to any farm.

Silage Bale Wrap

- Donald Macdonald uses silostop for his wrapped silage bales and with Phil Meldrum, they have been analysing the silage over a number of years.
- Silostop has a 100% air seal which helps with the rapid drop of pH in the bale helping to stop the growth of yeast and moulds. The lower oxygen levels mean reduced risk of high counts of listeria. Silostop helps to maintain an airtight seal which in turn means that dry matter loss is reduced.

FARMERS UPDATE

- Fodder beet- there is a weed issue, it has been top dressed and sprayed but it possibly could have benefited from another spray and sown earlier
- Swedes - looking good
- Made lovely hay - lots of it
- Top dressed the silage fields
- Started weaning the lambs approx. 11 weeks old- normally 12/13 weeks, but lack of grass
- Cull ewes are ready and are off next week
- Biggest concern - store lamb price
- Lost more lambs than usual - knock on effect from last winter?
- Of lambs aim to finish top and bottom 10% from grass
- Bulls are out week earlier for Stabiliser and 9 days earlier for Charolais
- Unfortunately, the new bull is lame so not working as yet
- Calves are looking good - only two breeds now
- 82 cows to the bull

Future Plans at Clynelish

- Need to improve sheep handling system
- Need to invest in fencing
- Potential investment in a drone

FACTS & FIGURES DISCUSSED

- Donald can dose approx. 500 ewes an hour using the Shearwell system
- Donald can weigh and sort approx. 600 lambs and hour using the Shearwell system
- Clipex fencing is 50% faster to install and 50% cheaper than timber fences
- Clipex has a 30-year guarantee
- Using silostop the bale when weighed in February are 10% heavier compared to those in black wrap
- The Dry matter of a bale wrapped in silostop was 20% higher

OPPORTUNITIES/CHALLENGES

- An automated sheep handling system- allows routine tasks to be undertaken quickly, effectively and minimises stress on the animals
- Clipex fencing with a 30-year guarantee will double the life of a timber fence- a saving a time and money
- Drone could be used to check on calving cattle and check on newly born calves at a time when cows are dangerous
- Drones could be used to round up of sheep on hills and rough terrain
- Drone could also be used to check on building roofs.

ACTIONS FROM MEETING

- Clynelish farm to cost up a drone
- Costing of clipex fencing
- Cost an automated sheep handling system

FACILITATOR CONTACT DETAILS

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