

## ABOUT SUTHERLAND MONITOR FARM

Farm name	<b>Clynelish Farm, Brora, Sutherland, KW9 6LR</b>
Meeting Number	<b>11 – Winter Planning and Preparations</b>
Meeting Date	<b>Tuesday 11<sup>th</sup> September 2018</b>
Next Meeting	<b>Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup> December 2018 – TBC</b>

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

The key messages delivered from this meeting were:

- Jim Logan from Pirntaton Farm opened the meeting with an engaging presentation on how his farming business overcame detrimental circumstances which made him re- think the enterprises on the farm. Jims talk "A New Dawn" showed that how a substantial change to the business was for the better- for himself and the farm. He has changed from an intensive high input system to one based on maximising the use of pasture. He described his journey to achieving significant reduction in costs, increased outputs, improved profitability and venture into a deer enterprise.
- Ian Macdonald from Norvite- gave an insight to silage analysis and made attendees think about their feed requirements for this winter. Ian also covered other feeds that could be fed alongside silage.
- At Clynelish Kirsten Williams gave a demonstration on how to MOT tups before breeding and discussed the importance of condition scoring ewes using the QMS 'ewe timeline.

## AREAS OF DISCUSSION

- Jim Logan from Pirntaton Farm gave an inspiring talk about his farm and the challenges over the past few years.
- In the past Jim produced pedigree bull and shearing tups for sale but disease issues prompted him to look at his business and develop one which was more profitable, resilient and sustainable without subsidy. He decided to do this by committing to a pastoral system and focus on reducing production costs but increasing the profit per ha and using the resources on the unit to the best of their ability.
- The unit was heavily reliant on purchased feed and Jim wanted that to change. He wanted to develop functional, fertile productive livestock and fine tune the farm land around forestry.
- The move to a pastoral system using rotational grazing gave the business control over the grass, increased grass production by 30% and utilisation increased from 50% to over 80%. This increased the stock per ha, lowering the cost of production.
- To begin Jim recommends reels to divide fields as they are flexible and can be moved quickly. Winter is the ideal time of year to start as grass growth is slower and allows to you find your feet before the spring when grass is growing quickly and is harder to manage efficiently. It also allows stock to get used to being moved. Over time fences and water points can become permanent. Jim uses the 'FARMAX' management programme to help him plan and the grass on the unit is measured every two weeks to help match grass growth to livestock requirements.
- Due to the dry Summer in 2018, the unit was running short of grass and decisions made to ease the pressure on the grass included early weaning to lower grass demand, cull ewes sold at weaning and finishing cattle given hard feed and sold as stores. As an experiment Jim has stitched in Spring Oats into grass to increase dry matter production in the 'shoulders' of the year.
- Looking forward there is always a spring pinch when grass is needed- Jim has to decide is nitrogen required? Using a software tool like Farmax has helped this process. In 2017 no nitrogen was applied and it worked well. Moving forward the unit would like to increase the stocking rate and continue to expand the paddock system. This could possibly allow collaboration/profit share with other farmers. The new venture of hinds could substitute cattle/sheep.
- Final note from Jim was "I've learned so much from my mistakes I'm thinking of making a few more."
- Kirsten Williams emphasised that now was the time to MOT tups. Kirsten also provided farmers with the QMS ewe nutrition and body condition scoring timeline which has lots of information about how to manage ewes condition from before tugging to weaning.



## FARM UPDATE

Victoria and Jason gave a quick update on what has been going on at Clynelish since the last meeting

### Grass

- Poor growth- its been dry
- Cut and baled any extra silage
- Trying to leave grass now for ewes before tugging
- Direct drilled a field in an grass organic type mix
- Fertiliser been applied on all fields

### Lambs

- Weaned early on 25 July- do this in the future
- 493 Suffolk cross lambs sold 3 Aug
- 46 lambs to Mey Select
- 188 Aber x lambs sold 16 Aug
- Private deal for the cheviot lambs
- Had a tick issue which has set the lambs back
- Approx. 80 left to finish
- Ewe lambs are looking well

### Ewes

- Affected by tick- not an issue before
- Sold cull ewes 15 Aug with 180 left to sell
- Slight decrease in numbers for 2019
- Only 1 tup to buy

### Cattle

- On rotational grazing
- 2 bulling groups
- Good condition and calves are looking good
- Cattle going onto fodder beet soon
- Calves to be weaned in October
- Cows to be scanned/pregnancy tested in November
- Feed budget- to ensure enough for winter
- Bulls feeling their feet

## Looking ahead

- Start measuring grass
- Monitor ewe condition
- Set up more fences for rotation grazing
- Calculate winter feed requirement
- Bulls to be removed from cows after 9 weeks- shortly
- Secure the straw
- Draft and beet pulp has been booked but they are waiting on a price

## FACTS & FIGURES DISCUSSED

- Suffolk cross lambs sold averaged £55
- Aberfield cross lambs sold averaged £48.80
- Mey select lambs sold averaged £75
- Cull ewes sold averaged £56
- 50 less ewes for the 2019 lambing
- No ewe hoggs to be tupped for 2019 lambing
- Silage analyses were good, and the winter budget needs to be completed asap.
- Fodder beet not grown well this year- it was planted too late and is weedy.
- Tick issue on farm- wasn't there before- treated stock and need to keep an eye on it

## OPPORTUNITIES/CHALLENGES

- Measure grass regularly and set up more fences for rotational grazing
- Monitor ewe condition; take action needed for those below and above optimum condition (BCS 3)
- Calculate feed rations and winter feed requirement
- Tick issue
- Bulls feet

## ACTIONS FROM MEETING

- Drone been approved for the project– source one ASAP
- Weigh heads approved – source and begin recording weights and monitoring performance
- Keep in touch with Jim Logan about sowing of the Spring Oats in grass
- Management and benchmarking meeting to be held late October to set plan for 2019

- Doug Avery - farmer from New Zealand is talking about how extreme drought battle with mental health and his business facing financial difficulty he made some life changing decisions that saved him and his business. Dingwall Mart Friday 21<sup>st</sup> September 2018 @ 12:30 and Pentland Hotel Thurso Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2018 @ 18:00 booking essential

#### **FACILITATOR CONTACT DETAILS**

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