

## ABOUT THIS SUTHERLAND MONITOR FARM

Farm name	<b>Clynelish Farm, Brora, Sutherland, KW9 6LR</b>
Meeting Number	15 Trevor Cook – Profit from Pasture
Meeting Date	4 June 2019
Next Meeting	6 August 2019 (TBC)

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:-

- Grass is your cheapest feed therefore Maximise Profit from Pasture by managed grazing to target quality grazing to the productive livestock on the farm
- Some parasitic worms are resistant to anthelmintic dosing products available manage dosing and pasture to ensure you don’t have build up levels resistant worms on you farm
- Collaboration- the Clynelish Monitor Farm has different levels and kinds of collaboration. Sharing of equipment such as the Vet Marker and buying of bulls and heifers from members of the group

## AREAS OF DISCUSSION

Since 2003 Trevor Cook has been involved with Quality Meat Scotland Grazing Group meetings and had seen big changes both on the 6 host farms and other farmers that were part of the grazing groups. These changes were bigger than he had seen in New Zealand on farms. In most cases there has not been a change in the system it has only been a change only to the feed- the unit still have sheep and/or cattle just use less or no concentrate feed. This has been achieved from the better utilisation of the pasture available through efficient grazing.

Trevor stated that quality pasture is the best feed for young growing animals not for breeding stock. He did suggest that Clynelish next step to increase profit could be to change from less breeding stock to more trading stock. He also pointed out that there was scope to reduce the weight of the suckler cows to reduce the feed and cost needed to maintain the cows. Using FARMAX software, Trevor worked out from the current system for every 1kg on dry matter produced Clynelish is making 20p in the sheep system but 50p/kg DM from cattle. As trading animals always make more money than breeding stock, Trevor felt that there was opportunity to make more money by increasing the amount of trading stock on farms. It removes the profit if breeding stock are grazed on good quality pasture. This is because young animals convert feed more efficiently. This would be dependent on the spring growth of grass depend and also on the purchase and sale prices. Grass grows April to September- with May to July is when most animals are on the farm. Trevor also noted that a sheep breeding system is so dependent on the weather both at tugging and lambing. Clynelish weaned early in 2018 due to the dry weather but did see once weaned and the ewes were on the rough grazing lambs grew on the quality grass.

Farms that use managed grazing and rotational grazing make the initial gain in profits from saving feed costs. Their next opportunity is to increase profits from growing their system- ie more stock on the ground- as they can grow more forage per ha. Breeding stock can be maintained on poorer forages- the quality forage should be allocated to young stock. This lead onto a very lively debate on the size of a suckler cow- Trevor stated that a 850kg cow requires 250kg more dry matter than a 600kg cow- but the when you sell the calf from the 850kg cow the higher price doesn't recoup the cost of feeding her. Trevor emphasised that farmers should be looking at maximising profits per ha not per head. Farms can only influence the cost of production not the price that the product realises. A more integrated system between breeding units and finishing units maybe one option. Trevors last note was "Grazed grass is cheaper then any other feed".

The group had a tour of the unit showing them fields that had been split as part of the rotation grazing. They would like to split fields further but water access need to be organised. A 280m electric fence had been set up in 3.5 hours at a cost of approx £300. This is a very cheap and quick way of splitting fields. As Victoria said " I would ideally like a bigger mob in a smaller area' and this is the way to achieve it.

The tour stopped at the Fodder Beet which is part of the a Monitor Farm Innovation project on 7 farms across Scotland; all members of Monitor Farm Community groups. The aim is to share knowledge and experience on all aspects of fodder beet growing and grazing. At Clynelish 3 acres of a field has been set up with 11 different trial areas. 1 ½ acres has been ploughed and sown and the other 1 ½ acres has been disced and sown. Over the 3 acres, there are 11 variables including method of bed preparation, spacing at sowing and spraying. A webinar about the trial on 4 June @13:30 can be found here

<https://register.gotowebinar.com/recording/2914955258108434946>

Victoria and Jason asked the group what should they sow next to the fodder beet- the plan is use the fodder beet for ewes carrying twins. There were several suggestions discussed but Italian Rye grass was chosen as the simplest and highest yielding flexible solution.

Anthelmintic resistance and failure to control parasitic worms was considered by Trevor Cook to be one of the biggest challenges to profitable meat production from grazed grass. Parasitic worms are the second biggest issue for young stock after poor forage. The effects of worm burdens begin before there are any clinical signs. Liveweight gains suffer before faecal egg counts rise in growing animals. As soon as stage 3 larvae are consumed they reduce the appetite of the animals. The cycle of a parasitic worm is- Eggs in faeces hatch as Larve 1 then after 6-7 days develop to larve 2 which after another 6-7 day develop to larve 3 (L3), these are then eaten by livestock and develop to adults where the cycle begins again. L3 are very hardy and can survive for months- eg over the winter. Larve present in November could still be present in March. They do like warm dry weather but need moisture to develop. Grazing management should aim to break the cycle- as a dosed animal will never perform as well as an animal that is free of worm burdens. Introducing new forage crops like red clover or chicory leys can offer clean or safe grazing and enable good levels of liveweight gain. If the unit has cattle and sheep rotate between areas in different years. Silage aftermaths are also good for post weaning grazing. There is increasing evidence of anthelmintic resistance in many of the key product groups. There are ways to avoid the multiplication of resistant worms by creating a refugia of susceptible worms that dilute resistant worms and prevent their increase in numbers so these never become a significant proportion of the farm worm population. This is achieved in several ways including not dosing 5% of the stock (eg fit singles) or by grazing briefly on contaminated pastures so resistant and susceptible worms become mixed.

Use of a technique called Targeted Selected Treatments is a strategy to guide treatments to only animals that need it. This has been developed in Scotland by the Moredun Research Institute and is now part of an innovation project on the Lothians Monitor Farm.

A drench test can be used to determine if the dose you are using is effective and to see if you have resistant worms. It is important that you do not try and keep your livestock worm free.

More information about controlling worms in sheep can be found at <https://www.qmscotland.co.uk/worm-control-sheep>.

Information is also available from SCOPS and Clynelish are submitting sample for egg worm counts and in conjunction with their local vet relaying the information to NADIS <https://www.nadis.org.uk/> The day finished with a look at the 'Vet marker' lamb handling system acquired through the Monitor Farm Innovation fund. This piece of kit has been used by members of the Monitor Farm group with others requesting its use well. The group had a look at the new Stabiliser bull in a quarantine pen which arrived earlier that day from a Monitor Farm group member- this is not the first Stabiliser cattle bought from group members. This is just a small way on how the Monitor farm group has been collaborating.

Later this month Clynelish are to host a group of farmers from the Western Isles. Jason and Victoria are going to give the group a tour of the farm and share their experiences as a Monitor Farm.

## FARMERS UPDATE

### Cattle

- Calving started 29 April – 5 days earlier than last year
- 50% of cows calved in first two weeks
- Last calf approx. 20 July
- Cows out 9 April, 12 days earlier than ever before
- Purchase on Stabiliser bull (from Monitor Farm member)

### Ewes

- Lamb marking is ongoing and soon to be finished
- Vet Marker has been a great benefit to the business
- Out of 50 ewes scanned for triplet 15 are still running with lambs- other are now pets or set-ons
- Non Cheviot Male single lambs and 60 larger twins not castrated- aim to fatten at weaning
- In conjunction with local vet Samples for egg worms counts are being submitted & results are being shared with NADIS

### Forage and feed

- Fodder beet sown (part of the QMS Fodder beet trial)
- Silage growing well to be cut soon but weather dependant

## FACTS & FIGURES DISCUSSED

- Vet marker has saved time (full saving to be discussed at next meeting)
- Whitehill & Clynelish neighbours have used the Vet marker with Kintradwell arranging a date for hire
- New electric fence to split filed 280m
- Next to fodder beet- which crop to grow? Italian Rye Grass
- 280m of electric fence cost approx. £300 and took 3.5 hours to erect.

## OPPORTUNITIES/CHALLENGES

- Split fields further for rotational grazing
- Water access in all paddocks required
- Change in farming system- breeding to finishing from grass
- Parasitic worms

## ACTIONS FROM MEETING

- Split fields further- possibly with electric fencing
- Organise hire of Vet Marker to maximise use
- Submit egg count results to NADIS
- Details of what was sown next to fodder beet plot
- Chase weighing equipment- hopefully be seen at the next meeting

### FACILITATOR CONTACT DETAILS

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