

ABOUT SUTHERLAND MONITOR FARM

Farm name	Clynelish Farm, Brora, Sutherland, KW9 6LR
Meeting Number	14 Farmer Collaboration- Bob Simpson, Scenarios for Clynelish – Kev Bevan (SAC)
Meeting Date	13 March 2019
Next Meeting	To be confirmed- June awaiting Trevor Cook itinerary

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, and Donald Ross



KEY MESSAGES

The key messages delivered from this meeting were:-

Bob Simpson is a member of several co-operative groups. He gave an insight to how these groups co-operate and how the groups are managed. He also gave an idea of the possibilities of collaboration for the monitor farm group.

From scenarios provided by the monitor farm group Kev Bevan showed the group how profit may be affected if they were implemented.

AREAS OF DISCUSSION

Bob Simpson of Castlemains started by emphasizing that collaboration is nothing new his examples include how in the 1902s his Grandfather was part of group of farmers that purchased the local blacksmiths shop. The group went on to employ the blacksmith- this collaboration allowed the group to have access to a blacksmith when they were required-which in 1920 would have been quite often. In the 1960s and 1970 a group of potato worker comes over from Ireland to help with the harvest. Between a few farms the group was guaranteed work for a number of months covering the new, early and man crop which allowed farmers to have workers and the group employment.

In the 1980s a group of farmers bought a round baler but due to weather issues all the group required it at the same time. This caused some friction- the baler was not a success!!!

The first collaboration group that Bob was a member of is a group of farmers from around North Berwick Law. Member are of a similar age and attended school, Young Farmers and Rugby together.

Bob explained that the group as one buy over 1000 tonnes of nitrogen fertiliser. Buying this amount of fertiliser allows them to negotiate a better price from suppliers due to the quantity required and as the farms are in a small distance from one another the haulage is reduced as they can take whole loads.

The group also can negotiate a saving in the supply of tractor diesel again due to the small distance between the farms. The group meet annually with the grain merchant as they sell the grain as group. This allows them to fix a higher price as they have a greater quantity of crop. Over the years the group has taken on farms on a contracting farming basis. This does mean that one member has to be in charge as "a farm can not be run by committee". The group does have a formal agreement in place but due to their history they can feel they can be direct with each other and problems can be ironed out.

Over the years the group has bought equipment to share including a grass topper and two combines.

Bob is also a member of a potato group which historically supplied crisping potatoes. This group had purchased a potato washing machine which moved between farms to wash them and the moved directed to the factories. Due to changes the number of producers have reduced and the markets have changed but a group mentality and to go with the group is required.

Bob is a member of a group which grow and supply peas direct to a frozen plant. The timing of sowing is dictated by the group due to the pea harvester availability. Price is dictated by quality of the peas but the price is pooled. In 2018 due to the drought peas ripened early and some were bypassed to allow other peas to be harvested when at the optimum quality. The peas that were bypassed were made into silage and sold as forage. Over the years Bob has tried a few different diversification ideas including 15kw turbines, horse livery, overwintering /fattening cattle, winter grazing of sheep and selling straw.

After Bobs talk with the group brains full of ideas they were challenged to come up with some ideas of collaboration. Ideas covered contract finishing calves and/or lambs. Small producers as a group can batch together animals of a similar size. Arable farmers could grow cover crops for the wintering of lambs and the

benefit of the their own arable ground nroducing organic matter to the soil. Group approaching professional services for insurance and utilities. Groups marketing together as small prodcuers do have time to research and find markets. Splitting loads of straw- small producers tend not to require full loads and a few producers could split a load between them. Clynelish recently posted on facebook looking for someone to split a load of straw with- another producer came forward and they are getting a load of straw. Groups of producer have better negotiating power. Another group came up with the idea to help other out with the supply of labour to cover time off such as holidays or attending a wedding! Jason and Victoria the Monitor farmers have an agreement with neighbours for holiday cover.

Bob summed up that is you are entering into contract with other such as selling grain them a formal agreement is required between the collaborative group.

Kev Bevan started by reminding the group that bugeting tools are available from Farm Advisory Service website at www.fas.scot.

The senarios provided by the group allowed Jason and Victoria to determine if they would be worth implementing. The different senarios provided provided lots of stimulated discussion about more alternative senarios! The figures and details of the senarios are avaible as handout in addition to thie report.

FARMERS UPDATE

Scanning Results

- 896 ewes & gimmers @ 155%
- More multiples and more empty (10%) (2018 = 4%)
- Most empty were Cheviot gimmers (38)
- Possibly hard winter as hoggs? Need more time?
- Cross gimmers scanned well – treated the same
- More cheviot ewes empty too. Flush of grass??
- 1400 lambs, 820 ewes

Ewes

- Most ewes on swedes except cross singles
- Seem to be holding condition well
- Will BCS at HepP+ next week
- 820 to lamb (2 fields less!)
- Start date 22 April
- Set stock to lambing fields on 15th
- Grass situation should be fine

Calves

- 25 Charolais X to Thainstone on 22 March
- 17 Angus, 3 Stab to Dingwall on 10 April
- 18 Stabiliser Steers – Private Sale – to attendee of the Monitor Farm meetings- Collaboration!
- 17 Stabiliser/Angus Heifers Retained
- On silage only now as out of grain beet
- Growing at 1kg/day – continued??
- £1.36 feed + £0.20 straw / calf / day = £1.56
- Will report on sale prices next meeting

Cows

- 74 cows – feeding costs £0.75p/day
- 12 bales silage, 6 bales straw/week, +min
- Now on silage only
- TB test, BVD test & vacc next week
- Looking well after good winter
- 4 abortions in 2018 – hope none this year
- Turn out planned for mid- April
- Need to keep eye on later calvers – condition score

Forage and feed

- Plenty of swedes – bit muddy though
- Bulling heifers going on next week
- May put cows on also early April
- Buying in half load of straw
- Grass growing but cold check
- Fertiliser on – 50kg CAN/ac on 84 acres
- Dung out once calves gone
- Stock club cleared for lambing

FACTS & FIGURES DISCUSSED

- Sheep scan results and the number of empty Cheviots-did blood test but no cause found
- Reduction in number of cattle abortions (so far)- vaccination programme

OPPORTUNITIES/CHALLENGES

- Encouraging collaboration within the Monitor Farm group and local communities.
- Using the FAS tools available to determine if alternative scenarios would be more profitable
- Are Cheviots a sustainable sheep breed going forward?
- Collaboration of buying part loads of straw and grain beet

ACTIONS FROM MEETING

- Set up a closed Facebook page for the attendees to the monitor farm to allow collaboration ideas/suggestion/options to be considered

FACILITATOR CONTACT DETAILS

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