

ABOUT SUTHERLAND MONITOR FARM

Farm name **Clynelish Farm, Brora, Sutherland, KW9 6LR**

Meeting Number **05 – Better Grass Management**

Meeting Date **Wednesday 13th September**

Next Meeting **Friday 1st December 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: Trevor Cook (guest speaker)

KEY MESSAGES

To make profit from pasture you must:-

- Grow lots of pasture
- Utilise over 80% of pasture grown
- Allocate the minimum amount of pasture to achieve the production objectives
- It is possible to have 50% more pasture under rotational grazing

The rules for rotational grazing are the same wherever in the world you are farming, they just may require to be tweaked but these are the main principles:-

- Rotation length is set by the required end pasture cover
- In the winter, grazing per break should be a maximum of 4 days
- Use residual dry matter (RDM) as guide to adequacy of feeding
- >1200kgDM/ha – full intake
- <950kgDM/ha – below maintenance

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

- Nearly 40 farmers took part in the 5th meeting of the Sutherland Monitor farm and were treated to some new thinking from Mr Trevor Cook, the highly respected consultant from New Zealand. His presentation created a lot of discussion and questioning and was followed by a breakout session to encourage the participants, as part of groups, to work out the area needed for winter rotational grazing of ewes on the following scenario:-
 - 500 ewes
 - From 1 December – 1 March
 - Areas with a RDM of 1800kg Dry Matter/ha at start and to have a RDM of 1400kg DM/ha at the end of the period.
- To work this out, The RDM required at end is subtracted from RDM at start and added to the 90days x 2 to give 580kg DM/ha available. The ewe requirement is 2.5% above maintenance for the first 15 days thus 1.6kg/day and then maintenance for the remaining 75 days thus 1.3kg/day. Therefore each ewe requires 121.5kg over the 90 period. Total requirement for the 500 ewes is 60750kg. Dividing this by the 580kgDM/ha available gives a total requirement of 104ha which assumes 100% utilisation of the pasture.
With an 80% utilisation rate, the required hectareage for the 500 ewes in the scenario provided is 130ha.

- Following lunch Mr Cook explained to the group about setting up a rotational grazing system and explained the rules as well as the supply in terms of pasture cover at start, required pasture cover at end, expected pasture growth rate and to know where/if nitrogen is required in advance. Also the demand in terms of maintenance as % of live weight, pregnancy demand which does not step in until day 110 and to know where to compromise. Monitoring must also be undertaken regularly for pasture covers, to know the feed ahead and to monitor animal condition.
- To finish off the day, the attendees enjoyed a short tour around some of the reseeded areas completed at Clynelish this year and Mr Cook also discussed the grazing management required by the Ballantynes to ensure a great grass sward for 2018.

FARMERS UPDATE Summarise the development of the initiatives on the farm

Lambs

- Sold 900 lambs at Dingwall on 17 August to average £54.43 (less £3.36 costs)
- Sold 400 more than last year. 14p/hd up
- Sold 53 to Dunbia 5 Sept to average £76.66 (less £2.38 costs)
- Avg - 18.3kg (21 -16.4kg) R2 = £4.25 U3H = £4.15
- 90 lambs left
- Plan to finish all on red clover

Ewes

- 88 cull ewes sold through ANM in Aug average £58.12 (less £2.61 costs)
- 185 still to sell – inc. 25 feeders
- Udders, feet, personality – leaves us short, may keep 6 yr olds
- Empty gimmers tested positive for Toxo so vaccination end of Oct

Cattle

- Bulls out on 24 July, coming in on 25 Sept (9 weeks)
- 30 x Charolais , 40 x Stabiliser
- 5 in calf heifers to come (Stabiliser)
- Have vaccinated for Lepto
- Moving cows regularly behind wires, will start forward grazing calves in Oct
- Wean and preg test in early November, 11 to cull for number of reasons

Grass/Grazing

- 3 New fields sown in Spring/Summer, ploughed all of them
- Plenty of weeds! Hard grazing helped
- Swedes precision sown after ploughing, overtaken by red shank!

FACTS & FIGURES DISCUSSED

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

- The general feeling in terms of lamb prices was that having taken the advice of the community group at the last meeting, the lambs had sold well store.
- The toxoplasmosis vaccine will be over £4/head and will be a more costly exercise this year as gimmers and ewe hoggs require to be done, while in future years it will just be ewe hoggs to be vaccinated.
- The merits of keeping the 6 year olds or cashing them in now and purchasing gimmers was also discussed as some of the community group felt that at the price of gimmers recently added to the fairly buoyant cull ewe trade, the business may be better off purchasing young blood.

OPPORTUNITIES/CHALLENGES

Highlight one specific opportunity or challenge, or two or three smaller ones

- During the farm tour a specific challenge for Jason and Victoria was highlighted in terms of replacement heifers, whether they should be keeping their own replacements and changing the bull more often or purchasing replacements and thus changing the bull less often. There was a mixed reaction to these options and it is one which Jason and Victoria must take on board in terms of their future beef strategy for Clynelish.

ACTIONS FROM MEETING

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

- To assess the points raised from the farm tour with regard to the replacement heifer policy
- To decide whether to keep the 6 year-old ewes or cash in and purchase young stock.
- Completion of electric fencing
- Trevor Cook suggested Jason and Victoria get a plate meter for measuring their grass so they could monitor the sward height.

FACILITATOR CONTACT DETAILS

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