

SUTHERLAND MONITOR FARM Working in Collaboration

THE CHALLENGE

Working more collaboratively was a challenge that Jason & Victoria Ballantyne had been wanting to tackle since the start of the monitor farm programme, so along with the wider community group we wanted to look at the viable options that could potentially work with the remoteness of Clynelish in conjunction with the rest of the farmers in the local area.

WHAT WE DID ON FARM

We invited Bob Simpson from Castlemains Farms in East Lothian along to a monitor farm meeting in March. Bob has been working in collaboration with a number of farmers in his area for over 20 years, so we wanted to gain as much knowledge from him on how he established this. His enthusiasm and success gave the community group a platform in which to start from.

Firstly we looked at the advantages and disadvantages – everyone agreed that to share resources is one of the main advantages, so we broke the options down:-

The Pro's

- Equipment – (machines, tractors, bailer, topper, vetmarker)
- Labour Costs
- Knowledge/Skills
- Costs
- Marketing Opportunities
- Transport
- Land/Grazing (working with the arable farmers)
- Selling livestock
- Economic Benefits – increase production

The Con's

- Clash of personalities especially with business decisions
- Profit sharing, should monies be generated
- Trust & Commitment

THEME REPORT



- Lack of equality – work/labour being one-sided
- Being tied into a formal agreement & trying to leave
- Risk Factor

Various options were then discussed on what types of collaboration could work. It was agreed that at this stage to kick off any formal collaboration, it would be at a lower level and something that was easily managed with little or no risk. We were not looking to go down the route of any formal Business Agreements, Lease Agreements or Partnerships. Instead we would be looking at an “Informal Arrangement” which would still see collaboration within the group but of a more “no strings attached approach”.

We then focussed on what could actually work within the group and the following feasible options were then collated:-

- Contract finishing of calves & lambs
- Arable farmers could grow cover crops for the wintering of lambs and the benefit of their own arable ground introducing organic matter to the soil.
- Group approaching professional services for insurance and utilities.
- Groups marketing together as small producers do not have time to research and find markets.
- Splitting loads of straw/hay/silage- small producers tend not to require full loads and a few producers could split a load between them.
- Machinery – is there a potential to consider sharing – something portable
- Shared supply of labour to cover time off such as holidays/sickness

RESULTS

Since the original discussion took place on collaboration, there has been a number of positive outcomes:-

Following the collaboration meeting in March, the Clynelish Facebook page was updated a few days later to say that Jason had sourced a full load of straw from the south but was looking to share the load as he did not require all of it. Within a couple of hours, a nearby producer, who was not at the monitor farm meeting expressed an interest. A deal was then complete to split the load, to the benefit of both parties.

In April a deal was agreed between Jason & Victoria and another community group member, in which the community group member bought 18 Stabiliser Steers directly from Clynelish.

THEME REPORT



In May, through the Innovations Fund it was agreed and approved that a Vetmarker could be purchased. This piece of kit would be used on Clynelish however it was then realised that this could be beneficial to a number of local farmers/crofters. The Vetmarker is a portable lamb handling piece of equipment and has a number of benefits:-

- Less stressful on the lamb
- Improving welfare when handling
- Height adjustable – less stress on your back and no shoulder strain
- Mobile so could be moved around easily
- Labour saving as marking is done much faster, so a cost saving to the business

It was then agreed that the VetMarker would be the ideal piece of kit to share around the community group. Immediately five farmers expressed an interest to be involved in using it and now the Vetmarker has since been shared out among them. The feedback on this has been excellent. Biosecurity measures are adhered to and the transporting and returning of the equipment is all agreed prior to it leaving Clynelish.



Clynelish had previously suffered from issues with a new bull that was bought in 2018. It had gone lame, however with the dry summer and hard ground conditions, both Charolais bulls ended up lame. After consideration on bull type into 2019, Jason & Victoria decided to move to a Stabilizer bull and through collaboration with another community group member, a Stabilizer bull was purchased and arrived on farm on the 4th of June.

THEME REPORT



With regards to shared resource, Jason & Victoria have an arrangement in place with a neighbour who provides labour to them for their holidays and any time away from the farm. In return they work hand in hand to assist each other throughout the year.

WHAT HAS CHANGED ON FARM

The Clynelish Facebook page will continue to be updated but will also have posts relating to collaboration opportunities. Knowing that there is now future options to share transport costs, this will continue. Social media will also play a key role when it comes to marketing options for cattle and sheep.

Improved communication among the local area and community group is now taking place with future opportunities to sell direct to one another is currently under discussion.

The vetmarker will continue to be available for use in the local area.

To collaborate, does not mean it has to be done on a large scale. It has been shown that in the 4 month period from the initial discussions that took place around Collaboration, the benefits at Clynelish are already positive.

FACILITATOR CONTACT DETAILS

Willie Budge & Cat MacGregor
SAC Consulting
Industrial Estate, Janetstown, Thurso, Caithness, KW14 7XF
01847 892602. Email: fbsthurso@sac.co.uk

