



# **FARMER LED, FARMER DRIVEN**

**Forage and Finishing  
Deeside Monitor Farm Open Meeting  
Upper Ingliston, Inverurie  
16<sup>th</sup> July 2024**



**Duncan and Claire Morrison, Monitor Farmers**

## FINISHING BEEF BULLS AT GRASS CUTS COSTS

Duncan and Claire Morrison finish their mainly Stabiliser beef bulls at grass. The Summer 24 Open meeting shows how good grass management, supplementary feed and hitting the target at the abattoir are critical to profit.

- high feed prices can make indoor finishing expensive.
- Ingliston's breeding bulls do well off grass and are at a good weight by 16 months.
- outdoor finishing has cut variable costs from £712/head to an estimated £377/head.
- estimated margins are £466 compared with £214/head, an additional return of £252/head
- key is rotational paddock grazing, moving every 2-3 days
- Duncan uses Farmax grazing software to plan rotations.
- swards must be high quality with good ME (12.7 MJ/kg at Ingliston in May)
- sward protein is boosted by red and white clover (27% in May)



Duncan commented "I am really pleased with how this has gone, and the weight gain so far has been very good, so I am cautiously optimistic. But I would caveat this by adding that we are not finished yet and will need to see how they grade."

### Feed Management

Timing	Feed	Av Weight
200-day avg	Adlib silage & wholecrop	273kg
Turnout 17 <sup>th</sup> April	Grass fed + 1kg blend	375kg
12 <sup>th</sup> June	Grass + 2kg blend	484kg
8 <sup>th</sup> July	Grass +4kg blend	540kg

Groups at turnout	Egg count per gramme	DLWG-pre worming	DLWG – post worming*
Light Group Below 350kg	570	1.75kg	2.21kg
Heavy Group Above 350kg	330	2.02kg	2.25kg

\*fecal samples were taken on 12<sup>th</sup> June and the light group was then wormed.

### Detailed costings (by Kirsten Williams SAC)

OUTPUT	2023	2024
Sale Value 347kg @ 483p/kg	£1,676.01	
337kg @ 475p/kg		£1,602.51
Less value @ weaning 300kg @ 250p/kg	£750.00	£750.00
<b>TOTAL OUTPUT</b>	<b>£926.01</b>	<b>£852.51</b>
<b>VARIABLE COSTS</b>		
Concentrates	£546.17	£149.50
Whole Crop@ £45/t	£113.00	£0.00
Whole Crop/Silage @ £40/t	£0.00	£120.00
Grass @ 6p/kg DM (70t)	£0.00	£87.12
Bedding Straw @ £12/bale	£51.25	£28.75
Vet & Medicines	£1.25	£1.25
Commission, haulage, levies		
<b>TOTAL VARIABLE COSTS</b>	<b>£711.67</b>	<b>£386.62</b>
<b>GROSS MARGIN £/head</b>	<b>£214.34</b>	<b>£465.89</b>

### Measure

Jill Hunter, Harbro Beef & Sheep Nutritionist highlighted the value in understanding performance and profitability by recording:

- daily liveweight gain
- weight for age
- feed conversion efficiency
- kill out percentage and
- cost of production

### Manage the transitions

Manage the transition of cattle onto grass or onto feed:

- it takes around 2 weeks for rumen bugs to adapt to a new diet.
- a pH of 6.2 is optimal for rumen function

Many feeds can cause rumen pH to be lowered and should be introduced cautiously. These include:

- lush grasses, including high clover leys
- cereal based rations
- new season grain

In recent trial work, a balanced rumen pH helped gain an extra 350g/h/day

### Sward analysis

Analysis of Ingliston grass shows:

- high protein with energy levels slightly below optimal for laying down good fat cover.
- standard finishing ration would be 13ME, 13% protein and 40-50% starch (on a dry matter basis)
- excess protein may be laid down as lean muscle but there's a deficit of carbohydrates
- starch increases solid fat cover and maximises kill out percentages

### DOCK CONTROL

Docks can have a significant impact on grassland quantity and silage quality and are hard to remove without damaging a clover rich sward.

Graham Ralston, showcased SoilEssentials' award winning, retrainable spot spraying system SKAi, running a 14m boom across Ingliston's mixed species sward.

Attendees saw it

- Spray individual plants, not the whole field
- Target docks within a field of red and white clovers

Graham Ralston noted that SKAi aims to:

- reduce chemical use by up to 85%
- save input costs
- reduce weight on fragile soils
- avoid spraying and stunting productive grasses



## OPTIMISING PROFIT

Stuart Annand Highland Meats buyer, and farmer explained what he looks for in finishing cattle and how farmers can optimise the price they receive.

- farm policies and decisions on-farm should be decided by farm profitability, not by the abattoir
- processors require a supply 52 weeks of the year so they can accommodate everyone.
- communicate with the end-buyer so they know what's coming their way
- understand the queue that can build with big cattle and bulls; communicate to avoid a delay in processing at certain times of the year.

And the answer to the most frequent question on the day

- 'there isn't an ideal breed and type or weight of beast for an abattoir!'



Stuart Annand assesses Duncan's bulls

Bull beef at Upper Ingliston

## FINISHING ON FORAGE



Lanarkshire farmer Michael Shannon explained how forage quality and quantity plays a vital role in finishing livestock. He:

- finishes all his cattle off grass and forage crops
- Michael's animals graze on high quality, clover-rich swards in summer
- feeds winter rations of kale with hay or silage
- does not feed them any manufactured meal.
- markets his livestock through his shop under the Damn Delicious brand
- promotes the grass fed and forage-based meat as 'extremely pure, healthy and full of flavour'





**MONITOR  
FARM**  
Scotland

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Initiative supported by:

 **Scottish Government**  
Riaghaltas na h-Alba

 **QMS**  
Quality Meat Scotland

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