



FARMER LED, FARMER DRIVEN

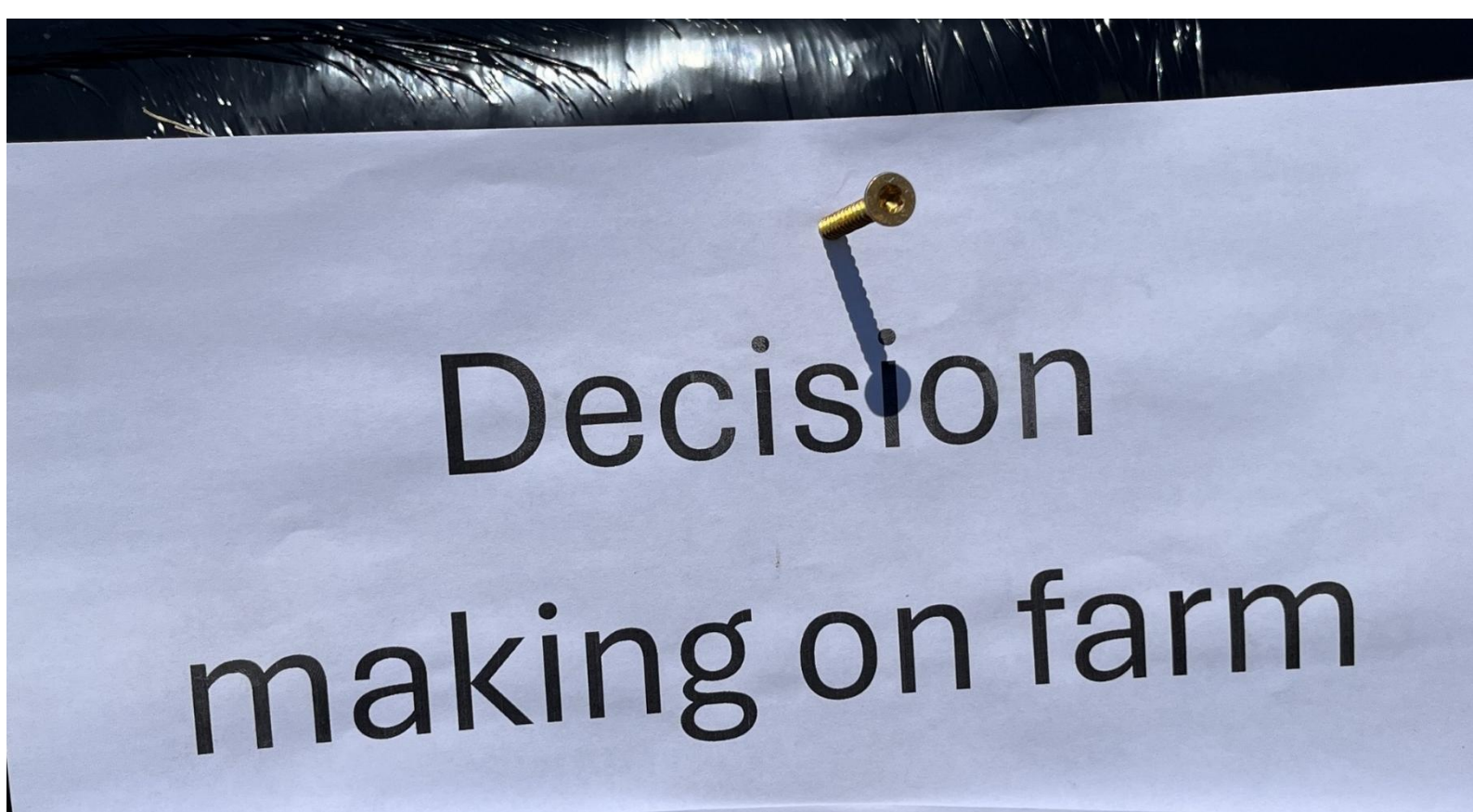
Decision Making-Part 1

Deeside Monitor Farm Open Meeting

Meikle Maldron, Torphins

8th July 2026

Duncan and Claire's Aims and Decisions



Decision
making on farm

INTRODUCTION

Deeside Monitor Farm Overview

- 770 ac of **mainly grassland**, 110 owned, 430 tenanted and 230 seasonal
- **Four units**, one at Inverurie, one at Kintore, and two, including a new secure tenancy of 164 acres at Torphins.
- Around 260 cows & heifers will be bulled this summer (Pure AA and Stabilisers plus a commercial herd)

Decision Making in Deeside- In Duncan's own words.

'In 2023 Kirsten Williams, carried out a Whole Farm Review of our business and assessed its strengths (things we're good at), weaknesses (things we're not so good at), opportunities (things that we could maybe do to improve the business) and threats.'

Grass Decisions

'We are reasonably well-stocked at certain points of the year, but in late summer when a lot of the store cattle or finishing stock have gone, we can have an abundance of grass for a two- or three-month period.'

Aim: Reduce grass surplus

One option was to purchase trading stock to take advantage of the grass surplus.

The Morrisons considered the health-status concerns from buying in stock.

Decisions:

- Increase breeding cattle numbers
- Keep store cattle longer to capture more value for minimal cost.
- Work with another farmer to finish/grow lambs.
- A farmer provides the stock; the Morrisons provide grass and labour.

This has reduced health and financial risk while still turning surplus grass to value.



Bull Beef Decisions

'Our bull beef enterprise has been a challenge. When we took on the herd at Kintore, the Stabiliser bulls were left entire. We are moving subtly away from Stabilisers due to better demand for Angus stores.'

Aim:

Assess viability of bull beef versus steer finishing versus selling store.

Background:

In 2024, finishing bulls at grass doubled gross margin/head from £215 to £465 by reducing feed costs. 2025 followed suit,

Decisions:

Grass finishing worked better than expected, but finishing bulls is not the direction the Morrisons want to go.

The focus will be steers and heifers, keeping flexibility to finish or sell store while making better use of grazing.

Aim –Use a grazing tool.

'Kirsten recommended we start making use of a grazing tool. We chose Farmax, a computer programme that predicts how your bottom line is affected with every grazing change made.

I'm now in a benchmarking group which helps me make informed grassland decisions.'

Aim: Increase the carrying capacity of the farm (see table at the end).

Decisions:

- Lots of reseeding over the last ten years
- 40 new water troughs installed in last ten years
- Now fully subdivided into 1–2 ha paddocks
- Around 300 tons of lime applied in last 3 years

Aim: Reduce labour at calving.

Decisions:

- Assess cows for calving ease, mothering ability, expression, teats and udders.
- Weigh every calf at birth and assess for vigour.
- EBVs are used for bull selection.
- Bulls that breed calves needing assistance are moved on.

‘We’re making better culling **decisions**, removing ones that aren't performing.’

Calving assists:

- 2022 – 7%; 2023 – 5.5%
- 2024 – 5.5%; 2025 – 4%
- 2026 – 2.5%

Aim: Record and use data

‘We Body Condition Score the cows and adjust weaning weights to 200 day weights and weight the cows then.’

‘These basic metrics demonstrate our cows are more productive than they were before.’

Decisions:

- Do not creep feed
- Use data to highlight genetics that operate from grass and dams that feed calves without assistance.
- Move on cows that do not mother calves well enough.
- Improve heifer management

200-day adj. weaning weight /mature cow weight/BCS:

- 2022 – 252kg / 657kg / 3.3
- 2023 – 263kg / 649kg / 3.4
- 2024 – 265kg / 666kg / 3.4
- 2025 – 271kg / 656kg / 3.5

Duncan says, ‘We have have lifted weaning weight by 20 kilos, mature cow weights have not increased, and cows now carry more condition.’

Aim: Reduce feed/mineral costs

- 2022 – £46,800
- 2023 – £39,700
- 2024 – £21,100
- 2025 – £31,000
- 2026 – £23,053

Aim: Increase the sheep flock.

‘We **decided** to introduce sheep two or three years ago, buying ewe lambs. We trusted the seller who had the same ideas for sheep as we have.’

‘We can increase sheep numbers rapidly by tupping ewe lambs. We think we've picked the right sheep and have not had cull too many. In contrast, the cattle that we bought in years ago have had to be sifted through a lot

Decisions:

- Increase the flock slowly from a consistent genetic base,
- Tup ewe lambs to expand fairly quickly
- Build a closed, self-replacing maternal ewe flock.
- Use the benefits of a sheep system on a beef-dominated unit and make use of grazing scope/aftermaths where cattle are not able to.

‘We enjoy having sheep and have decided to continue with them.’



Duncan and Claire Morrison

Meikle Maldron Livestock Figures

Cattle	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027 expected
Owned females	100	125	149	172	205	225	265–275
Grazed / leased females*	220	216	215	225	247	260	290–300
Area farmed	231	231	248	248	314	314	314

*This number includes leased cows and owned cows i.e. Total to the bull

	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027 expected
Female sheep to tup	30	90	180	300	400



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