



# FARMER LED, FARMER DRIVEN

DON'T FENCE ME IN!

**SOUTH AYRSHIRE**

Summer Open Meeting Report

9 July 2025



# MEETING REPORT

On Friday 9 July 2025, 37 members of the South Ayrshire farming community came along to Knockroon Farm, Crosshill, for the Monitor Farm Summer Open meeting.



John and David Andrew provided the following farm update:

## CATTLE

- Fantastic cattle trade in back end which facilitated 270 tonne of lime to be bought and the shed roof to be sorted.
- 100 acres of ground had been limed in the spring by GPS variable rate .
- Cattle were turned out 1<sup>st</sup> April which has been the first time in many years due to the weather.
- 65 acres have been utilised in a rotation where 230 ewes and around 400 lambs are **mob grazing** followed by 19 bulling heifers.
- 45 bullocks could have been added to the grass rotation but wariness of an adverse impact on weight gains prevented this. In hindsight, these animals should have been put into the rotational grazing system to **utilise grass** better.

## SHEEP

- No feet issues this year due to rigorous treatment last year.
- Shearing has begun for the season!
- Alex Brewster and John Ritchie had helped to set up the **rotational grazing system**. The ewes and lambs were put out early May, but they should have been put out earlier. With **confidence** built, this will be a plan for April 2026.
- The flock have quickly acclimatised to moving paddocks are moving every two days. David had said that this is the '**most enjoyable job on the farm.**'
- **Lamb performance** has been on par this year with the rotational grazing exercise.
- There have been some **practical learnings** whereby a big batch of 230 ewes and 400 lambs is a big mob for a 2-acre paddock to do go in and draw lambs.
- Last week there has been 2 paddocks taken out of the rotation for cutting. It is a matter of **patience and learning.**

*“Moving the sheep on rotation is the most enjoyable job on the farm.”*  
**David Andrew**



# STARTING ROTATIONAL GRAZING

John Ritchie – Montalt Farm



## Set Up Considerations

- With electric fencing that costs approximately £0.37 per metre it is a much **cheaper alternative** to livestock fencing.
- The other useful thing about this style of management is that you can put a gate anywhere you want.
- It is key to remember that the less joints and underground cables or tie ins there are, the **more effective** the electric fences will be.
- If putting up a fence for the first time remember to join the wires at each end to ensure that there is **10-15% more power** and no dead ends.
- You need to have an **earthing system** that matches your output i.e. one metre of earth rod for each Joule of energy driven into the ground three metres apart preferably in a wet spot.
- Think about the draw on the system you need and at what time of year (it is easier to **plan ahead** rather than go back to refit due to needing more power or water).
- Three wires for sheep and one wire for cattle are usually sufficient with at six metre **intervals** or 8 metre intervals once they have got used to the system. Wires may need tightened due to the weather.

## The Rotation

- The Andrews have been working on a **1.3 and 1.4 hectare paddocks** and ensuring that they are a square as possible.
- It is a matter of matching the **grass growth curve** to the livestock growth curve.
- The key thing is to **make the most of your available grass** by grazing hard followed by rest periods.

If the grass gets too far ahead, you can **reset** by:

- Mowing – taking out forward paddocks by bailing for silage or topping.
- Grazing with dry ewes.
- Putting on a big mob of cattle or cows and calves to graze to the barebone is useful at least once in the rotation



## John's Top Tips

- ✓ Be adaptive
- ✓ Be open
- ✓ Realise no two seasons are the same

# THE MOREDUN MOBILE LAB

Dr Eilidh Geddes and Dr Sarah Thomson



Attendees had the opportunity to hear from the [Moredun Research Institute](#) and explore the Mobile Laboratory.

Eilidh used the lab to demonstrate how to do a faecal egg count with **farmers bringing their own samples** along for testing.

They then saw how beneficial the [FEC Check](#) app is to see what those numbers really mean and what do to next.



Lots of discussions were had on various topics with Sarah outside of the lab including:

- **Best practice** for collecting the correct samples and keeping them in the fridge to **halt egg development** before analysis.

## Your Faecal Egg Count CHECKLIST

- ✓ **A compound microscope (40X magnification)**
- ✓ **McMaster slide**
- ✓ **Tea strainer**
- ✓ **Graduated syringe**
- ✓ **Pasture pipette**
- ✓ **Plastic beaker**
- ✓ **Weigh balance**
- ✓ **Saturated salt solution**
- †† **Materials are available to help with the recognition of eggs and how to prepare samples [HERE](#)**

- Ensuring **good biosecurity** alongside the correct use of **treatments and diagnosis** was also discussed.
- Attendees heard about the newly announced [Louping Ill vaccine](#) but there will be some time until it will be commercially available. The Scottish Government will provide match-funding of up to £100,000 to support the **development** of a new vaccine to halt the progression of the most serious tick-borne viral disease affecting sheep.

# VIRTUAL FENCING PROJECT



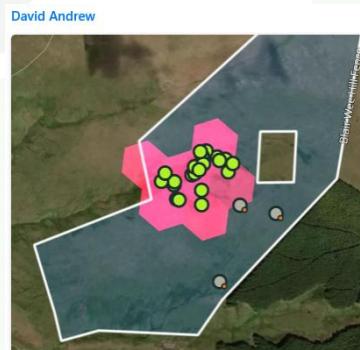
The cost-benefit of virtual fencing technology, which could **transform managing hill and upland suckler herds**, is being extensively trialled in commercial field conditions on four Monitor Farms. The innovative system uses a **phone-based app** to remotely set and manage flexible virtual 'fences', or boundaries using sound and pulses in GPS-equipped cattle collars to create grazing paddocks. John & David are trialling the system with **25 heifers** due to calve in September on a 200 acre block of the 1,000 acre hill at **Blair Farm**.

## Their Goals

- Ease of management when calving outside. Keep cows to one area.
- Utilise underused area of hill ground in summer and potentially the shoulders of winter to make more grazing available.
- Keep bull tight when running with cows



*David allocates the virtual fencing collars*



*The phone app allows you to view cow position and make changes to fences*

- Potential to graze neighbouring woodland
- Easier to locate cows or quickly see if there is an issue.
- Keep herd in safe areas.

## How is it Going?

Within a week the heifers had been trained, and the system has been working well on farm. They have not been able to keep cattle on the top area of Blair hill before and has now seen the **return of cows** and more recently sheep as the area has had improved grazing and accessibility. The Andrews have plans to invest in more collars to allow **optimised grazing across their ground** and plan to use the collars to work out a way of incorporating bull beef into their system.



*Heifers on Blair Hill using the system*



**MONITOR  
FARM**  
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Initiative supported by:

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