MONITOR FARM Scotland

FARMER LED, FARMER DRIVEN

South Ayrshire

Summer Open Meeting Handout

26 June 2024

Farm Overview - Suckler Cow Enterprise

Review 2023/2024

- The herd has been in an expansion phase
- All heifers bulled
- Heifers calving at 30 months
- Fertility issues 2023/24
- Nutrition and cow condition?

2025 Herd Targets

- Increase calving percentage
- Identify causes of low fertility
- Better manage - 2nd calvers
- More consistent breeding policy
- Luing Heifers as foundation for the herd
- Screen for disease
- Nutrition – manage cow condition and Body condition score

2025 Herd Targets Cont.

- Extend grazing season
- Fertility test Bulls
- Collect and analyse more data
- Individual enterprise financial performance
- Better use of technology

Herd data – scanning, rearing and calf losses	2022	2024 Spring Calving herd	2024 Autumn Calving Herd
No of cows to bull	161	91	84
No of stock bulls	6	5	5
No of cows scanned	161	91	84
No of calves scanned	147		69
Twins (sets)			
Empty		16	15
Scanning Percentage	91%	82%	82%*
No of calves born live	143	71	
No of calves born dead	4	4	
Total number of calves born	147	75	
No of calves dying between birth and weaning	6		
No of weaned calves	137		
No of calves retained for finishing	102		
No of calves kept for breeding	35		
Age at first calving (years)	2.5	2.5	2.5
Bulling period (weeks)	12	12	12
*Shut down with suspected TB in middle of bulling prevented getting another bull in when present bull had health issues			

Farm Overview - Finishing Cattle Enterprise

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Background

- Around 200 purchased Cattle via Ayr market finished between 20-26 months (100 day on farm target
- All suckled calves not retained for breeding are finished at 20-26 months
- Around 5 finished steers and heifers are sold to Highland meats per week
- Around 3 'butcher type' heifers sold at Ayr market fortnightly
- Current small-scale collaboration with other farmers to finish cattle
- Autumn born calves worth approx. £100 per head more when finished than equivale spring born calves

Opportunities

- Expand small-scale collaboration with other farmers to finish cattle
- Contract finishing - would this free up cash?
- What could cash be used for?

Threats

- Respiratory disease risk (IBR)
- Tight margins with market fluctuations (inputs and outputs)
- Robust agreement required on contract finishing

Ration	£/t	Kg/day	p/day
Barley	180	5	90
Bread	160	2.5	40
Supa grains	80	2.5	20
Silage	40	9.5	38
Straw	100	0.5	5
Limestone	200	0.1	2
Minerals	400	0.08	3
Diet cost (kg per day)			**1.98**
Fixed costs/day			62p/day
Total costs £/day			**2.60**
DLWG (kg)			1.4
Sale Price (£/kg) LWT			3.00
Daily Gain (£)			**4.20**
Daily Margin (£/head)			**1.60**

Farm Overview - Sheep Enterprise

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Ewe Flock Performance

Scanning Percentage	Ewes Numbers 2024	2024	2023	2022
Early Flock	124	152%		
April Flock	256	156%	177%	179%
Hill Flock	464	129%	128%	150%
Cast Ewes (away wintered)	132	155%	142%	159%
Scanning Percentage		**142%**	**146%**	**161%**

Sheep Flock Review

- Challenging Year
- Poor scanning figures
- Lameness issues
- Lamb sales achieving good price
- Lots of potential- management, nutrition and health

Example - April Flock Potential

- 256 Ewes
- Scanned 156%
- Lost potential compared to 2023 – 21% or 54 lambs
- 54 lambs @ £150/head = £8,100
- Scanning to lambing losses = 13% or 52 lambs
- 52 Lambs @ £150/head = £7,800
- 2025 potential = £15,900

2025 Flock Targets

- Increase scanning percentage
- Foot rot issues – cull policy and vaccination with vet help
- Further flock disease screening
- Naive to abortion with no current vaccination programme
- Currently clean grazing system but check worm control policy
- Shorten lamb finishing period for low-ground lambs
- Continue with longer keep lamb finishing for hill lambs
- Lamb minerals and trace element plan
- Nutrition at tupping
- Grazing plan to make best use of grass and forage crops
- Collect and analyse more data
- Individual enterprise financial performance
- Better use of technology

Arable Enterprise

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Current Cropping

- 80 acres cereal crops
  - Largest crop is spring barley of 40 acres
  - Some oats grown
  - Stopped winter barley
- 13.5 acres forage crops
- 9.8 acres red clover

Farm Livestock Requirements from 40 acres of Spring Barley

Farm requires 200 round bales of straw and 80t of barley

- 200 bales = £3,200
- 80t barley = £12,800
- **Total = £16,000**

Costs of Growing 40 acres of Spring Barley

- Seed £590 per tonne = £50 acre
- Slurry umbilical £20 acre one pass
- Ploughing £30 acre
- Seeding one pass £32 acre
- Rolling £10acre
- Rent £100 nominal
- Spray £25.50 herbicide & fungicide
- Fert £44 acre
- Combining £45 acre
- Baling £30 acre
- **Total costs** acre £386.50 x 40 = **£15,460**
- **Yield** Straw 320 bales - £5,120
- **Yield** barley 80t £12,800
- Value = **£17,920**
- **+£2,460**

Discussion points

Is this the best use of 40acres of arable land?
How many ewes and lambs would this carry?

Getting the best from your Hill Livestock

Local farmer and Management group member David Whiteford of Maxwelston Farm Dailly has drastically changed his farming system over the past few years. He discussed his changes and reasons why with the group.

Pre 2018

- 2000 acres (ring fenced) 1500 acres rough grazing and 500 acres ploughable.
- 200 acres seasonal lets plus various wintering.
- Staffing 2 labour units plus dad and me.
- High input –low output

Cattle Enterprise

- 170-180 cows and 35 heifers
- Limousin, Belgian Blue and Saler X Friesian with Limousin bulls.
- Selling forward stores off seasonal lets.
- Selling through Craig Wilson (Ayr Mart) and private sales.
- Buying heifers privately and at Craig Wilson at 18 months old.
- Fertility poor@ Spring 10-12% (barren) and back end 12-30% (barren).
- Grazing mid- April to late October.

Sheep Enterprise

- 900 Blackface hefted ewes
- 350 cross ewes – Mule/Texel
- 300 homebred hoggs
- Suffolk, Beltex, Texel, Blueface Leicester and Blackface tups.
- Lambing 20th February to 15th May.
- Mule lambs sold.
- Lambs finished and sold through Craig Wilson and Farmstock.
- Focus on E and U grades from cross ewes.
- Fertility; cross ewes 195-200%, Blackface 120-145%

Crops

- 100 acres silage 1st cut; 200 acres silage 2nd cut.
- 8-10 acres maincrop turnips 8-10 acres s
- Spring barley.

Getting the best from your Hill Livestock

Changes from 2018-2023

- Introduced rotational grazing and deferred hill grazing.
- No seasonal lets.
- Farm soil mapped.
- Time off farm.
- Reduced bought in feed.

Cattle Enterprise

- Moved to all Spring calving.
- Introduced Saler bulls over Saler X Friesian cows to retain heifers.
- Bulling heifers at 12-14 months to calve at 2 years old.
- Selling calves at 12 months old.
- Cow fertility 5-10% (barren).
- Grazing mid-February to Mid-March.

Sheep Enterprise

- Started using Innovis genetics.
- Reduced Blackface ewes, introduced Aberfield sires; terminal sires Primera/Abermax.
- Lambing 20th March to end April outdoors.
- Ficus on R grade for dead weight market.
- Fertility; 165-180%.

Crops

- Increase pH across the farm.
- Growing cover crops; Redstart, Stubble Turnips, Kale, Fodder Beet, and Spring Barley.
- Introduced legumes (mixed species) and Red Clover.
- 50 acres silage 1st cut; 50 acres silage 2nd cut.

Where we are at in 2024

- Saler herd; Saler and Charolais bulls.
- 190 cows and 45 heifers to bull.
- Synchronised AI for heifers.
- No fence collars for cow on hill.
- 850 ewes and 290 ewe lambs (170 to tup).
- Low input – high output.
- Aberfield/Lleyn ewes.
- In crops; Fodder Beet, deferred hill grazing and bale grazing.

Controlling Weeds In Grassland

Bob Baine of Soil Essentials talked through the new SKAi spot spraying innovation system which is about to launch. It was born out of a desire to minimise chemical usage on specific problem species in crops and grassland, saving costs on unnecessary blanket herbicide application, and reducing the environmental impact.

SKAi is a re-trainable smart camera system solution for agriculture which utilises smart cameras, trained in the recognition of target weed species, to control an agricultural crop sprayer as it passes over a field.

With the SoilEssentials SKAi system, you can detect and spot spray individual weeds and unwanted plant species including to target dock infestations in grassland.

Benefits of Spot Spraying

- Spray individual weeds – not the whole field.
- Reduces volume of herbicide applications.
- Minimises impact non-target species e.g. clover
- Doesn't check crops when using a selective herbicide.

Controlling Weeds In Grassland

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Gavin Stewart and Rory Clark Kennedy of Agrii discussed control of weeds such as thistle, rush, and docks in grassland and the appropriate herbicides to use.

1. Make an assessment and decide if you need to treat

Start assessing the state of your swards at the first signs of grass growth. If the dock, thistle or nettle burden looks like it covers 10% or more of the ground, then you need to take action.

2. Getting the timing right of spraying is critical.

The right time is when the weed leaves are actively growing, the movement of nutrients in the weed is from the leaves as they photosynthesise, down to the roots. Consequently, the herbicide will get into the leaves and be moved to the roots to kill the weed plant.

3. Select the right product

Which weeds need controlling and what you actually expect from your swards will dictate which product to choose.

- If you only have a dock problem, select a narrow-spectrum herbicide

•If you have a mix of docks, thistles and nettles then choose a wide-spectrum product

•If you expect clover to perform in your grass, then make sure that you use a clover-safe product – they are available.

4.Apply the chosen product correctly

Always apply herbicides according to the label instructions and make sure that you or your contractor follow best practice for spraying operations. If it has a withdrawal period, then adhere to it.

If you are going to spot spray by hand, then make sure the product is approved for this use. To safely and legally use this authorisation, the user must be PA1 (Safe use of Pesticides Module) and PA6 (Hand-held or Knapsack Sprayer Module) qualified.

5. Review the results – what to look for, when and what to do if the application has not worked

Monitor weed control levels four weeks after application. Take before and after pictures to help make the assessment. And lastly, review what you have done. Did it work OK?

If the treatment didn't work, then try to work out why. It's usually because the application timing wasn't quite right, so try again and be meticulous about when you spray.

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To find out more or to sign up, please contact:

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