



FARMER LED, FARMER DRIVEN

Trusting the Process at the
Strathspey Monitor Farm Summer Open Meeting
Auchernack Farm, Grantown-on-Spey
June 3rd 2026



Kirsten Williams discusses 'Family Planning' with Sammie and Malcolm Smith

INTRODUCTION

Auchernack, in the heart of the Cairngorms enters its fourth and final year as the Strathspey Monitor Farm.

The meeting theme, 'Trusting the Process' highlights the importance of long-term planning and commitment in four important areas;

- bull choice
- use of long-term data and information
- greening requirements of Highland livestock farms
- planning for the next generation.

THE FAMILY

The Smiths, Malcolm, Sammie and sons Calum and Hamish produce store calves from a 150 strong suckler herd, mainly on grass and silage.

BULL CHOICE

Calum explained Auchernack had tried a number of breeds over the years: **Saler** and **Aberdeen Angus** (through AI) but they had not been a huge success.

Then they went down a **Limousin** over **Limousin** route and found:

- Maternal instincts were being lost.
- Milk quality was dropping off
- Good temperament was declining
- Calving ease was becoming an issue

Two **Simmental** bulls gave the Smiths a really good cross cow. Very milky, strong cow and good mothers. But they didn't produce the best cross with the **Limousin** for selling as store through the live ring.

Of their 800 acres at Auchernack, only 200 is, at a push, ploughable. The rough ground needs to be utilised by an animal that is fit to go to the hill. Their Limousins can outwinter, but this doesn't support longevity.

The Smiths then tried the Shorthorn option. The Shorthorns:

- Are a bit thicker skinned
- Can carry a bit more fat on their back
- Can stay out longer in the back end
- Are suitable for grazing their hill
- Are easy calvers at Auchernack
- Are very good mothers
- Produce good maternal daughters for replacements, from the Smith's Limousin cows.

Calum says, '20 Shorthorn heifers have come back into the herd: with a batch calving this springtime, all to our Mayfield Shorthorn bull which is not carrying myostatin genetics.

'The Shorthorn bull will go over our spring cows to get more heifers back into the herd.'

For the Smiths' Limousins remain, to produce a terminal sire for the store market.

Calum adds, 'The Limousin is the best fit for what we're producing to sell. It's a very successful source of income for us.'

Grant Stephen, Morayshire breeder of [Glendual Shorthorns](#), presenting with Calum, described how he started a pedigree herd after running Shorthorn/Simmental crosses at his dad's farm. Similar to the Smiths, he places an emphasis on a more maternal cow.



THE VALUE OF LONG-TERM LIVESTOCK DATA

Ellie Mann, Shearwell, discussed with Hamish Smith, how he turns data collection into meaningful information for decision making on the farm.

Hamish knows that good information helps their business.

The Smiths record:

- Births, deaths and movements
- Cattle weights
- The Smith's software links to a stock recorder
- Instant updates through a phone app
- Important for ration decisions
- Shows DLWG easily
- Illnesses, treatments and results
- Helps decide replacements.
- Medicine recording
- Demonstrates compliance at inspections
- Will show past treatments with dates
- Cattle behaviour
- Reduces risk and helps decide replacements
- Calving notes in the comments
- Helps as a reminder of calving ease, calf vigour and suckling ability

Continuing advances in tech mean that figures and information can be viewed through a phone app.

Data stored on the phone updates the full livestock programme when there's a phone or wifi signal.



The Smiths use Shearwell's [MyFarmWorks](#) for their cattle records.

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THE SMITHS USE THE INFORMATION

Hamish says, 'Previously we've just done it from the computer where we when we're manually entering the calves into the computer.'

'But that has involved sitting down in the house on a computer that's 15 year old.'

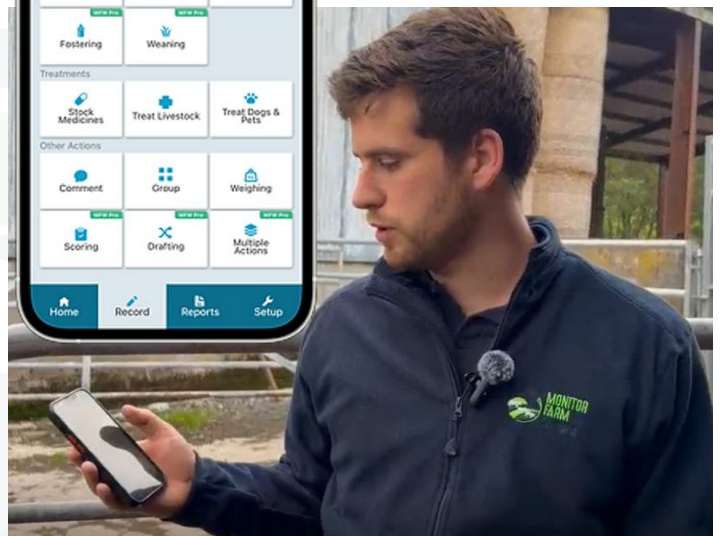
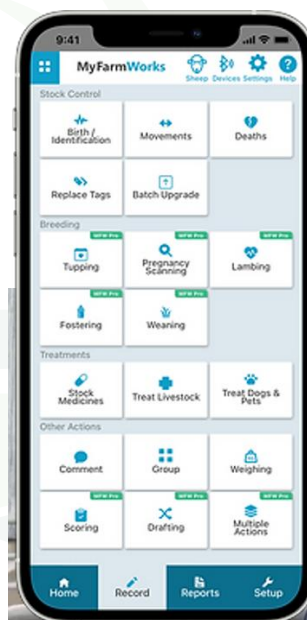
'Now we're able to do it from our phones then and there.'

'Going forward, the information will help make decisions on bullying and culling simply and early.'

'We'll no longer be deciding on the spot who's staying, who's going or what you're doing with that animal!'

'This winter we'll be able to track daily live weight gain on the store cattle and see if we're doing the right thing. We'll know if the cattle are where we expect them to be.'

'If not, we'll be able to tweak our feed ration and maximise performance.'



EFA IN ACTION

Jenny MacCallum, shepherd and rural consultant, discussed [Ecological Focus Areas](#) at a Strathspey Monitor Farm meeting in late 2025. She looked at the options available under the scheme and discussed pros and cons of options for Auchernack and other Highland farms.

At this summer meeting audience members explained their choices.

Many of the attendees did not require an EFA, typically livestock farmers who predominantly have permanent grass.

SELECTED EFA OPTIONS

For those that do require an EFA, many went for low input grassland (**EFALIG**).

Fewer went for herb and legume rich pasture (**EFHLRP**) which has a good multiplier. The option can fit in with sowing out an arable field to grass and lasts for five years. It has a useful 1.5x multiplier with no restrictions.

AUCHERNACK CHOICE

At Auchernack, the Smiths have chosen the EFA fallow (**EFAL**) wild bird seed, which can be a mixture of two brassicas.

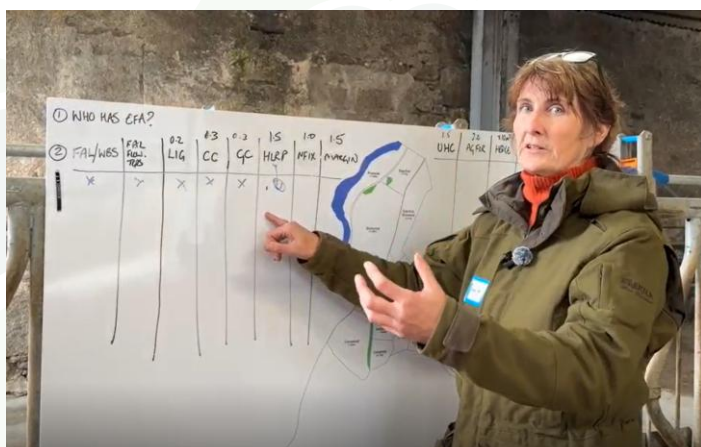
This option has proven popular for people who are rotating brassicas in a livestock-based enterprise, or where the farm takes in winterers.



Jenny says, 'One of my clients near Tomintoul has selected EFA green cover (**EFAGC**) after silage which works in quite nicely. It's young grass being cut for silage in July and as **TGRS** is classed as an arable crop, a rape/kale mixture is sown which is well which is well grown later in the season and he'll graze his cattle or sheep, reducing feed costs.'

EFA PRACTICALITY

Jenny likes the practicality of the scheme. 'It allows farmers to choose options that fit with what they are doing now,' and encourages her clients to choose options that improve farm efficiency, e.g. keeping stock out a little bit longer or finishing lambs.



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[Ecological Focus Areas webpage](#)

FAMILY (BUSINESS) PLANNING

At the beginning of the Strathspey Monitor Farm in 2022, Malcolm made the majority of business decisions, something highlighted in Kirsten William's Integrated Land Management Plan.

Four years later, with Malcolm now Agricultural Adviser at the Cairngorm National Park, the changes are profound. Calum and Hamish are making the majority of decisions on the farm. Malcolm (M) and Sammie(S) Smith discussed the process with Kirsten(K) that has led to this gradual transition.

K: 'What encouraged you to discuss succession with the family?'

M: 'We went to a succession meeting in Carlisle led by Canadian [Elaine Froese](#) and this triggered the start of family discussions.'

K: 'How often did this happen?'

M: 'Great intentions! Weekly but they tailed off to monthly. Then we stopped progressing'.

K: 'This is not uncommon in families, but you found a solution.'

M: 'We needed a third party to help us. We considered asking friends to help but realised it had to be someone neutral and qualified. You'd been involved with us before on other projects.'

K: 'That was about five months ago.'

M: It helps that you're independent, with no ties to our family. It helps, I think, that you're closer to our sons' ages and you are a new entrant farmer yourself.'



Picture from L:
Calum, Ellie, Jack, Sammie, Malcolm and Hamish



K: 'It's good to hear the perspectives from all four of you, when I meet with you individually and then again as a farm team.'

M: You've encouraged us to introduce our sons to our accountant and the last two year's farm figures.

Also to our bank manager when we've been arranging finance. It's vital that we maintain the good relationship we've had over the years and agree a fallback should anything happen to me.

K: Sammie, what has been your role in this?

S: I've been in the middle, with Malcolm explaining his perspective and then our sons talking with me individually. It's been good for them to talk to with you (Kirsten) and for me to be able to say how I think things should progress.

I'm keener to retire than Malcolm!

K: And we meet regularly, the last Friday of the month.

S: It's good to go through the action points and see what we've achieved. We've also got our wills and power of attorney done – they're the bare minimum.

K: How would you like to see this end up?

M: With us retired, secure in the knowledge that the farm was being taken in the direction that our sons want, not the one I think it should be going in.

S: We want to see them happy in their decisions and confident in what they can achieve.

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