



# FARMER LED, FARMER DRIVEN

**Streamlining: Efficiency and Time**  
**Banff & Buchan Monitor Farm Open Meeting**  
**Sauchentree Farm, New Aberdour**  
**6<sup>th</sup> June 2024**

## **Part 2 - GRASSLAND & LAYING HEN MANAGEMENT**



**Presenters Iain Chapman and John Ritchie**

## INTRODUCTION

'Streamlining' at Sauchentree Farm, was an idea from the Banff & Buchan Monitor Farm Management Group. Over the last 2½ years they've set Monitor Farmer Bruce Irvine challenges to improve his business management.

For Bruce this includes:

- successful tightening of his calving period
- significantly improved lamb production
- greater sharing of workload across his team
- more efficient use of grassland for both sheep and cattle
- more confident heifer selection using state-of-the-art genomics

## GRASSLAND MANAGEMENT

John Ritchie, Montalt Farm, Forgandenny, 2023 Farmers Weekly Grassland Farmer of the Year, provided a perspective on Sauchentree's grassland management.

John noted that Bruce is currently on a loose rotation, where he moves stock as they eat the grass. John with Bruce prepared subdivision maps for two scenarios where Sauchentree could move to the next level.

**Scenario 1)** By taking control through subdividing some fields - **fairly easy to implement.**

- 2.6-22.7ha fields on a leader-follower system for approximately 6 weeks (end July) - 200 ewes+lamb running ahead of the cattle.
- 2 day shifts where grass is eaten down to around 2,000kg/ha level.

This system also helps to cut down on the use of wormers as 1 dose can be missed for lambs which helps to tackle resistance.



**Scenario 2)** By taking significant control by having **lots of subdivision** but which entails a lot more management.

- 1.3-1.5ha fields - allows for 110 cows/paddock on a daily shift or 65 cows/paddock on
- 2 day shift working at a level of around 1,200 kgs/ha

A further option discussed was a 'flerd' (flock/herd) starting in May and continuing throughout June to utilise leaf grazing only: once seed heads appear then move on to a leader-follower rotation.

**John commented,** 'The meeting sparked interest and enthusiasm. Sometimes the answers seem a long way off from where people are now - **the biggest and most important crop on a livestock farm is grass**'.

Any kind of grazing management is better than none, particularly if you get it to fit into your system, your life and how you want to farm. Do not be overly prescriptive, saying 'you must do this!'

'Share ideas and take advice, as people did at the meeting, on how potentially to push a little bit forward. Remember to get advice from someone who is doing it, not someone who has never tried!'

For more discussion, contact John at **07889880096** or [ritchiemontalt@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:ritchiemontalt@hotmail.co.uk)



# Grassland Management Lessons Learned John Ritchie, Montalt Farm



*John Ritchie's Grazing Tips:*

## Infrastructure: Energy

- Power: put in the biggest energizer you can – bigger is better
- Earth: your earth needs to have capacity to meet your energizer, don't scrimp. ✱
- Remote Control: very handy to have for moving fences and reduces shocks!

## Infrastructure: Water

- Capacity: put in enough to do double the amount of water you'll need.
- Troughs: are cheap so we put more in to save time when moving stock
- Set up: spend time getting the set up right to save time in the longer term.

*Not copper  
wrepper  
Gallagher  
wire*

## Infrastructure: Fencing

- Hot wire: a boundary hot wire increases flexibility
- Polywire is cheap and effective and at 47p per meter is a flexible investment.
- Permanent: don't invest in permanent fencing until you are certain on location.

## Grazing Management

- Rest is key
- Be wary of farming the grass rather than the livestock. Don't worry about the 3-day rule, be flexible.
- Measuring: key measurements are start of Spring and Start of Autumn to determine average farm cover (this helps make decisions).
- If paddocks are getting away from you, don't be afraid to take opportune silage.
- Use the mower (not topper!) to reset the grass if necessary.
- If it's wet, we tighten stock and sacrifice smaller areas, it always recovers.

## Mindset

- Just start: even if its rocking stock from 1 field to the next
- Support: speak to others who are doing it, not those who haven't tried it.
- Determine your WHY: don't do grazing management because everyone else is – what do you want out of it: do you want more stock, more forage, less inputs.
- No year is the same, no farm is the same. Work out what works for you and the grassland you manage.
- Don't be too hard on yourself WHEN you make mistakes.

## Signposting

QMS Grazing Calculator, Teagasc Beef Farm Infrastructure Book, AHDB Planning Grazing Strategies

Bruce has recently installed a 32,000 egg-laying unit at Sauchentree which will alter the way he manages the sheep, cattle and arable enterprises on the farm.

Iain Chapman, livestock farmer and Managing Director of Farmlay Eggs highlighted what he's learned about **efficiency and management** through combining livestock enterprises with the production and packing of over 7 million eggs/week.



### Management of People

- WhatsApp groups are a fantastic resource for quick and timely communication
- Make sure to let people get on with their task (only phone if you absolutely need to).
- It's inevitable employees make mistakes but if they make a mistake twice then things need to be rectified.
- Emails are a good way to communicate; they provide written records.
- Create a weekly to-do-list and stick to it!
- Invest in time saving technologies
- **Make sure you know your biggest priority - do not rely on employees to guess it.**

### Egg layer facts for thought:

- Half of what a bird eats is coming out in an egg (125g feed intake vs 60g egg)
- If optimised correctly 97- 98% of birds lay every day
- There are 4 hybrid breeds of brown hen common in UK production
- White birds laying a white egg are starting to become more popular due to easier management and optimised output

### Hen Timeline

- Eggs are incubated in England and hatched chicks are moved at 1 day old to Scotland.
- After 15-16 weeks they're moved to a laying shed (e.g. Sauchentree).
- Dung collection is 1 week after birds arrive
- First egg harvest is 3 weeks after arrival
- A brown bird lays for around 87 weeks, white birds approximately 100 weeks.
- Optimal laying occurs when there is a maximum of 16 hours light and 8 hours of dark.

### Management of hens

- Like cattle and sheep, **quality feed, water and ventilation** is vital.
- **Attention to detail** makes all the difference
- **Biosecurity** should be top of priorities. Many beef and sheep farms need to optimise practices to avoid cross contamination.
- Sheds should be checked 3 times a day.
- 40ac per shed of grassland is needed to qualify for free range status.
- Light technology is changing - white light is an activity "cooler", red light is for laying "warmer".

### Key financial message

- There's an approximate 4-5 year payback on a £2m investment with laying chickens (if there's attention to detail).
- Bruce's livestock and grassland will benefit from the application of hen manure, **bringing nutrients and organic matter** onto his light, sandy soils.





# MONITOR FARM Scotland

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

Regional Adviser – Peter Beattie

07769 366614

[pbeattie@qmscotland.co.uk](mailto:pbeattie@qmscotland.co.uk)

[monitorfarms.co.uk](http://monitorfarms.co.uk)

Initiative supported by:



**Scottish Government**  
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