



FARMER LED, FARMER DRIVEN

MAKING A SUCCESS OF RE-SEEDS, LAMB WEANING AND VIRTUAL FENCING

STIRLINGSHIRE

Summer Open Meeting Report

11 July 2025



MEETING REPORT

On Friday 11 July 2025, 32 members of the Stirlingshire farming community came along to Lands of Drumhead Farm, Balfron Station, for the Monitor Farm Summer Open meeting.

Bruce, Shona, Rebecca and Gregor Duncan provided the following farm update:

SHEEP

Lambing 2025

Blairfad: 439 scanned at 169%

Losses 10.4%

Lands of Drumhead: 555 Cheviots scanned at 160% (much improved from the previous Black faces which scanned at 100%)

Losses 6.8%

Total 1550 lambs on the ground.

- Conditioned scored Cheviots at the meeting in February and some were thin. Took advice from SAC Consulting Nutritionist Lorna Shaw.
- Supplemented all ewes - 500g per ewe/day with 18% protein cake for six weeks.
- All lambed well and were milky and motherly and enjoyed lambing them.
- 90 Texel cross hoggs put to the tup scanned at 17%. Bloods have come back as negative for Toxoplasmosis, so cause still unknown.

CATTLE

Calving 2025

162 cows bulled

141 Pregnancy diagnosed as in Calf

21 empty

128 Calves on the ground

Calving percentage = 79%

- Majority of empty cows were from the far away Blairfad group. Tested and treated for rumen fluke and given extra minerals and feeding.
- Metabolic profiling showed across a sample of cows showed low magnesium and energy levels, so mag licks and supplementary feeding given.
- 4 scanned as in calf did not produce a calf – unsure of cause. Other calf losses all accounted for.
- Cows all out and running with the bulls.

INVESTMENTS & PLANS

- Liming programme.
- Concreted handling pens.
- Cattle handling system revised at Blairfad.
- Re-seeding plan implemented.
- Evolution of succession planning.
- Agri-Environment Climate Scheme – wader grazed grasslands, wetland and lowland bog, wild bird feed, wader scrapes, and new water margins.



"We have made investments in the business mainly from Monitor Farm group recommendations."
Bruce Duncan

GRASS RESEEDING PLAN



What's the Ley of the Land?

The Duncan family want to produce more kilos from grass. The attendees discussed the re-seed with the Duncan family, Graham Lofthouse (Farm Advisor), and Pat Lambert (Watsons Seeds).

Choice of Mixture:

- Duncan's looking for **production** from grazing of ewes and lambs initially.
- **Two** mixtures have been selected:
 - **Fyvie** – high clover mix on majority of the field.
 - **Hermitage** – multispecies mixture as a trial on one acre at the far corner next to tree line.

Challenges for Establishment

- Dry weather.
- Repairing of field drains.
- Costs of liming.

Preparing for a Re-seed

- Field was sprayed off with round up.
- Ploughed, power harrowed, seeded.
- 2 tonnes of lime/acres applied.
- Calciprill applied to seed bed at 120kg/acre
- Correct soil pH and Calcium is critical.

Managing a New Ley

- First grazing - heavy stocking for a short time to tiller and thicken followed by 3-4 days/3weeks rest.
- Duncan's lambs ideal follow with ewes.
- On/off grazing for the 1st year.
- Reset pasture with stocking density or mow in a dry spell with rain forecast.
- Keep leafy and reduce seed heads.

Managing Grass Through Challenge

Key Challenges this Spring/Summer

- Long dry spell (we're not calling it a drought!)
- Seasonal grass growth pattern.

What's the objective

- Keep it leafy and productive.
- Reduce seedhead.
- Protect the soil.

Options to manage through dry spell

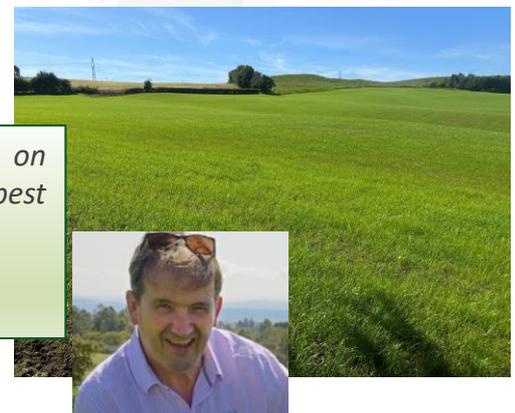
- Leave longer cover to protect the soil.
- If rotational grazing speed up rotation to leave longer cover.
- Supplementary feed to maintain performance if required and reduce pasture demand.
- Sell any trading stock or unproductive stock to reduce demand.

Options to Manage grass quality and productivity

Reducing seed head and resetting the plant after drought will increase productivity, digestibility and increase leaf area for photosynthesis

- Grazing pressure (Mature cows/dry ewes or hogs).
- Mow it (4cm) in blocks, not all at once.

"Money spent on lime is the best investment"
Pat Lambert
Watson Seeds



SUCCESSFUL LAMB WEANING

Emily Grant - Forrit



The Management Group wanted to focus on how to wean lambs successfully. Emily Grant has been advising the Duncan family on how to increase farm profits.

The weaning decision revolves around two key aims:

1. Maximising lamb growth rate to drive profit.
2. Ensuring ewes can **regain any lost Body Condition Score (BCS)** ahead of tugging to support next years lamb crop.

Within this, key considerations are:

- How much and what type of pasture you have available?
- How well the lambs are growing ahead of weaning?
- Ewe BCS and their stage of lactation.
- What is the market doing?

“Weaning shouldn’t be a set date.”

Emily Grant - Forrit



What you need to know

- Lambs aren’t born as ruminants. Their rumen develops over weeks 3 to 8 of life as they start to increase the amount of grass they have in their diet. Beyond 8 weeks, their rumen is fully functioning.
- Milk has an ME of around 12-13MJ/Kg DM. To continue growing well, lambs need high quality, highly digestible pasture to replace it.
- Lactation requires additional energy over maintenance - peak lactation (when lambs around 3 weeks old) is when ewe has her highest energy demand, which can almost treble, before falling as lactation declines.

Table 1. Potential growth rates at pre- and post weaning

	Target	What’s possible?	What’s common?
Pre weaning DLWG	300g/day	500g/day (eg single with milky mother)	Less than 200g/day
Post weaning DLWG	200g/day	350g/day (eg high clover pasture grazed at optimal height)	Less than 100g/day

Adapted from Lovatt & Gasgoine (2015) https://www.researchgate.net/publication/281470214_Lamb_growth_rates_and_optimising_production

SUCCESSFUL LAMB WEANING CONT.

- Minerals, particularly cobalt can limit lamb growth rates and development.
- Ewe will drop some BCS during lactation phase due to energy requirements.
- Ewes that wean at their target tugging BCS only need maintenance energy requirements.
- It takes a lot of energy to raise BCS. Ewes that need to lift from less than a 3 BCS will be competing with lambs for quality pasture. Try to keep an even BCS throughout the year to prevent additional stress on the ewe.
- Optimal weaning age is 12-13 weeks.
- Target weaning weight for lambs at 90 days should be ~30kgs for twins and ~35kgs for singles.

Emily's Top Tips

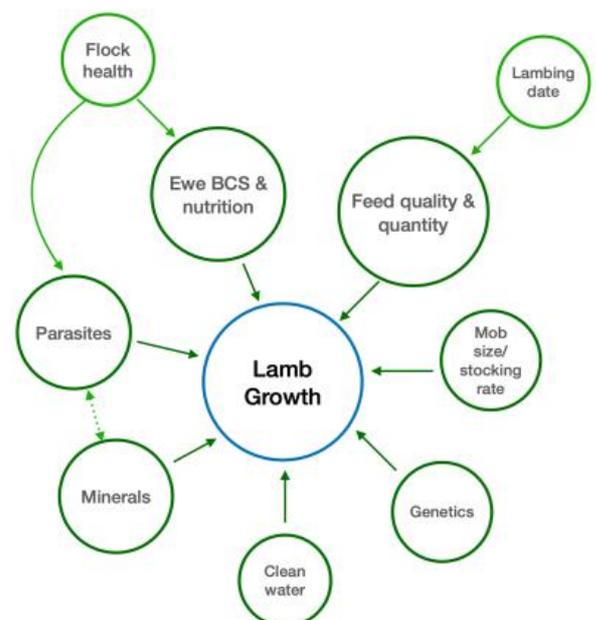
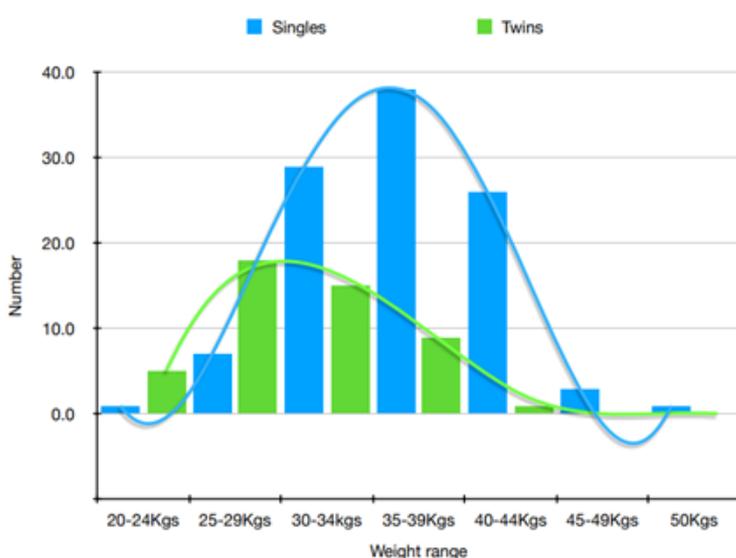
Minerals – Check your cobalt levels, even if levels are marginal remember levels change between the seasons. Low cobalt has production limiting effect.

Worms and parasites – lambs coming off their mothers are at risk of parasite challenges. You want to keep the lambs growing to get them marketed as soon as possible off pasture.

Timing – Weaning should NOT be a set date. You need to consider:

- What pasture you have.
- Body Conditions Scores.
- Growth rate of the lambs.
- What market you are aiming for.

Lands of Drumhead lamb weight profile
Weaned at 87 days
Average weight singles 37Kgs - average DLWG - 259g/day
Average weight twins 30.1Kgs - average DLWG - 211g/day



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.

The Duncan family, trialling with 25 native-bred hill cows Inveruglas.

Their key goals:

- 🐄 Locate cows and calves more easily.
- 🐄 Use to monitor cow movements to check all is well.
- 🐄 Keep herd in safe areas. i.e. away from walking routes and deep cervices.
- 🐄 Use current under-grazed areas to improve grass quality for sheep grazing.

- 🐄 Run bull in a defined area with cows to catch more and reduce bulling time.
- 🐄 Free up more time/labour to focus on production at Lands of Drumhead.
- 🐄 Improve personal safety (not having to search for cows)

How is it Going?

The Duncan's have been pleased with how well the cows have quickly learned to work with the system.

Initially connectivity was good, and the cows were staying within the virtually fenced paddock. An unforeseen issue with connectivity has resulted in only being able to use the collar to be able to locate the area the cows are in. This is still very helpful, and it is hoped that connectivity to use the full system will be resolved by Autumn.

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

Bruce puts on the virtual fencing collars



Cows at Inveruglas using the system





MONITOR FARM Scotland

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

Regional Adviser - Christine Cuthbertson

07769 366671

ccuthbertson@qmscotland.co.uk

monitorfarms.co.uk

Initiative supported by:



Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba



FARMER LED, FARMER DRIVEN.