



FARMER LED, FARMER DRIVEN

ARGYLLSHIRE

Summer Open Meeting Report
16 July 2026



Forward Planning for Future Resilience in Island livestock systems

Meeting Report

Feed and Production Planning Session – Lorna Shaw, SAC Consulting

A key focus of the meeting was the use of a **2026 wall planner** to map **production stages**, **feed demand** and management activities throughout the year. The planner helped identify key **pinch points**, including **weaning**, **winter feeding** and periods of limited **grass availability**, allowing the group to consider **mitigation strategies** in advance.

For island farms facing challenges around feed and forage supply, this approach supports better planning and improved **resilience**. The wall planner was highlighted as a **practical management tool** that provides a clear **visual overview** of farm activities, helping everyone involved in the business understand upcoming priorities and resource requirements. It also **captures** knowledge that might otherwise be held by one individual and can be expanded to include **health planning**, **breeding activities** and other key management tasks, creating a useful one-stop reference for the whole farming team.

"The plan is a really good thing because it allows anyone on farm to have a good picture of what's going on at any one time, rather than it just being stored in someone's head."
Lorna Shaw SAC Consulting



For Craigens Farm, **cattle weaning** and the transition onto **winter feed** were identified as major **pinch points**, due to increasing reliance on **bought-in forage**. For the sheep flock, **early November** was highlighted as a critical period, with heavy **grazing pressure from geese** reducing grass availability at **tupping**. Maintaining ewes on a **rising plane of nutrition** during this period was recognised as essential to support **flock performance**.

Virtual Fencing Project Update

Craig Archibald shared his experience of using **virtual fencing collars** to manage **cattle grazing** on challenging **hill ground**. Despite a difficult winter and a shortage of feed, **cow condition** this year has generally been better than at the same stage last year.

A major benefit of the virtual fencing project is its potential to improve **grassland quality** and **productivity** over time. By using collars to **target grazing** on areas of **rough, less palatable vegetation**, cattle can be encouraged to utilise **forage** that would otherwise be **undergrazed**.

Their grazing activity helps break up **mature, rank grasses**, while **dung and urine** are deposited directly onto these areas, **recycling nutrients** and stimulating **new growth**.



Craig highlighted that the aim is to keep cattle grazing and **depositing nutrients** in the same area, rather than grazing rough ground and returning elsewhere to lie up, ensuring the benefits are concentrated where improvement is needed most. Calves are also able to graze ahead of their mothers on **higher-quality pasture**, supporting performance while allowing cows to condition more challenging areas. The expectation is that continued managed grazing will gradually increase the proportion of **productive grass species**, improve **forage quality** and **carrying capacity**, and make better use of land that has traditionally contributed little to livestock output. Over the longer term, this could support both increased **livestock numbers** and improved **profitability** while maintaining grazing across more extensive areas of the farm.

"We're turning undergrazed hill ground into productive grazing by keeping cattle where the improvement is needed.

"Craig Archibald

Grass Re-Seeds

Pat Lambert and Mhairi Dawson of Watson Seeds highlighted the importance of tailoring **grass seed mixtures** to the specific challenges of each farm, rather than adopting a **one-size-fits-all** approach. Using Craigens Farm on Islay as an example, they discussed how local pressures such as prolonged **wet weather**, **grazing livestock** and significant **goose activity** influence **reseeding decisions**.

“Successful reseeding starts with understanding your farms conditions and choosing grass mixtures that deliver both productivity and long-term persistence.” *Pat Lambert*



A key focus was the importance of **sward persistence**. Both speakers emphasised the value of including a higher proportion of **diploid perennial ryegrass** in areas subject to **heavy grazing** and **trampling pressure**.

Diploid varieties produce more plants per square metre, **tiller strongly** and create a **denser sward** that is better able to withstand **poaching**, grazing and the impact of **overwintering geese**. **Tetraploid varieties** still have a role in mixtures due to their higher **feed quality** but are generally **less persistent** under these conditions.

Clover management was another key topic. While **white clover** can significantly reduce reliance on purchased **nitrogen fertiliser** through **nitrogen fixation**, establishing and maintaining clover requires careful attention to **soil fertility and pH**. Soil pH should ideally be above **6.2**, with adequate **calcium, phosphate and potash** levels to support root development and successful establishment.

Pat also discussed the challenge of balancing clover benefits with **dock control**, particularly on farms using **slurry systems** where dock pressure can be high. Farmers were encouraged to consider their individual circumstances and long-term management goals when deciding on **reseeding and clover strategies**.

Rotational Grazing

Craig Archibald shared the positive impact **rotational grazing** has had on his **beef enterprise**, particularly on the farm's **marginal soils**, which range from **sand to peat**. The grazing system has divided fields into approximately **five-acre paddocks**, carrying around **40 cows and 40 calves** per group, allowing **grass utilisation** to be managed more effectively and increasing overall **grass production**. Craig reported that cows are carrying **better condition** since the system was introduced, despite challenging weather conditions this season.

One of the most significant outcomes has been improved **herd performance**.

Historically, around **10% of cows were empty** each year, but since moving to rotational grazing, the herd this year had only **3% empty**.

Calves are managed through a **leader-follower system**, with **electric fences** set to allow calves access to **fresh grass** ahead of the cows. This has enabled calves to maintain performance without the need for **creep feed**, while cows continue grazing **lower-quality pasture**. The system also allowed cows to remain **outdoors for longer**, extending grazing into **November**.

“Rotational grazing has given us more grass, better conditioned cows and a system that is easier to manage day-to day” Craig Archibald – Monitor Farmer



Rotational Grazing Cont.

He also noted the management benefits of **smaller grazing groups**, making it easier to monitor **cattle health and condition**, **identify issues quickly** and spend more time **observing stock** rather than searching for them in larger fields. Overall, **rotational grazing** has delivered benefits for **grass utilisation**, **animal performance** and day-to-day **herd management**.



Kieran Archibald fabricated this water trough which can be moved with the quad bike.

Water infrastructure proved to be one of the **biggest challenges** when introducing rotational grazing. During the first year, considerable time was spent managing **water supplies** from a nearby burn. To overcome this, the farm invested in a **solar-powered pumping system** that now delivers water efficiently to grazing paddocks. While the system required significant **upfront investment**, it has **reduced labour** demands, improved **access to water** and helped make the rotational grazing system **sustainable** in the long term.



Solar powered water pump from Ardo Water is essential to supply water for the rotational grazing system.



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