

**Peter Cook  
P & L Cook and Partners**



## **Cairngorms Monitor Farm**

**A & J Adams  
Eastfield Farm  
Ballater  
Aberdeenshire**

**Report on Meeting held Wednesday 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2008**

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## TOP TIP FROM THIS MEETING

1. Starting a diversified business selling direct to consumers is not easy. It demands a lot of energy and commitment. The support of family is vital for success. Making a profit can take a considerable time.
2. Farmers selling direct to consumers get a real sense of what consumers want and what they value. The quality of the service and product must be high and consistent. In this case, the eating quality of beef has proved to be vital so you need to understand all the factors that influence eating quality. For “The Store” this has been marbling, length of the animal, good fat cover and hanging, not necessarily big backsides.

**This meeting was a mixture of business and social.**

**The programme was as follow:**

- Visit the summer grazings at Keiloch, Braemar. Inspect the spring calving cows and calves and discuss their management
- Return to Eastfield for a BBQ (*The Store* kindly supplied all the burgers and sausages)
- Talk from Andy Booth, *The Store*, Foveran, on how he developed his successful farm shop, experiences and lessons
- Project business.

At total of 30 farmers and several wives attended the meeting on a warm summer's evening in Deeside.

### **1. Spring calving herd at Keiloch, Braemar.**

- Land on partnership agreement with Invercauld Estate since 1999.
- 180 ha of old and variable quality grass with limited fencing, no stading, height at 1,100 feet.
- Whole area is let to a sporting tenant who keeps a small ewe flock to act as a tick mop for the hill, which graze the lowground grass over the winter once the cows return to Ballater. Also grow some game cover crops. Some problems with sheep overgrazing in early spring.
- The land is actually heavier than Eastfield so less likely to burn in a dry summer.
- Being 16 miles away from home does limit the grass' utilisation. In past have made silage and carted it home, now too expensive with high diesel prices.
- Employs a retired farmworker to look through cattle in the summer.
  
- Currently the grazings are summering 65 spring calvers with their calves. The calves are mixture of Salers, AA and Limousin crosses.
- Currently the new AA bull is running with the cows. (Farm has 2 Saler, 2 Aberdeen Angus and 1 Charolais bull)

- In past, the grazings would also carry another 100 yearlings, but not this year due to the switch to selling stores. As a result, no fertiliser has been applied to the grass this year (previously would get 2cwt/ac of a 25.5.5)
- Plan to take cows and calves home in autumn. Then calves will get vaccinated for pneumonia and clostridia approx a month prior to weaning.
- The land qualifies for LFASS payment so with that and rent for sheep winter grazing it is virtually free grazing.
- Is this wasted grazing (low stocking rate, no fert, small silage fields other side of river cannot be grazed, but not worth cutting)? Group discussion generally indicated that as a result of the point above this was cheap grazing and therefore there was no need to push it. It gave the cows and their calves a very low cost summer. Alan pointed out the costs of trying to be more intensive at that distance from Eastfield; transport costs, lot of time wasted on the road, hassle if any breakdowns, viewing stock.

## **2. Development of “The Store”, Farm Shop, Foveran, Aberdeenshire. (Andy and George Booth).**

- Family farm at Savocho, Foveran, Newburgh.
- Andy returned home from College and working abroad and was looking for a new opportunity.
- Purchased the neighbouring farm (Westfield) in 1999.
- Looking to establish a diversified business and after considering options decided to open a farm shop.
- Westfield had an old distinctive bothy which was small but ideal to convert into a farm shop so opened July 2000.
- The whole family was supportive and being passionate about good food wanted to sell their beef and lamb direct to consumers
- Farmers Markets were just getting started at the time so provided a good opportunity to sell directly to the public
- ‘The Store’ aimed to provide as wide a variety of locally sourced products as possible. These products included vegetables, fruit, bread, cheeses, bacon, eggs, salmon, poultry, mushrooms, preserves, bakery goods, amongst others.
- Following 18 months of successful trading and growth, the business reached a stage in which investment was required in order to take it to the next level. This involved establishing a cutting plant on the farm and a kitchen for added-value products. For the first time as well, staff would have to be employed. Prior to this butchery had been sub-contracted.
- The business was also able to utilise grants to help fund the capital investment now required. FBDS and PMG were both received to help erect and equip the new butchery, kitchen and van for deliveries. However, the vast bulk of the investment was from their own funds.
- FMD in a funny way helped as consumers wanted to know where their meat was coming from

- Following market research further expansion took place in 2005 with the opening of a farm shop/ delicatessen in Edinburgh. The aim was take the 'farm shop' concept into the city centre and so taking the business to a new level. Edinburgh was identified as the ideal location and following a lengthy search, suitable premises were eventually found. Andy's sister took over responsibility for managing the new outlet
- Received a boost when were approached by Waitrose to provide specialty sausages for their new Edinburgh supermarket. This arrangement has proven to be a great success
- Market outlets now include; the farm shop at Westfield, the shop in Edinburgh, attend four local Farmers Markets per month, some internet sales, and supplying local hotels & restaurants.
- Big variations in type of consumers at each farmers market and each shop. Edinburgh customers very keen on reading labels, ingredients, traceability. May now also be the most affected by the credit crunch.
- Andrew's wife established a small pottery & paint studio on the farm, which turned the shop into a visitor attraction rather than just a retail outlet.
- Weekly meat throughput; 6 cattle, 10 lambs. They finish all their own stock (homebred lambs from a 200 ewe Texel cross flock, purchased store cattle).
- 60% of business through the shop, 15% from Farmers Markets (however, they still make important contribution to promotion)
- Business now well established, with a staff compliment of 22. Managing staff a challenge – they have discovered it is best to 'employ for personality, train for knowledge.'

### **Discussion with Group**

- Booth's like to purchase stores direct from farms as opposed from marts – looking for new suppliers. Animals paid on gross weight loaded on lorry.
- They are trying to finish on a traditional grass fed system rather than a high cereal continental breed system. All AA cattle. Has bought stores from Eastfield in past.
- Concerned that 'scotch' beef may be trading on its reputation rather than actual quality. Industry needs to ensure eating quality is excellent. Problem is that EUROP grading scheme doesn't measure eating quality. They have found that the best eating quality beef is well marbled ribeye. They are therefore looking for their finished cattle to have good fat cover, length and breadth. A huge backside is not important and may consist of meat which is too lean.
- Shop and Farmers Markets are good places to educate people about marbling and fat cover. Supermarkets might not be.
- Booth's aim for fat class 4H, need the extra fat cover so can successfully hang carcass for 21 days.
- Selling own animals through a farm shop places huge demands to provide finished cattle and lambs on a regular weekly basis.
- Have developed own grading system – green, amber, red (based on marbling, overall fat cover, muscle at 5<sup>th</sup> rib, yield).

- Opening a farmshop requires huge amount of commitment and family support. It is not easy. Range of skills and ability to pull in people at short notice has been very important.
- They would consider supporting a livestock supplier by contributing to the purchase of an appropriate bull. Would also look at contract finishing options.

### **Management Committee**

The current Management Committee have served their term of one year so the Group need to select a new Committee. The Management Committee's role includes:

- to advise facilitators and the Monitor Farmers on any aspects of the project
- appoint a Chairperson
- to approve expenditure and selection of Specialist inputs
- provide feedback on the project
- provide an independent point of contact for Community Group members
- and generally to represent the Community Group

Members should contact the facilitators either to volunteer or with suggestions for nominations.

### **Next Meeting**

The next meeting will be held in October – depending on weather. Members will be notified by post and e-mail.