

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



## **Cairngorm Monitor Farm**

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

**Report on Meeting held Tuesday 6th November 2007**

**Facilitators: Peter Cook Tel 01467-642802 [cooknewton@btopenworld.com](mailto:cooknewton@btopenworld.com)  
Jim Booth Tel 01651-843607 [jim.booth@saos.co.uk](mailto:jim.booth@saos.co.uk)**

**TOP TIP FROM THIS MEETING**

The Older Cattle Disposal Scheme for pre August 1996 born cattle ends 31 December 2008. After that there will be no compensation payment and we might be charged £150 for disposal. Need to make a decision about what to do with these old cows. Estimated that to be worthwhile keeping they need to produce another 3 calves after 2008.

**TOP ARGUMENT FROM THIS MEETING***Johnes Strategy*

The conventional wisdom may be to test and cull all reactors annually, to close the herd and keep replacements bred from cows which have not tested positive.

However, the counter argument is that if the disease is very widespread in the herd, then a closed herd policy using homebred replacements may be concentrating the disease. In this case it may be better to buy in replacements from clean sources and live with the disease or set up a completely new herd with clean stock at a separate unit which gets built up as the old dirty herd gets run down.

34 attendees took part in this meeting which had been delayed from October due to the FMD backlog.

**The aims of the meeting were to;**

- Take an in-depth look at the long term strategy for the beef herd. Background: The herd has been cut back from approx 200 to 140 cows to remove Johnes reactors, closed herd policy started using homebred heifers (AA, Saler X) and AI top 10% bull semen into selected cross heifers to breed own bulls. Is this the correct policy?
- Look at the immediate feed cost issue given recent rise in grain prices.

**Programme;**

- Morning. View calved AI heifers and housed feeding cattle at Eastfield. View housing, silage and urea barley pits at Braehead.
- Lunch. Short talk on beef and sheep market prospects from Eric Buchan, McIntosh Donald, Portlethen.
- Afternoon. Feed cost discussion. Sub-groups work on beef strategy areas (breeding, feeding, health, overall farm policy). Discussion led by Gavin Hill, SAC Beef Specialist.

A **handout** was available describing cattle sales since the last meeting, harvest 2007 results and silage analyses (see Appendix 1).

**Key Points from Discussion****1. Feeding**

Use of this years silage and urea barley

Despite the difficult summer silage quality is adequate. Proteins are high (12%), though energy and digestibility may be slightly low in one pit (see analyses in appendix 1). Autumn calvers with sucking calves will need 12% protein, dry spring cows only 9% protein. Therefore silage alone is OK given adequate energy levels.

The urea treated barley provides energy (12.5 to 13 ME) and high protein (17 to 18%). Given the silage proteins above the cows do not need it.

Usually urea treated grain is produced to provide the perfect supplement to straw (with correct minerals). Alan uses the urea barley for feeding cattle, to supplement poor quality silage for lactating cows and as a way of preserving grain from end riggs, rabbit eaten margins and fields with poor combine access.

Note that urea treated wheat is best for straw rations. Urea treated barley has a harder coat and on a straw diet more is lost in the dung. However, on a silage ration the silage “mat” holds the barley in the gut longer allowing better breakdown.

Alan is considering trying spring wheat for urea treatment.

#### Coping with higher grain prices

Gavin presented the following figures;

<b>Getting performance right - 550kg beast</b>				
		<b>Silage ME 11.0+</b>	<b>Silage ME 10.2</b>	<b>Silage ME 9.5</b>
<b>Barley fed 3kg/day</b>		Good	Average	Poor
	Gain/ day	1.04	0.91	0.65
	Cost p/day	92.9	91.1	85.5
	<b>Cost p/kg of gain</b>	<b>89.3</b>	<b>100.1</b>	<b>131.5</b>
	Days to gain 150kg	144	165	230

<b>340 kg steer fed good quality silage (ME 11.2, CP 13.3%)</b>				
	Gain 0.4 kg/day	Gain 0.5 kg/day	Gain 0.8 kg/day	Gain 1.0 kg/day
Barley/soya mix fed	0kg	0.3kg	1.4kg	2.3kg
<b>Feed cost p/kg of weight gain</b>	<b>79p</b>	<b>71p</b>	<b>63p</b>	<b>63p</b>

Source; Gavin Hill, SAC Select Services

#### Conclusions

- Making good quality silage can save a lot of grain cost/ improve finishing cattle performance markedly. When grain was cheap did we stop concentrating on making top quality silage?
- Even at current prices, if you cut grain feed levels you are likely to increase the cost of producing each kg of beef.
- Delaying growth means that when you do try to boost growth rates it takes more feed cost to achieve it.

- Key point is to look at - HOW CAN YOU IMPROVE YOUR EXISTING FEEDING REGIME BEFORE CONSIDERING A RADICAL CHANGE.

## **2. Johnes Disease**

Alan has an ongoing programme to reduce the impact of Johnes on the herd. Important points from this meetings discussion were as follows.

### Testing heifers.

Testing cows annually is the norm. Alan also tests potential breeding heifers at 18 months. Despite most stock not showing reaction until much older, Alan always finds some heifers reacting at this stage and the ability to dispose of them at a young age and higher value more than pays for the whole test.

### Different approaches to Johnes control.

- (i) Regularly test and cull out reactors – assumes only partial infection of the herd.
- (ii) If suspect Johnes is rife in the herd with high proportion infected, then perhaps cannot clean out gradually. In this situation the best strategy may be to separate off a piece of the farm with its own stabling and build a totally new clean herd there. Obviously this depends on having a separate unit. This was not available at Eastfield so Alan has adopted the test and cull policy.

It was noted that some lines of cattle within the herd were more susceptible to the disease. Certain breeds may also be more susceptible.

## **3. Market Prospects (talk by Eric Buchan, McIntosh Donald)**

### Beef

Unlike previous years a price rise is not expected until the spring, partly because a lot of cow beef overhangs the market in the next 6 weeks (as result of FMD movement and export restrictions). The number of bulls being finished is expected to be much lower than previous years which removes the glut of bull beef in the spring/early summer period.

There is still a market for bulls, but at a discount to steer/heifer beef. It might be the best route for more maternal breed types.

The Scottish and UK beef herd continues to decline. While this may help support prices, processors like McIntosh Donald are concerned about the gap this creates for imports and for the viability of the processing chain. Gavin later pointed out that the major driver of reduction in the Scottish herd is the culling of pre-96 cows before the Older Cattle Disposal Scheme is meant to end on 31 Dec 2008. Estimated that 70,000 of the Scot herd are pre-August 1996 = 16% of national herd.

The Scottish premium of around 12 to 15 p/kg remains, but too large a gap could push retailers to other sources.

Much talk about ASDA increasing max allowable carcass size. Most retailers want no larger than 400 kg deadweight.

### Store Cattle

Fear of fall in price due to high feed costs and switch from grass to grain has not materialised. Finishers are committed to use their silage and are positive about price prospects?

### Lamb

Not a happy story. Everyone knows the problem created by the inability to export lambs due to the FMD restrictions. Need big increase in exports over the next 6 weeks to clear the market. Eric fears that too many lambs are being held back due to poor prices and that this might result in a repeat of last year – a spring glut of lambs which are too big and too fat. More lambs out of spec may encourage supermarkets to shift faster to NZ supplies?

## **Group Session Feedback.**

The attendees split into 4 groups to look at 4 areas of strategy for the beef enterprise at Eastfield. Feedback was as follows.

### **Group 1. Breeding Strategy**

- Forget about closed herd (especially for breeding own bulls – will not get consistency from first cross bulls). From health point of view closed herd may actually be concentrating disease in what is left?
- Buy in females from hopefully accredited sources (but are there many?)
- Aim for medium size cows e.g. AA X type (currently bit too big?)
- Charolais or other strong terminal sire breeds and aim to produce the best possible yearling stores. Select easy calving bulls – lot of variation within breeds
- Shorten calving period – concentrates effort

The groups proposal was a real challenge for Alan as in many respects it is the opposite of his current strategy. However, it clarifies the two routes which could be adopted;

1. Go for a closed maternal breed herd – all easy calving and easier to manage. Aim for a calf from every cow. Could handle more cows per person. Quality less good and therefore think about pushing males to a bull system.

2. Go for a cross herd (not necessarily closed, but buying replacements from known sources) and use beefy terminal sires like Charolais. Produce top quality calves suitable for store sale or finishing.

### **Group 2. Health Strategy**

- Continue with current Johnes test and cull closed herd policy at least until next test (Jan 2008).
- Blood test 10 youngstock for BVD per year – basically monitor presence

- Rispoval RS vaccine for calves (Rispoval 4 better than RS, but more expensive. However RS works OK on this farm)
- Leptospirosis not been a problem, but test 6 to 10 per year to decide if need to vaccinate
- Continue with blackleg vaccine (problem in this area)
- Continue with iodine pour-on policy and added vitamin E in minerals. Vitenium injection for cows 6 to 8 weeks pre-calving also recommended for this area.
- Cryptosporidium in calves. Cows treated with decox which is an anti-coccidial, but also reduces crypto levels. Has been a problem once in the past on this farm.
- For calving problems ensure cow condition not excessive at calving. Work on breeding (select on ease of calving EBVs)
- Wormers. None used on calves this spring due to dry conditions, but will worm calves at weaning.

### **Group 3. Feeding Regime**

- Recommend better batching of calves by breed and sex
- Utilise triticale/oats mix better by feeding on top of silage rather than mixing in feed wagon? It is a good crop for urea treatment where there are a lot of rabbits and overhanging trees which make cereal crops late
- Check minerals are correct, especially on these light soil areas
- Cows over fed? Dilute mix with straw (especially as have ample straw this year)
- Silage quality OK. Keep improving by shortening grass rotation and improving soil status
- Maximise stubble neeps (but competition with barley in the rotation)
- Introduce an extra feed run with feed wagon every second day to supply lower energy mix to youngstock and avoid being overfat at calving.
- Ample grain supply to finish all stock if wished

### **Gavin's additional points on feeding;**

- Very good feed regime at Eastfield
- Plenty high protein feed (urea barley) so don't need to buy in protein
- Simple big bucket and mixer based system
- Feed to dry cows is a bit too good, but saves time having fewer rations to mix – it's a trade off
- In his experience stubble neeps have proven to be worth sowing even into September (therefore after an early harvest). Cheap to grow – just seed and 40 units N. Alan has had less success that late.
- Deferred grazing is not like silage where, once ensiled, the quality is preserved. Quality of deferred grazing declines steadily from October to December with a big drop after December. However, this is an adequate feed on its won for spring calvers (not for milking cows) with appropriate minerals e.g. tubs to avoid staggers.

#### **Group 4. Overall Farm Strategy**

- Limited scope to change mix of enterprises due to land quality. Could up grain a bit
- Aim for only 120 to 150 cows (don't go back up to 200). Have two herds of 60. One a maternal herd to breed replacements, the other a cross herd to put to Charolais to produce top quality calves. Spread out the cows so need less silage, increase grain a bit. Better suits a one man system.
- Alternative option for one man system; 200 AA or other "easier care" cows, finish all calves (easy with AA), sell to AA premium market.
- No cross bred bulls. Buy in accredited bulls.
- Consider organic option. Already have an extensive system. 10p/kg premium on stores, finished stock making 300p/kg dwt. Will market premium remain? How control ragwort?
- Try to keep existing acreage – is allowing a low cost extensive system. However, doubt economics of carting silage from Braemar.
- Consider agri-environment scheme options once details of new RDP known.

## Appendix 1

### November 2007 Cairngorm Monitor Farm Meeting What's happened since the last meeting?

#### 1. Cattle Activity since last Meeting 17/7/07

73 calves born 3 calves died at birth

1 calf died

1 cow died

1 heifer put down after calving

24 cows sold	14 Pre 96 to OCDS	£225.76 average
	4 PD'd empty	£537 av
	6 after rearing last calf	£??? Av

6 heifers not in calf sold	4 to SPM 313kg @ 224p/kg	£701
	1 to prime ring 580 kg @ 118p/kg	£684
	1 to OTM ring 720 kg @ 78.5 p/kg	£565

1 old bull purchased £800

Store stots sold 31/08/07 6 AA X, 4 LM X  
10 @ 397.8kg @ 121.29 p/kg

#### 2. Hairst 2007 summary

143 acres cereals

91 ac Riviera barley (20 ac undersown)

20 ac Waggon barley (all undersown)

12 ac Oxbridge barlet

20 ac Oat/Triticale mix

Approx Yields	Tonnes
6 acres cut for wholecrop (games car park and gate too small for combine)	?
Headlands, green bits and smallest fields treated with urea for pit	70
Sold off combine	58
Dried in bin for future sale or use if required	45
Waggon barley dried to 17% in bin for seed 2008	15
Oxbridge barley dried to 17% in big bags for seed 2008	4
Moist grain tower for bruising	40
Triticale/Oat mix urea treated for pit	50

<b>Approx Total</b>	<b>282 (excluding wholecrop)</b>
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Total straw approx 1300 bales (usually 1100 bales)

### **3. Silage analysis summary**

Quantity = a lot!

Quality;

	PIT EAST	PIT WEST	BALES
Dry Matter (g/kg)	286	205	211
D- Value (%)	57	65	58
ME (MJ/kgDM)	9.2	10.4	9.3
Protein (g/kgDM)	122	119	121
pH	4.5	4.4	4
Lactic Acid (g/kgDM)	28.1	46.2	83.3

### **4. Health**

2 cases of scour in calves.