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P & L Cook and Partners**



Buchan Monitor Farm

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Report on meeting held 21st May 2009

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TOP TIP FROM MEETING

1. Q Box analysis is based on individual livestock information gathered automatically at the abattoir. It provides producers with a powerful management tool to help improve livestock and efficiency.

Meeting Agenda:

1. Update on sheep performance
2. Update on cattle performance
3. McIntosh Donald Q Box system

1. Update from Monitor Farmer (Patrick Dickson)

1.1 Ewes and lambs

The Group looked over a field of ewes and lambs. Lambing started in the 1st April. Most of the ewes are Lleyn cross ewes from the original Shetland cheviot flock. This is the 2nd lambing to the easy-care tup. It is noted all the ewes are away wintered.

A closed ewe flock is maintained by rearing own replacements.

Ewe lambs with potential for breeding are tagged, the criteria for selection being; dam lambed herself, lambs suckled, quiet mothers, and the dams past record.

Feeding prior to lambing:

All ewes on high energy buckets + decox (for toxoplasmosis) 2 months before lambing. For toxoplasmosis control, instead of vaccination, tried to treat by using in-feed buckets. However, suspect ewes didn't eat enough to allow good control so plan to vaccinate in the back end.

Thin ewes and those expecting triplets get fed concentrate 1 month before lambing. Soon after lambing starts, all hard feeding (single & triplets) is stopped but still have access to buckets. There was plenty of grass so this works well

This year didn't house any ewes at night so all lambed outside. Singles and triplets are kept together to help cross-foster lambs. Have plenty grass this year

Review Sheep performance record.

A key aim of the monitor farm project to measure and monitor current performance (benchmarking) as an aid to management and to identify any problems. Fortunately the Dicksons keep good records.

The on-going sheep performance record was circulated to the Group for comments – appendix 1.

Comments from the Group

- ❑ Should consider finishing more lambs off grass - last year (2008) only 30% sold by the end of October. However, noted, it was more profitable to keep lambs longer last year!
- ❑ Should they retain own replacements or buy-in? Some thought it requires a lot of effort and adds to complexity to retain own replacements for a small flock.
- ❑ The Group thought the level of concentrate feeding per ewe was low compared to the norm – this may be attributed to smaller ewes, away wintering and late lambing (Apr).
- ❑ The scanning of hogs has improved due too the influence of the Lleyn. There is a danger it gets too high – don't want too many triplets with hogs.
- ❑ Lambing percentage sold at 168% was good (2008) – top third performance
- ❑ Average sale weight was 19.96 kg dwt, achieving average price £55.47 – good reflection of strong trade.
- ❑ Impt to keep hogs on good grass at the back-end to keep them growing and improve body condition
- ❑ The sheep flock works well with rest of the enterprise mix and ensures good grass utilisation.

1.2 Suckler cows in straw court

The Group moved on to see the heifers and cows in the cattle court.

Key management points:

1st of May the bull went in with heifers, followed by 20th May bull went to cows.

Have 3 bulls; 2 simmental and 1 luing

So far being one of the easiest for calving – only assisted 4 cows in total.

Generally, all cows are calved inside, however, some tail-enders go out to grass

Heifers normally calve at 2 years old

Review Cattle performance record.

The on-going cattle performance record was circulated to the Group for comments – see appendix 2.

Comments from the Group

- ❑ It was noted the calving % had improved and was good at 92%
- ❑ The weaning weights for bulls and heifers were both v good – milky cows
- ❑ The average daily lwt gains were consistently high
- ❑ Noted, the Luing calves slight lower dlwg compared to the Simmental but still good.
- ❑ Calves were fed more creep last year so when went into the slats they kept going. Also meant cows were not stripped so much to maintain calves.
- ❑ Suspect the barren cows in the previous year due to an uterus infection
- ❑ Calving is now more compact - recovered from a previous campylobacter infection although it has taken time.
- ❑ Average weight of cull cows sold 678kg (2008)
- ❑ The average weight of heifers sold 2008 was down 19kg, Partly due to smaller heifers - top ones were sold for bulling – but could be due to heifers performing poorly on the dry brae fields (17ac permanent grass)

- Potential reasons for the poor performance of the heifers at grass was discussed. Group thought it could be due to worm burden or trace element deficiency.

Action: It was agreed the Group should investigate the poor summer of heifers on these brae grass fields.

2. McIntosh Donald Q Box analysis

Mike Martin who farms at Garguston, Muir of Ord gave a presentation on Q Box to the Group. Mike is chairman of the 1,200 strong producer group, which supplies beef and lamb to Tesco through McIntosh Donald.

The 'Tesco Producer Club' were interested to get more information from their finished cattle so adopted Q Box a number of years ago. The key aspect is improved information management, which allows producers to modify their livestock management. By utilizing electronic slaughter data to analyse the level of output, producers were now able to improve production and quality all leading to more profit.

Q box analysis allows producers to target production towards the most profitable market for the individual producer. Currently many producers don't know what it costs to feed cattle or bothered to look at their current performance. This was a wasted opportunity.

Mike described how he had used the information to tighten up their own breeding and feeding at home.

He also reminded the meeting of the need to ensure the Scotch premium is not eroded. Processors are having a problem with over weight and fat cattle but were not able to penalise enough.

The average age of steers at slaughter was 25mths – was that too old?

Supermarkets are looking for cattle in the age range 18-24mths.

We must remember 90% of beef is sold through supermarkets.

Cattle needed to be well hung – McIntosh hang their for 5 days in carcass, then further 23 days in chill.

Example sheets were handed out

This also included the results for the Monitor Farm cattle.

A range of parameters were examined and benchmarked. This included breed analysis.

See the web site for further information - www.qboxanalysis.com/

Date of next meeting

The next meeting will take place on Thursday 16th July 2009.

Appendix 1:

Ongoing Cattle Performance Record as at 21 May 09

	2007	2008	2009
BREEDING			
No. cows to bull	81	74	74
No. heifers to bull	17	15	27
Scan %	89.8	91.0	
Calving %	85.7	92.1	
Average bull weaned weight	311.55 kg	33 @ 355.7 kg	
Average heifer weaned weight	306 kg	42 @ 325.83kg	
Average dlwg to weaning – bulls kg	1.48	1.42	
Average dlwg to weaning – heifers kg	1.27	1.30	
Average weaning age (days)		217.5	
Sim Bull progeny average dlwg to weaning kg	Bulls 1.47 heifers 1.30	Bulls 1.46 Heifers 1.29	
Luing bull progeny average dlwg to weaning kg	N/A	Bulls 1.37 Heifers 1.30	
AI Sim bull progeny average dlwg to weaning kg	N/A	Bulls 1.45 Heifers 1.35	
Av cow weight		678 kg	
Kg calf weaned per kg of cow and heifer served		0.42 kg ?	
FINISHING			
Av finished weight males kg DWT	321	323.72 (10 left to go)	
Av finished weight heifers kg DWT	324 (2006 born)	305 (2007 born)	
Dlwg wean to finish males			
Bull 1			
Bull 2			
Bull 3			
Dlwg wean to finish heifers			
Bull 1			
Bull 2			
Bull 3			

Appendix 2

Ongoing Sheep Performance Record as at 21 May 09

	2007	2008	2009	2010
BREEDING				
Scan % ewes	202	194.6	198.5	
Scan % hoggs	85	145.2	165.7	
Barren % ewes	0.94	0.45	2.0	
Barren % hoggs	37.5	16.67	14.3	
Lambing % to weaning	164	169.55	159.5 (as at 15.5.09)	
Ewes and hoggs put to tup	252	266	237	
Concentrate feed per ewe (kg)		11.84	3.8	
Energy buckets per ewe kg		2.37	4.0	
Average weaning weight kg		30.83		
Weaning date	25.07.07	25.07.08		
FINISHING				
% lambs finished by end October		30		
Average sale weight kg DWT		19.96		
Average dlwg weaning to sale				
% U, R and O.		10, 85, 4.		
Average price per head £		55.47		
Lambing %, sold/ retained	161.9	168.4		