

LIVESTOCK+

QMS Sharing best practice from Scottish livestock businesses **SUMMER 2014**

+ *Features*

CATTLE PROFITABILITY KEY TO
PORTERS' FARMING ENTERPRISE

IMPROVING PRODUCTIVITY
AND PROFIT FROM GRASS

HIGH PERFORMANCE FROM
LOWGROUND SHEEP FLOCK

UPDATES

**Kintyre Monitor Farm
Builds on Improvements**

**Improving Performance
Through EBVs**

**Pig Monitor Farm Upbeat
About Future**

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For the latest, up-to-the-minute information follow us on Twitter or Like our Facebook page – Quality Meat Scotland.

WELCOME

“ Welcome to the first edition of QMS **LIVESTOCK+**, which we hope you enjoy reading and find a valuable source of information and innovation. We are producing this publication on a trial basis to replace the newsletters you received previously from QMS. We would welcome any constructive feedback or suggestions you have on the content of **LIVESTOCK+** which is very much focused on the work we do to improve livestock producers’ efficiency and profitability.

You will find many more examples of best practice in Scottish livestock farming by visiting our website www.qmscotland.co.uk (where you can also sign up for our free weekly newsletter) or by following us on Facebook or Twitter. I would also very much encourage you to get involved in the range of activities, most of them free, detailed on the opposite page and funded by QMS.

During recent weeks I have had a good opportunity to get out and about and meet farmers and I am pleased to say that, despite the uncertainty our industry has endured of late, the vast majority of livestock producers are positive about the future. They are also committed to producing top quality Scotch Beef PGI, Scotch Lamb PGI and Specially Selected Pork.

Something that has been very heartening at recent events I have attended – including our Grazing for Growth conference in Stirling – is the huge appetite from farmers for information about opportunities to improve the efficiency and profitability of their businesses. This augurs well for the future.✚

Best wishes from the team at QMS and myself.

Jim McLaren, Chairman, Quality Meat Scotland

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Working for our industry



Uel Morton, Chief Executive, QMS

QMS has a small team of staff who are committed to delivering a very diverse programme of activity for the Scottish red meat industry.

Our staff operate in a number of very specialist areas – marketing, industry development, economics services, communications and brands integrity.

Our industry development team focuses on knowledge transfer activities, including our monitor farm programme and many other activities aimed at improving efficiency and profitability. LIVESTOCK+ is very much focused on this area of our work and sharing some of the many great examples of innovation and best practice in Scottish livestock farming. However, there are many other important areas of work QMS undertakes such as that delivered by our marketing team to drive brand awareness and build markets for Scotch Beef PGI, Scotch Lamb PGI and Specially Selected Pork.

Our economics services team works on policy impact analysis and provides market information and other data to help businesses plan for the future. In particular, this team monitor CAP developments, world trade and climate change policies as well as looking at future supply patterns. They also provide information from which producers can benchmark their businesses.

The communications team delivers the PR campaigns behind our brands and a very extensive programme of health and education activity to encourage good understanding of the importance of a healthy diet and the role of beef, lamb and pork in achieving that. We also have a Brands Integrity Manager whose role includes managing QMS's six assurance schemes as well as developing the brands licencing scheme. For more information on the work we do for the industry please visit www.qmscotland.co.uk or follow us on Facebook and Twitter.+

Falkirk pupil wins QMS 'Commonwealth Burger' challenge

A "Scotch Bonnet" burger described by judges as "delicious, healthy and very Scottish", has lifted the top award in a "Commonwealth Burger" competition run by QMS.

The three finalists in the nationwide competition battled it out at the Royal Highland Show, with the standard of all three burgers summed up by judges as extremely high. BBC's The Voice contestant Max Murphy, also British Judo Champion, announced the overall winner from 12-year-old Eve Cattanach from St Mungo's High School in Falkirk.

Eve's Scotch Bonnet burger contains lean Scotch Beef mince, Scottish free range egg, Scottish cheddar cheese and Scotch Bonnet chilli. Another ingredient which caught the judges' eye was porridge oats. After working with local Scotch Butchers Club butcher Rod Gillie from Thomas Johnston in Falkirk to refine her final recipe, Eve beat off tough competition from her fellow finalists, Hannah Riddell from Dornoch Academy in Sutherland and Cameron Tweedie, Cameron McGlade



and Haydn Evans from Cedarbank School in Livingston, to win a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for any budding young chef. In addition to her burger being sold in Scotch Butchers Club member shops across the country in the run up to the Commonwealth Games, her school will receive a £250 voucher to spend on delicious Scotch Beef and Lamb PGI as well as Specially Selected Pork.

Scottish schools were invited to participate in the challenge, which involved the children creating a delicious burger incorporating a Commonwealth twist using naturally produced Scotch Beef PGI, Scotch Lamb PGI and/or Specially Selected Pork. The three finalists were shortlisted from 295 entries.

Jennifer Robertson, Health and Education Coordinator at QMS, said: "The competition provided a fun and entertaining opportunity to raise awareness of healthy eating and

encourage the pupils to take a more active role in the kitchen, learning how to prepare and cook meat from scratch. The assistance of Scotch Butchers Club butchers was invaluable and they worked with the pupils to develop their recipes and think about what makes a product popular with customers."+



Image: Eve is pictured above with Max Murphy and butcher Rod Gillie from Thomas Johnston in Falkirk.

Importance of “Bull MOTs” highlighted

Farmers are being urged to bear in mind the importance of a “Bull MOT” check to ensure cows get back in calf for next year.

QMS’s “Guide to Improving Suckler Herd Fertility” reveals that in excess of one quarter of all working bulls are sub-fertile or infertile. By asking their vet to undertake an annual Pre-breeding Soundness check (PBS), problems can be identified in good time to prevent their bottom lines, and business efficiency, being hit as a result of cows not getting into calf.

Graeme Richardson, Director and senior vet at Thrums Veterinary Group, based at Kirriemuir, has been carrying out PBS

checks for over 10 years and believes they are an important management tool to ensure a compact calving period and to improve herd efficiency.

He said a large percentage of Thrums’ beef farmer clients are now making use of the check-up and are enjoying the improved results and peace of mind which it brings.

“Our customers fall into three categories: those who have had a problem with a bull; those who carry out the checks routinely; and those who get new purchases checked. Unfortunately many farmers come to us because they have had a problem, but hopefully we can reduce the chances of the same thing happening again.”

Ideally, bulls should be checked four to eight weeks before being turned out, which allows enough time to

re-test, if necessary, and also to source a replacement if a bull is found to be sub-fertile.

The PBS examination checks the bull’s general health, condition and locomotion, internal and external genitalia and a sample of semen is collected and analysed for volume, density, motility and abnormalities.

It is generally accepted that a bull will run with a maximum of 30 to 40 cows. However, Graeme said that one of the benefits of identifying fertility is that sometimes he will recommend that a bull can run with 50 cows and still achieve the 95% conception target in nine weeks.

Graeme explained: “A compact calving period makes management easier and improves efficiency and hence profitability, with a more even batch of calves to sell at the end of the day.”+

Grazing project aims to increase meat output per hectare



Improving the utilisation of grass to increase the kilogrammes of meat produced per hectare is the main objective of a major new QMS grassland project.

The new initiative is seeing six grazing groups established throughout Scotland – in the South-West, Borders, Central, Aberdeenshire and northern Scotland.

The groups will be hosted by farmers who are keen to make more of their grazing and each will have around 20 members, who will attend four group meetings each year. The meetings will involve a range of expert speakers and will focus on the host’s previous performance data as well as monitoring growth rates of their stock to target maximum uplift in performance from grazing.

“There is huge potential for efficiencies in red meat production by refining our grassland management,” said Johnny Mackey, QMS Head of Industry Development. “Currently only 50–60% of the grass we grow ends up in the rumen.”

“Grassland can be a major asset to all sheep and cattle producers, and by bringing together groups of enthusiastic, positive farmers, we will have a fantastic opportunity to look at better grass utilisation through improved grazing management which will, in turn, impact positively on the bottom line.”

The project will also see the establishment of a network of new grass measurement stations set up on a range of farm types located around the country. Each station will provide QMS with important information on grass performance, to back up the data gathered on the host farms and provide a valuable tool for the Scottish red meat industry.+

The Scottish red meat industry contributes around £2.1 billion to Scotland’s economy

To request a copy of the Scottish Red Meat Industry Profile – packed with key stats – email info@qmscotland.co.uk



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New Joint Industry Initiative to promote Scotch Lamb PGI



Television presenter Cat Cubie joined representatives from the Scottish sheep industry at the Royal Highland Show to unveil an exciting new Scotch Lamb PGI initiative.

Quality Meat Scotland, NFU Scotland and the National Sheep Association (NSA) are working together on the joint initiative which will see an unprecedented, united PR push behind Scotch Lamb. The details of the initiative, which will involve farmers around the country, are being kept under wraps ahead of a major consumer PR launch. However, the organisations behind the activity revealed that wide-scale Scotch Lamb sampling activity by farmers at supermarkets located around Scotland will form a major part of the initiative.

The widespread sampling activity will take place over one special weekend celebrating Scotch Lamb and will dovetail with QMS's major marketing campaign behind Scotch Lamb.

QMS is set to continue its "Wham Bam Thank You Lamb" campaign, which was launched last August. The success of the campaign – which aimed to communicate how simple it is to cook quick, tasty mid-week dishes with Scotch Lamb – was recognised with two silver awards last week at the Scottish Marketing Society Awards.

"We are looking forward to working closely with NFU Scotland and NSA on this initiative and delighted with the response achieved so far from farmers around the country who are keen to get involved," said QMS Chairman Jim McLaren.

"The fact that there is so much early support from grassroots level for this joint initiative is really encouraging and augurs well for its success."

"Every sheep farmer in Scotland can be a fantastic brand ambassador for Scotch Lamb and, by working together, we hope to drive home the message about the quality of our natural, grass-fed product, underpinned by the industry's quality assurance schemes."



Pictured at the launch are some of the farmers from around the country who are getting involved in the new initiative. Back row (from left) Ewan Hyslop, Hugh Hamilton, Stephen Withers. Middle row (from left) George Milne (of NSA), Neil MacRae, John Wildman, Sybil Macpherson (of NSA) and Martin Kennedy. Front Row (from left) John Sleight (of NFU Scotland); TV presenter Cat Cubie and Laurent Vernet of Quality Meat Scotland.



The 2014 QMS campaign behind Scotch Lamb PGI is set to reach 90% of all adults in Scotland -



3.6m
people



Pig Welfare in the Spotlight

Scotch Butchers Club member shops are running a QMS promotion which raises the profile of the importance of welfare in the production of Specially Selected Pork and includes recipe leaflets and posters for display in their shops.

QMS works very closely with the Scottish SPCA, Scotland's animal welfare charity, on the industry's assurance schemes and each of the pig farms which are members of the assurance scheme are inspected by the Scottish SPCA.

Scottish SPCA Senior Inspector Don Wilson said: "The Scottish SPCA very much values the opportunity to work closely with the farming sector. It is also very important that the public has a good understanding of livestock farming and the priority placed on good welfare to ensure consumer confidence in the food sector."

Pigs from a Perthshire farm starred on the QMS stand at the Royal Highland Show. The pigs came from one of the 100 plus pig farms in Scotland which meet the farm assurance standards required by QMS to produce pork which can carry the Specially Selected Pork Approved by the Scottish SPCA labels. The four-month old pigs, which have a Large White Landrace dam and Optimus sire, joined the cattle and sheep on the stand to help



Above: Farmer Duane Whittaker, pictured with the pigs and Scottish SPCA Senior Inspector Don Wilson on the Perthshire farm.

improve the public's understanding of the care and commitment which farmers, and others, take to produce top quality beef, lamb and pork.

"We are keen to ensure consumers, old and young, also have a good understanding of the quality assurance schemes which underpin the industry's brands – Scotch Beef PGI, Scotch Lamb PGI and Specially Selected Pork," said Jennifer Robertson, QMS Health and Education Co-ordinator.

The cattle on the stand this year came from the McNee family's Woodend Farm, near Armadale. The cow was a six year-old Sim-Luing Cow which was at the show with her March-born Charolais cross heifer calf. The ewes and lambs were provided by the Dykes family, stars of this year's BBC Lambing Live, of South Slipperfield Farm, West Linton, and included some of the lambs featured on the show, presented by Kate Humble and Adam Henson.✚

Singapore Delivers New Opportunities for Scotch Beef PGI and Scotch Lamb PGI



A keen appetite for Scotch Beef PGI and Scotch Lamb PGI was very much in evidence at the Food and Hotel Asia (FHA) event in Singapore.

QMS attended the event – which attracted more than 40,000 trade delegates from the region's food sector – as part of a Scottish delegation organised by Scotland Development International and Scotland Food & Drink. Singapore is renowned for its fine dining and eating out culture, with more than 6,700 restaurants and food outlets registered in 2012. It also has the third highest per capita income in the world, and half of the world's population is within six hours flight of Singapore. It is not surprising, therefore, that there is a big demand for high-quality, premium food products in both the retail and food service sectors.

Laurent Vernet, QMS Head of Marketing, said that during the course of the event several significant new opportunities for Scotch Beef and Scotch Lamb were identified. "Consumers in Singapore are very interested in sourcing food which has strong ethical credentials. They are keen on grass-fed, growth hormone free meat," Laurent stated the importance placed on animal welfare was very much in evidence in the region, which has a strong vegetarian lobby with poster campaigns related to animal welfare very much in evidence on public transport routes. "Singapore offers a real opportunity for us. It is not a big market, but it is a lucrative one – with real potential for top quality Scotch Beef and Scotch Lamb for both the retail and food service sectors."✚

** The profile of Scotch Beef PGI and Scotch Lamb PGI was also high in Sweden at GastroNord, the largest food fair in the Nordic countries. Representatives from QMS attended the event, which attracted around 20,000 visitors including premium retailers, foodservice representatives and top European chefs.

Scotch Beef in Commonwealth Football Celebration

Over 100 school children competed in colourful Scotch Beef PGI T-shirts at a StreetSoccer Scotland event, with a Commonwealth Games theme, in Glasgow's George Square.

The event also saw the launch of a new publication, "Eat Well. Play Well", produced by QMS and StreetSoccer Scotland and highlighting the importance of eating a healthy diet to performance on the pitch.✚



**STREET
SOCCER**
Scotland



CATTLE PLAY MAJOR ROLE IN **PROFITABILITY**



The **Porter family** from Carnoustie have had cattle on their arable farm for over 50 years and have every faith in them continuing to be profitable.



Father and son Willie and James Porter farm East and West Scryne and Carnegie in partnership, while Willie is also responsible for 7,500 acres of hill in Glen Lyon. They believe the combination of hill and arable ground is ideal for their autumn calving suckler herd, while the spring calvers have their permanent base on the Carnoustie farms.

Speaking at a Quality Meat Scotland (QMS) Planning for Profit event in Perth, Willie Porter explained that much of the 900 acres of arable land at the coast is very light and requires grass in the rotation which fits in with the cattle enterprise.

Meanwhile James Porter said: "We see considerable benefits, in terms of cereal and potato yields, from having grass and cattle in the rotation, and we believe that the cattle are partly responsible for the fertility of the arable farm."

They attribute much of their success to the Blue Grey cow, which is economical to keep, long-living and hardy. The average cow weight is 525kg, and one of the key messages from the Porters' experience with the herd is that you don't need to have large cows to produce decent-sized fast-growing calves provided that you look after the cows and choose the right bulls.

The neat cow size also offers the potential to stock more cows on a given area of land, resulting in highly efficient cows producing more kg of beef for a given area of land.

They buy replacements for the 100 autumn and 80 spring calving herds at Newcastleton.

James said: "Blue Greys are incredibly healthy and fertile cows. We expect to get an average of nine calves out of them, which means depreciation is running at only around £30 per cow."

"The autumn calvers are summered above 1500ft at Glen Lyon and they are great foragers. They always come off the hill well-fleshed, fit and ready to calve down in September," explained Willie. This herd is outwintered on lighter fields at Scryne where three blocks of Bittern kale is grown with barley stubble run off. Bittern is the variety of choice because it is slightly shorter and does not get too tall and fall over.

"The cows and calves winter really well on the kale from November to March; each cow and calf unit will eat 30kg of kale per day. The calves are only creep fed from the turn of the year," said Willie Porter. A Limousin bull is used on the heifers and three Charolais bulls on the cows, but thanks to the fertility of the Blue Grey, bulls are only in for nine weeks and calving percentage is always around 95% to finishing.

Willie said: "I believe profitability lies in keeping a small cow for economy and using a big bull. We have few problems calving the Blue Greys which, although small, have a wide pelvis."

The 2011 costing showed the Porters' cows were making a net margin of £114-£113/cow up to weaning, after fixed costs had been deducted.

Potatoes, cereals and soft fruit are the mainstay of the business for the Porters, but the cattle have an important part to play in utilising around 30 acres of land which is unsuitable for ploughing, and the spring calving herd spends the whole year at the lowland farms.

They clean up after vegetables and potatoes before ploughing gets underway in January when they are housed to calve in February and March. This is the only time cows and calves are inside, and by April/May they are out to summer on permanent and temporary grass.

Willie commented, "We have adapted our cattle enterprise to suit our arable farms, but this could not be done everywhere. We have the ideal conditions for out-wintering cattle—light land, low rainfall and very little frost."

However, he was adamant that the cattle have always paid their way thanks to keeping the right type of cattle and managing them well.

James pointed out that having spring and autumn herds spreads the fixed, labour and bull costs. All the calves are finished on a barley beef system with bulls kept entire.

He added: "The bulls average 332kg live weight at weaning and are intensively fed until they are finished at an average of 14.2 months and 355kg dead weight. They are all sold to ABP, Perth, and 80% make U grade." He explained that the average daily dead weight gain from birth to weaning for the bulls was 0.72kg, while the heifers, which are less intensively finished to 270kg at 16 months, average 0.46 daily dead weight gain with the majority making R grade.

Both Willie and James have confidence in the cattle business, and Willie stated, "I have always been a great believer in diversification and having a variety of enterprises on the farm, because when one goes up another will come down. At the moment we can not sell potatoes but can easily sell cattle!" He added: "We would not have nearly 200 cows if they were not profitable."+

+ To get involved with QMS's Planning for Profit initiative please visit, www.qmscotland.co.uk where you'll find more information and case studies, or speak to us on **0131 472 4040**.

THE NUMBERS: AT A GLANCE



Average Blue Grey cow weight



Each cow and calf unit will eat 30kg of kale per day.



(November to March)



Blue Grey average calf birth rate

IMPROVING PRODUCTIVITY AND PROFIT FROM GRASS

The enthusiasm among Scottish livestock farmers to look at the opportunities to increase their bottom line through better use of grass was very evident at QMS's recent "**Grazing for Growth**" conference.



Around 120 delegates attended the morning session and few would go home without a better idea of how to make grass pay. QMS Chairman Jim McLaren said, "Grass is the largest crop grown in Scotland and we are good at growing it, but we will be better after this conference."

Jim said that that farmers were already good at converting grass – a protein source which humans cannot eat – into protein we can eat (meat) in an environmentally friendly way, but they could improve. "QMS talks about uptake of proven solutions, and this is a perfect example. We have the knowledge to improve our productivity from grass."

It was clear from listening to the speakers that, while Scottish farmers are good at growing grass and producing quality livestock from it, they could be utilising pastures much more effectively and efficiently, and potentially improving profits by doing so.

Michael Shannon farms 207 acres at Thankerton Camp Farm near Biggar and also has a butchers shop in Lanark. He finishes 150 head of cattle, mostly Aberdeen-Angus cross heifers, per year off a 100% forage-based diet and buys in no hard feed at all.

He established his on-line butchery business and shop in 2007 to add value to his grass-finished beef and lamb but stressed that he keeps the two businesses separate and sells the meat to the shop at the QMS-published pence per kg every week.

Michael said that at Thankerton Camp "grass is king." However, it was on a visit to New Zealand, when he saw cattle grazing on a techno-grazing system gaining two to three kg per day, that he had his "light bulb" moment, and he came back to Scotland to put a simple system in place which he can operate on his own.



Now he has 85 acres which are split using electric fencing into approximately one-acre paddocks and is rotationally grazed by 200 heifers through the summer. There are 30 acres of silage and kale for winter feed, 47 acres of wholecrop, 40 acres of young grass and a few acres of additional silage ground.

Michael said: "Cutting silage is a surplus management tool; grazing grass is king and the important thing is to keep the grass young with high sugar levels to achieve the target daily liveweight gain of 1.5kg per animal per day or 1,200kg of liveweight gain per acre."

Every day the cattle are moved onto new pasture, which is ideally 10 to 15 cm tall and grazed down to three to four cm. This year Michael said there was an exceptional peak of growth in May, but in general he considers having to get the topper out means he has failed in his task of stocking at rates which keep up with the grass growth curve.

New, young grass is grazed by what Michael called "grassland management assistants" (more commonly known as sheep) and he finishes all the progeny of the 200 ewes on grass.

During the summer, silage bales are set out at the end of each of the winter paddocks and the same system is deployed, with cattle moved from paddock to paddock of kale with the ring feeder rolled over a new bale each day. Winter targets are 0.5kg DLWG and costs, including baling, wrapping, fencing, seed etc are 69p per beast. He over-winters around 170 head.

Michael said: "The average cost per animal per day throughout the year is 48p and so far in 2014, the 33 head of cattle sold have provided a gross profit of £1.31 per day."

Anglesey beef and lamb producer Richard Rogers took his inspiration from visiting Michael Shannon's farm, and his rotational grazing system for Friesian store cattle sees them gaining 1.5kg per head per day minimum. He measures the grass and weighs the cattle to work out exact margins and reckons the system takes the uncertainty out of grazing livestock.

He said: "It is easy to go into a field of cattle or sheep and think they are doing well, but you have to measure to be sure."

Ten years ago Welsh dairy farmer Rhys Williams had no farm or cattle, but now he milks 750 cows on two units on the Llyn Peninsula. The cows are split between an 80ha farm which he owns and 150ha on a shared farming basis, but both systems are heavily reliant on milk from grass.

His own farm, Trygarn, runs 300 cows on a spring block calving system and is paying for itself by growing up to 16 tonnes of grass dry matter per ha using 300kg of nitrogen and stocking at 4.4 cows per hectare.

Rhys employs a paddock grazing system too, and the secret on his farm is to have a good track access system established.

He said: "I consider myself a grass farmer, not a dairy farmer. I constantly measure the grass and estimate the dry matter which makes decisions much easier."

He continued: "It is essential to know the cost of production and be able to identify the areas in which money is being wasted. One of my key targets is to make £200 to £250 profit per tonne of dry matter of grass grown."

After hearing from three farmers who are putting rotational grazing systems into practice, the conference heard more technical details from Irishman, John Bailey, who does most of his work in France now through his company PatureSens, which has produced a computer programme which helps grass management. He stressed the importance of correct grazing to keep the structure of the plant right and believed you could achieve 400g/day liveweight on sheep and up to 2kg per day for cattle on good grass, grazed correctly. He said: "Farmers need to learn to associate profit

with plant husbandry – a good paddock structure becomes a management tool."

The final speaker at the event was Trevor Cook from New Zealand, a vet by trade but now a consultant on nutrition management by grazing. He also emphasised the profit aspect of farming and said: "Farmers have to focus on making money and establish what drives the profit; increasing productivity does not always increase profit, but increasing productivity while reducing costs does."

He said he could see a lot of similarities between Scotland and New Zealand, not only in the landscape but also in the farming methods and farmers themselves. However, he observed: "In New Zealand, the common factor among the top 10% of dairy farmers is not breed or yield but the fact that they utilise 85% of pastures they grow."

Trevor said: "Everyone gets excited about per head performance, which is a driver of profit – but not the main one. Measuring the return on feed consumed leads to the gross margin per hectare. The main reason for individual animals not performing is that they are not being allocated enough pasture, and the second reason is the quality of the pasture is not good enough."

QMS's new grassland activities are headed up by knowledge transfer specialist Michael Blanche, who admits he is obsessive about grass. "Good grazing provides better nutrition for one-fifth of the price of a typical total mixed ration," he said. Six grass stations have been set up in Scotland by QMS along with six grazing groups, with the focus on increasing the kg of meat produced per hectare through better utilisation of grass.✚

✚ Visit www.qmscotland.co.uk to view the video of the conference, hear from all of the speakers and find out more about how you can get involved in QMS's Grazing Groups.



MAXIMISING PROFIT FROM GRASS

Achieving high performance from a lowground sheep system has been the secret of the success of start-up farming couple, **Emily and Malcolm Grant** at Coldrochie Farm, Redgorton, on the outskirts of Perth.

For more information on how you can get involved in QMS initiatives, visit www.qmscotland.co.uk or call us on **0131 472 4040**.

With Malcolm having taken an earlier decision not to return to his family farm in Inverness-shire, the couple managed to buy 30ha of bare land from Strathord Estates in 2001 and rent a further 14ha of seasonal grass every year for their flock of 260 Texel cross ewes and 80 hogs. They have built a house and shed on the land; however, Emily pointed out they do not have enough land from which to make a living, and the couple both work full time.

Malcolm works in renewables with SSE and Emily has a job with SNH in their Agricultural Policy department. She said: "I am lucky that the office is so close to home, I can go back to the farm every lunchtime and keep an eye on things."

It was the need to maximise profit from grass and keep the winter workload low which led the Grants to choose the Texel breed, with its comprehensive Estimated Breeding Values (EBVs).

Emily explained: "We started out with Texel cross Cheviots but the flock is now nearly pure Texel. We select rams on the EBVs that suit our system – eight week growth rate EBV, positive backfat, lambing ease and faecal egg count – and we are pleased with the performance in recent years which suits our low-maintenance system of finishing from forage." She added: "One of the reasons for concentrating on the eight-week growth rate is that it reflects the milking ability of the ewe, too."

The Grants are part of the Perth and Angus Business Improvement Group (BIG), one of a network of BIGs funded by Quality Meat Scotland (QMS) and Scottish Government's Skills Development Scheme. The group, run by facilitator Peter Cook, has encouraged them to analyse performance both physically and financially, and to compare other members of the group. Emily feels the small group size and on-farm sessions are of real value. "Everyone in the group has been really open about their businesses. Within our businesses we all do some things really well but, equally, there are always areas where we can improve. Sharing information allows us to identify the areas where we can improve and learn from others. Our group is a really good mix of highly innovative farmers – it's like having a group of specialists on your farm at once. There are always some great thoughts and ideas up for discussion."

The Grants have embraced the use of EID and use it to select the best ewes for



replacements, but being part of the BIG has encouraged them to analyse important traits such as liveweight gain and speed of finishing. The top 25% of the Texel lambs are achieving liveweight gains of over 400g/day and are finishing at 12 weeks, while the majority (three-quarters) are sold at around 16 weeks and they are all away off grass by October.

Lambs are sold through the Highland Glen Producers Group, which provides good feedback on weights and grades, with the majority of the lambs grading U3L with a few E3Ls among them. In 2013, the couple won the Highland Glen Producers performance award for having the highest proportion of lambs in the specification throughout the year – over 98%.

"Within our businesses we all do some things really well but, equally, there are always areas where we can improve."

Peter Cook has calculated that getting high lamb growth rates and finishing fast off grass may give £12/ewe more margin than winter finishing, even if there is a good price rise. If there is no rise in lamb prices, grass finishing gives over £40/ewe more margin. At 480 kg/ha, the Grants achieve the highest level of liveweight production from grass within the Perth and Angus BIG. "We do this without nitrogen fertiliser or creep feeding, which amounts to big cost savings," observed Emily.

Careful grass management is critical to the enterprise, with most of the farm down to a white clover mix. However, they also re-seed

red clover leys for silage, which is safe to feed the ewes from six weeks after tugging. They finish their cast ewes on the aftermath in September and Emily said: "Another reason for focussing on the Texel is the value of cast ewes. We sell them at UA, and last year they were making £90 to £100 per head."

Last year they sowed some chicory and plantain, but it is too early for any results yet. The Grants hope the chicory, with its deep rooting system, will help to improve the soil structure and biological activity and provide some anthelmintic benefit while plantain should help rumen function.

By growing quality silage, the aim is to feed as little concentrate as possible. Emily explained: "We analyse the silage and condition score the ewes so we know exactly how much extra they require. However, last year's late spring left us with a much higher feed bill than usual, as we had finished our silage stocks just after lambing and had to feed concentrate until the grass finally arrived."

The ewes lamb outdoors from the third week in March and the lambing percentage is 158 to 160% lambs sold. While Emily is happy with the performance of the lambs, she would like a few more lambs, although not triplets because of the extra work involved. She uses EID to help her select replacements from ewes which have produced twins unassisted and feels this will be the focus of the enterprise in coming years.

Being part of the BIG has encouraged the couple to analyse and question everything they do on their farm, to set targets and discover how best to achieve them or why they are not achieving them with the support of Peter Cook and the rest of the farmers in the group.+

BUILDING ON IMPROVEMENTS



Although the Kintyre monitor farm has completed its three-year term, monitor farmer **Duncan Macalister** of Glenbarr Farms is determined to continue to build on and develop the initiatives introduced during the past three years.



Glenbarr Farms, a mixed 1,730 acre (700ha) unit, located a few miles north of Campbeltown on the west coast of the Kintyre Peninsula, supports a suckler herd of 140 mainly Aberdeen-Angus cows, just over 500 breeding ewes and approximately 120 acres of spring barley. Land type ranges from hill to shore, with sitka spruce woodland on the higher land occupying more than a third of the farm's total acreage.

At the final official meeting, Duncan and facilitator Linda McLean gave a brief overview of some of the many topics addressed since the first monitor farm meeting in March 2011. Duncan admitted that being the monitor farmer for the area had given him "a right good boot up the backside." He told the group: "I realise now that I had been doing more or less the same thing for the previous 20 years."

"I've welcomed hearing the views and opinions of the community group as opportunities and challenges have been discussed. And I've really appreciated the support of the farmers who've been at the meetings. I hope they've also benefitted from the monitor farm experience. Sometimes just a little comment has helped to make a big difference."

At the initial meeting Duncan had highlighted breaking up the soil pan and lifting the pH levels as among the main tasks he wanted help with. Soil improvement has since been frequently discussed at the 17 monitor farm meetings. "I had thought the solution to the farm's soil structure and drainage issues was to plough deeply," he commented. "Now I know that by doing that I was just burning diesel, burying organic matter and digging up rocks! Thanks to being the monitor farm, I now realise that the main problem was on the top – surface compaction, which in the grassland is being resolved by aerating with a sward lifter."

The deep tap root of red clover, sown after barley in 2012, has helped to break through the soil pan. "The improvement in soil structure is clear to see, and the red clover silage crop was so heavy the pit burst. The other good news is that the cattle really thrive on the red clover silage."

"I've also learnt that the organic matter in the soil's top layer is the 'engine' which makes the soil work, and I had greatly underestimated the value of FYM (farmyard manure)."

The bedding from the winter-housed cattle is now spread on the arable ground before shallow, instead of deep, ploughing. "The muck combined with shallow ploughing has rapidly resulted in more worms in this land than we've ever seen before!"

“I’m also converted to sward rejuvenation by over-seeding, instead of ploughing and doing a full re-seed. Some of the fields have recently been GPS soil mapped in detail, revealing big variations in soil compaction and pH levels within individual fields, which will be tackled. Thanks to the mapping, money will only be spent on the areas which need it.”

Livestock health issues have also been addressed. Since tests in summer 2012, confirming the breeding flock had been exposed to Toxoplasma, incoming gimmers have been routinely vaccinated for Toxoplasmosis. Scanning percentages have considerably improved.

“The improvement in soil structure is clear to see, and the red clover silage crop was so heavy the pit burst.”

In 2012, it was also established that the IBR virus was circulating in the breeding herd. The cattle are now routinely vaccinated against this respiratory disease which suppresses fertility and reduces performance. Two Hereford bulls were purchased to breed “Black Baldies”, a rotational cross of Hereford and Aberdeen-Angus. The first home-bred, Hereford-sired Black Baldie heifers, calving at two years old, will produce their first Aberdeen-Angus sired calves this spring. The cattle are in the process of being Electrically Identified. “I plan to increase cow numbers to 150, and I’m determined to improve performance and productivity,” stated Duncan.

“EID will help to identify the better – as well as the poorer – producing females, which will guide replacement selection as well as which ones to cull. It will also save a great deal of time in the cattle paperwork.”

A Whole Farm Review had recommended increasing barley acreage from 100 to 120, to reduce purchased feed costs. “This resulted in being able to sell over 40 surplus tonnes of barley, which added almost £10,000 to the bottom line.” During an away day to a previous Wigtownshire monitor farmer – Robert Parker of Drumdow, near Stranraer – the group learnt that Robert beds his cattle on “green” sawdust. Changing from straw to sawdust at Glenbarr Farms has since resulted in over £1,100 per winter month, plus many hours of time, being saved on bedding cattle. Additional projects are in the advanced planning stage, including more rotational grazing. “Access to water was a hurdle, but a new header tank on the hill will help resolve that,” said Duncan.

Three years is a short time in farming; however Duncan’s enthusiasm to embrace the opportunities of the monitor farm project with gusto has yielded more than tangible financial benefits.

“I believe that I’ve now developed the confidence to ask the right questions,” he said. “I also feel I now have the knowledge to get the heart of my farm, the soil, sorted. The soil is the foundation of the entire farm, and getting it right is fundamental to lifting performance and yield of all farming enterprises, with the ultimate aim being, of course, to improve the most important thing – the bottom line!” +

Main image: Soil improvement has been a hot topic at meetings. Duncan now views the soil’s top layer as the ‘engine’ which makes the soil work.

Inset: Changing from straw to sawdust at Glenbarr Farms has resulted in over £1,100 per winter month, plus many hours of time, being saved on bedding cattle.



IMPROVING PERFORMANCE THROUGH EBVs

The use of Estimated Breeding Values (EBVs) has been the subject of considerable discussion recently and one family farm which swears by them and has the results to prove it is Shandford, run by the Mather family, near Brechin.

Shandford is one of the 21 case studies showcased in the Planning for Profit initiative aimed at assisting farmers to ensure their businesses are well-placed to operate profitably in the face of possible reduction of support payments. It is supported by the Scottish Government's Skills Development Scheme, Quality Meat Scotland (QMS) and NFU Scotland.

There are six members of the Mather family in the partnership with Graeme junior very involved in the livestock enterprises at Shandford. This side of the business involves a commercial herd of 360 mainly Limousin cross cows and 1,300 sheep. The family has recently started using Aberdeen-Angus and Shorthorn bulls on the heifers and is retaining some for replacements, finding them quiet to handle and milky. The terminal sire on the cows is always a Charolais.

A small herd of 20 pedigree Charolais cows are kept to produce home-bred bulls for use on the commercial herd, and Suffolk and Texel tups are bred on the farm too. "We have much more confidence in using home-bred bulls and tups as we know their families and can select for good traits," said Graeme. The herd is spring and summer calving and all heifers not retained for replacements are finished. Spring-born bull calves are kept entire and finished at 12 to 14 months of age, while the summer-born steers are sold as forward stores at Forfar market.

The finished cattle are sold through ABP at Perth, with the bulls averaging 360kg to 380kg deadweight and the majority grading E and U. Heifers are finished at 18 to 21 months of age at around 330kg deadweight, and for the last two years everything has been R grade or better.

Graeme finds EBVs a valuable management tool, and number one on the list of good scores is ease of calving, followed closely by birth weight. Ideally bulls will also have good growth figures. He said they like to produce bulls which are above average in most traits, known as "curve-benders".

"The cattle from the best bull finished earlier at better weights and had better conformation, making them much more profitable."

By using EID tags he records birth weights and can calculate growth rates and link those back to any particular bull. "The daily liveweight gain for the bulls from birth to slaughter is 1.5kg per head per day," he said. "I have been recording for 15 to 16 years now and in the last ten years the improvement in daily liveweight gain has been 0.45kg per head per day. This mirrors exactly the improvements in the bulls' EBVs."

Graeme worked out that the difference between finished cattle sired by the bull with the poorest EBVs and the one with the best figures over a year averaged £275. He said: "The cattle from the best bull finished earlier at better weights and had better conformation, making them much more profitable."

A member of a beef steering group with ABP and Sainsbury's, Graeme uses the figures to improve efficiency of production, but also to provide the supermarket with a better, more consistent product.

In an effort to improve the performance of the ewe flock, Graeme has been using performance recorded rams for the past four to five years. The 1,000 Texel cross and Mule ewes and 300 ewe lambs are tugged with home-bred Suffolks and Texels and since starting to performance record, he has noticed that lambs are finished significantly earlier.

"We sell our lambs at Forfar Market when they get to over 40kg liveweight, and they have been reaching the target weight more quickly over the last few years. It is too much work to EID tag all the lambs, but as long as we can keep improving the genetics, we should continue to see an improvement in finishing times." ♦



UPBEAT ABOUT THE FUTURE

Aberdeenshire farmers **Danny** and **Alison Skinner** from Lazyfold, Inch, are discovering new ways to improve the efficiency of their pig business thanks to their involvement in the **Quality Meat Scotland** Monitor Farms Programme.



Lazyfold has been a monitor farm for around 20 months, and a key focus has been improving growth rates in the finishing unit through more efficient food conversion.

Danny and Alison farm in partnership with Danny's parents, Dan and May, and they employ four people on the 300 acre unit. The Skinners have around 400 sows, each producing 28.56 piglets per year on average with all the replacements being home-bred.

The family has taken a two-fold approach to becoming more efficient by planning a partial de-population of the herd to improve herd health and also by building a new, environmentally controlled grower/finisher building to improve feed conversion rates and growth.

Danny explained: "Being a monitor farm has pushed us on to improve the business. Facilitators Jim Booth from SAOS and Jamie Robertson of Livestock Management Systems Ltd have helped with budgets and planning, which has given us the confidence to proceed with the new building. Other members of the monitor farm group have also contributed significantly to the decision-making process on design details."

The first step however is to get to the bottom of any disease problems in the herd and, with the help of Allan Ward, QMS Pig Specialist, the Skinners have started testing to confirm the status of the unit for potential diseases. Danny explained: "Production will not be affected, but when the piglets are weaned at four weeks they will be taken off site to another farm while the sows go through a month of treatment for any disease issues we find."

"Our local vets, along with a specialist pig vet, will set up the programme. After this treatment the herd will be regarded as high health and their new progeny will be able to be finished on farm as before – disease free."

Upgrading the health of the herd will have many advantages, according to Danny, not only in reducing costs and stepping up welfare but healthier pigs should also have better feed conversion rates.

The Lazyfold pigs are marketed through Scottish Pig Producers at Huntly and sold to Tulip at Brechin and Woodhead Brothers at Colne, Lancashire.

Danny said: "There is no premium for high health pigs, but there is a real move within the industry to reduce medication and improve health, so we feel we are heading in the right direction."

The new slatted building which will take the pigs through from 10 weeks to finishing will be built to the highest standards with a controlled environment, which should improve growth rates. Feed accounts for 70% of the cost of producing a pig, so efficient feed conversion is very important. Five different rations are used in the first eight weeks post weaning, with the cost varying from £1,200 per tonne to £350 per tonne, so it is critical to know how each ration is performing.

The existing weaner building has electronic ventilation and feeding systems which, from the beginning of May, have been able to "speak to each other." This means that Danny will know exactly how much of each of the five rations the pigs are eating and which is the most efficient. He will also be able to see peaks and troughs in consumption and link them to the environmental conditions, which can be adjusted accordingly thus reducing costs.



Around 70 tonnes of feed are used every week, so if the new shed with its improved environment brings down the finishing time from 22 weeks to 20 weeks, the Skinners will make significant savings. Monitoring and evaluation of the impact of the partial depopulation and investment in the new building is then shared with fellow farmers at the monitor farm meetings, which take place off farm to ensure the biosecurity of the farm is not compromised.

However, it is not just the pig unit which comes under scrutiny at these meetings; the monitor farm project takes a whole farm view, and the Skinner family is also looking at ways to improve cereal yields. They grow 420 acres of wheat and barley, which allows them to be about 55% self-sufficient for feed in the pig unit. Danny said: "Last year we built a slurry store, which has allowed us to target our slurry applications to the most effective time and save on bought-in fertilisers."

"Pigs are currently leaving a healthy margin, so prospects look good."

They also now use a contractor with an umbilical system for slurry application, which means the tank can be emptied in about one-and-a-half days, reducing passes across the field, and thereby preventing soil compaction as well as saving time and money.

The Skinners have had pigs at Lazyfold since the late 1960s and they are positive about the future of the industry. Danny said: "The pig industry has shrunk across the whole of Europe, which has created demand for pork and bacon, and prices are currently at about 160p/kg, which is good value compared to beef or lamb and should be attractive to the consumer. Pigs are currently leaving a healthy margin, so prospects look good." He believes that, with the help of the Monitor Farms Programme, he can continue to improve efficiency, reduce costs, and remain a profitable pig and cereal unit.+

Image above: From left Daniel, Dan and Danny Skinner at Lazyfold.

SUCCESSFUL ON-FARM JOHNE'S STRATEGIES HIGHLIGHTED AT WORKSHOPS

A Speyside farm, where the number of cases of Johne's has greatly reduced since 2010, is one of the case studies being highlighted at a series of workshops taking place around the country.





The workshops are aimed at equipping farmers with a greater understanding of Johne's management options.

Farm manager George Rae, along with the cattleman Colin Calder and shepherd Peter Tinney, run a suckler herd of 200 Aberdeen-Angus cross cows put to Limousin bulls at Ballintomb Farm in Speyside. The successful reduction of Johne's cases at Ballintomb can be attributed to the adoption of a long-term strategy and vision which resulted in real progress on tackling the disease on the farm.

The farm is one of the case studies being reviewed at a series of workshops funded by Quality Meat Scotland and the Scotland Rural Development Programme (SRDP) Skills Development Scheme. The workshops are aimed at equipping farmers with a greater understanding of Johne's management options and at showcasing practical examples of case studies from the previous project, Paraban. This initiative showed how different approaches taken by farms can be successful as long as key principles are applied. Inverness-based SRUC (Scotland's Rural College) epidemiologist Dr Selene Huntley is coordinating the workshops. "Johne's management involves a combination of culling and management decisions based on test results, and other interventions such as environmental management to limit the exposure of animals to Johne's infection," she said.

"Ballintomb Farm is an excellent example of how, despite the setbacks that inevitably happen as part of farming, by adopting a long-term strategy and keeping a long-term vision, real progress can be made."

Regular herd screening means Mr Rae can make early decisions on the management of test positive cases to minimise the risk of infection to the rest of the herd, particularly the young calves. Cows which test positive are isolated and culled as soon

as possible. If the animal is in-calf, she will be allowed to calve in a separate area and managed separately whilst nursing her calf. Calves from cows which test positive are not kept as replacements.

"Removing blood positives from the herd is one of the main ways for George to combat the spread of the disease. As this is an open herd, he strives to source replacements from herds with no known history of Johne's, to minimise the risk of buying in cows with the disease," said Dr. Huntley. However, George recognises that a "bigger picture" approach is also needed to combat Johne's, and he is addressing some of the other potential routes of infection on his farm.

The cows are kept outside all year round, and the natural topography of the area means that free-running burns were previously one of the main sources of water for the stock grazing across the farm. In the absence of availability of fresh-piped water to much of the farmland, George has worked with the Spey Catchment Initiative on the Allt Mor, Achnahannet Burn and River Dulnain enhancement project and improved the sources of water for his stock.

The aim of this project was to improve the water quality along these waterways as well as to enhance the habitat bordering them. Fencing off burns allows the protection of the water courses and environment from poaching by cattle hooves and minimises the risk of contamination of water courses (thought to be another possible way in which Johne's could spread). He has also drained standing water areas and installed solar powered drinking troughs that pump fresh water from the river. Although in the past Ballintomb had clinical cases (where the animals have exhibited symptoms of the disease such as weight loss or

diarrhoea), in recent years early diagnosis has alleviated this. The annual whole herd screening has been simplified as a result of George being a member of a Health Scheme and having a management plan for Johne's in place with his vet.

The workshops involve SRUC, Glasgow University, Edinburgh University and the James Hutton Institute. The aim is to assist farmers across Scotland to identify the best way to control Johne's disease under their specific management conditions.✚

Workshops are being held throughout Scotland this year. If you would like to join one of these evening workshops, or would like to be advised when a workshop is to be held at a location near you, please contact Jo Baughan on **01463 246061** or email **jo.baughan@sruc.ac.uk**.



To view a video on tackling Johne's, visit: **www.qmscotland.co.uk**

A LOOK AT MARKET TRENDS

By **Stuart Ashworth**, QMS Head of Economics Services



Registrations of calves from beef cattle breeds look likely to have stabilised in 2014, with calf mortality in the first third of 2014 much reduced on last year and lower than it was two years ago. Similarly, on-farm cow mortality has been significantly reduced in the first third of 2014 compared with both 2013 and 2012. So the reality is that the 2014 calf supply is likely to be fractionally up on 2013 but well below registrations of a couple of years ago.

Cattle producers have been on something of a roller coaster over the past 18 months, both in terms of the physical performance of their cattle and the market for those cattle. Looking back over their shoulders, cattle farmers will remark on the wet weather of late 2012 that extended into 2013. Associated with that, they will observe the poor quality and availability of feed and forage at this time and its effect on cow and calf performance.

The evidence is there to support their concerns. Cow and calf mortality was unusually high in spring 2013, and the knock-on effect of poor cow fertility

was felt through into 2014 when the latest calf registration information shows reduced calf registrations from January to March but increases in April and May. The months of March, April and May account for some 50% of all Scottish calf registrations, and the total over this period for 2014 is barely changed from 2013 (though in 2014 they were born later in the year). Nevertheless, over the first five months of the year calf registrations are running one per cent lower than last year in Scotland and unchanged across GB as a whole.

The conclusion from these registrations is that the availability of slaughter cattle in Scotland and GB is unlikely to change significantly over the next 24 months. Indeed in the short term, over the next six months, prime cattle supplies are likely to tighten as the fall-off in the number of calves registered in early 2013 begin to reach slaughter age. With carcase weights already at historically high levels, it is unlikely that the weight of beef on the market can be maintained by even higher carcase weights. Indeed heavier carcase weights do create issues regarding consumer acceptance about the size of roasting cuts and steaks.

Meanwhile in Ireland, calf registrations for 2013 were five per cent lower than in 2012, and the number of yearling cattle exported live from Ireland in 2013 increased by over 47,000 head. Irish prime stock supplies are therefore, also expected to tighten up as 2014 moves into 2015.

There are, therefore, a number of factors which suggest that the beef industry roller coaster is likely to move in favour of producers in the coming months. Cattle supplies are threatening to tighten across the UK and Ireland, grass growth has been good and grain futures markets suggest autumn feed grain prices will be lower than last year.

The outlook for global feed grain and protein prices will also favour the pig sector this autumn when around three quarters of the cost of production is feed. This will be welcome as the selling price of prime pigs has come under a little pressure recently through a combination of a slightly better supplied UK market, strengthening sterling and a trade dispute between the European Union and Russia, leaving the European market well supplied with pigmeat despite some growth in European exports to Asia.



However, although UK pigmeat production may increase over the next six months, the European Union is not forecasting any significant change in European pigmeat production over the next half year, and producer prices are likely to remain firm. This will particularly be the case if the current dispute between the European Union and Russia can be resolved quickly.

The more extensive nature of sheepmeat production in Scotland means that the cost savings of a bearish feed market are not as significant as for some other sectors.

Nevertheless, calmer energy and fertiliser prices are helpful certainly as the 2014 lamb crop is expected to be significantly larger than last years. A bigger supply of lambs has already put some pressure on prices in early July. However, with over one third of UK sheepmeat production exported each year of equal importance to the lamb market is the relative strength of sterling against the Euro. Its current strength will act as a drag on farmgate prices.

The months of March, April and May account for some 50% of all Scottish calf registrations...

However, with sheepmeat production expected to be lower in France and Spain this year and some tentative evidence of recovery in consumption of sheepmeat in France, export demand may remain firm. With New Zealand production stable and growth in export trade to the Asia, there is likely to be less competition from the southern hemisphere in the European market this year.

All Scottish red meats need a strong UK market and, with UK consumer confidence at its highest level since 2005, we may be coming to the point where UK consumers are more willing to eat outside the home or to grade up their meat purchases in the home. +



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