



BUTE MONITOR FARM

BRIAN & JANET HILL

THE PLAN

KINGARTH

ISLE OF BUTE

REPORT ON GROUP MEETING

&

OPEN DAY

AT

THE PLAN

10 MAY 2007

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CONTENTS

	Page/s
Summary	III
Group Meeting	III
• Calving 2007	IV
• Lambing 2007	V
• Vet and Med Costs	V
• Fluke & Black Leg	V/VI
• Vaccinating Lambs	VI
• Steering Group	VI
• Older Cattle Disposal Scheme`	VII
Open Day	VII
• Grassland	VII
• Sheep & Lambs	VIII/IX
• Feeding Pre 2007 Lambing	IX
• Electronic Tagging	IX/X
• Cattle	X/XI
Conclusion	XII
Next Meeting	XII
APPENDICES	
Brian's Diary	I
Janet's Diary	II
Open Day Itinerary	III

1.0 SUMMARY

Over 40 farmers and suppliers attended the Group meeting and Open Day in May. There were some far travelled attendees. Jane Mitchell, a Nuffield Scholar from New Zealand, Rod McKenzie who manages the Scottish Sheep Strategy on behalf of QMS from Inverness, Rob and Kath Livesey the first monitor farmers in Scotland from the borders and others from Lismore and Campbeltown

A group meeting started the day with updates from Brian and Janet. Full details form Appendices I & II. The session also covered a discussion on vet and med costs. Johnny Mackey took time to explain the benefits of establishing a steering group. Gavin Hill updated the group on the Older Cattle Disposal Scheme.

After discussing the various topics the group considered that it was cost effective to:

- Dose the cattle and sheep against fluke now
- Vaccinate against black leg
- Continue with vaccinating the lambs with Heptavac P at this time of year

The Open Day was centred on a tour of the Plan. During the afternoon Brian Janet and individual group members updated everyone on particular topics which we have covered over the year.

The itinerary which Brian and Janet had prepared for the day forms Appendix III.

2.0 GROUP MEETING

The group meeting covered:

- Updates from Brian and Janet
- Veterinary and Medicine costs
- Formation of a Monitor Farm Steering Group
- Older cattle Disposal Scheme
- Thirty month slaughter

Brian and Janet provided updates on this year's calving and lambing. .

2.1 Calving 2007

This Spring Brian followed the group recommendations from the March meeting. These included using the newly constructed calving bays on the earth floor in the shed for the heifers, calving the first batch of cows at Garrochty and the second group on the hill. Calving both in the shed and outside has gone well with 90% of the cows calving in the first five 5 weeks.

As recommended by Graeme Richardson MRCVS a speaker at our March meeting Brian used Halocur (Intervet) as a prophylactic treatment for scour for any calves retained on straw courts for more than 48 hours. There were no cases of scour which historically has always been a problem. Any calves judged to be at risk were also given a tube of MVT Calf Flourish, so this may also have contributed to the successful outcome.

Outside, maximum effort was made to keep calved cows turned out in groups of no more than 20/25 and to keep silage feeding constantly moving onto clean areas as much as practical. The dry conditions undoubtedly contributed significantly to virtual total elimination of scour. A combination of one day's rain and cows/calves lying in too concentrated an area did result in one group of calves beginning to show some signs of mild scour. Moving onto clean ground and a return to dry weather saw any problem eliminated.

The disbudding of calves at 24-48 hours also contributed to make the "clean ground" policy a practical proposition since groups could be moved further away without the need to bring them back for dehorning at 2-3 weeks which was the former practice. There have been no incidences of navel ill or joint ill this year which appears to prove conclusively that the administration of long acting Terramycin as a prophylactic to all calves was justified.

Calving on the hill proved too time consuming as the cows and calves spread. After 4 calvings the remaining cows were calved at Garrochty. Even if the environmental conditions are less favourable in the future, calving the cattle at Garrochty now seems to be the most practical option unless new hill parks can be fenced.

Cows put to the Limousin bull which was diagnosed as sub fertile in March all calved OK. The fertility test in March showed that the bull developed a problem which could have been costly in 2008 if it had gone undetected.

2.2 Lambing 2007

Having reduced the flock to 700 ewes Janet was able to report more lambs from less ewes. There had been fewer hanging lambs and only 10% losses from scanning to lambing. However prolapse, a widespread problem throughout Scotland this year, had been more of an issue this year. Janet considered that the ewes were not over fat at lambing.

Possible reasons put forward were, more internal fat within the ewe combined with bigger lambs due to more grass being about at lambing time. Rod McKenzie confirmed instances of prolapse throughout Scotland this season. It is also an issue in New Zealand, again with no specific cause put forward.

In terms of achieving an easy care prolific flock lambing results showed that a Lleyn crossing policy could be the way forward. Janet instanced 60 half cross Lleyn gimmers, in lamb to the Lleyn, which lambed within 18 days at 146% with minimal assistance.

2.3 Vet and Med Costs

Both Brian and Janet are aware that veterinary and medicine are a significant cost each year. However discussion agreed that taking no action on certain aspects could prove even more costly. The topics covered were a third treatment in the year for fluke, treating calves for black leg. and vaccinating lambs

2.3.1 Fluke

At our meeting last September Ian Gill MRCVS had suggested that there could be a case for a third fluke treatment in the year. The discussion centred on administering a flukicide to all the cattle and the sheep in May to deal with adult fluke before eggs are laid.

It was agreed that given the number of livers being rejected at abattoirs it would be beneficial to treat cattle and sheep at this time of year. The benefits outweighed any risk there could be to any build up of fluke resistance to treatments.

2.3.2 Black Leg

Over the last few years there had been incidences of a single calf dying at around 3 months for no apparent reason. Although no proof, Brian considered Blackleg might be the likely cause.

Vaccinating for black leg is relatively cheap and the group agreed that it would be beneficial to do so. Calves could be vaccinated from about 4 weeks old.

2.3.2 Vaccinating Lambs

Until now Janet has routinely treated breeding lambs with Heptavac P Plus but considers that it can result in a check in their growth. The group discussed the merits or otherwise of delaying treatment until the lambs are older but this risks infection as Duncan MacIntyre pointed out that pneumonia is an intermittent disease. There is no real evidence that Heptavac P has a detrimental effect on the lambs' long term development. The general consensus is that the present treatment should continue.

2.3.4 Steering Group

Johnny Mackey referred to the considerable number of Monitor Farm topics with which Brian, Janet and the group are dealing. He suggested the formation of a management committee to ensure that specific points are addressed. However, group members already have commitments to a number of meetings due to the Island's active groups.

To ease this it may be worthwhile to form a number of sub groups with separate areas of responsibility

- Soil, grassland and forage
- Beef
- Sheep

Based on their experience Rob and Kath Livesey confirmed that sub groups were a valuable asset to the community group being able to discuss and evaluate topics and bring recommendations to the main group for decision.

2.3.5 Older Cattle Disposal Scheme (OCDS)

There are some 80,000 cattle in the UK which have been born before 1996. OCDS has ensured that since 2006, the farmer has received a payment for these cattle, when slaughtered, albeit on a sliding scale. It ends in 2008, which is the same time as government subsidy for the fallen stock scheme is scheduled to end. It is likely that there will be a charge implemented for disposing of pre '96 cows after the end of the OCDS. Gavin Hill urged the group to thoroughly review the status of their pre 1996 cattle. He recommended cashing the cows this year, when there is at least some sort of return rather than incurring a disposal cost, if it is unlikely that they will have an economic life beyond 2008.

3.0 OPEN DAY

The farm tour formed the backbone of the Open Day. It gave individual group members the opportunity to speak about certain aspects of the policies being adopted at The Plan. John Dickson and Euan Warnock covered cattle issues. John McNaughton talked about the sheep. Andrew Best of John Watson Seeds Ltd had the grassland and forage brief.

3.1 Grassland

The tour provided a number of opportunities to view the various improvements made to the grassland. This has been through a combination of Autumn applications of phosphate and potash, soil slitting, reseeding and over seeding.

Following Jo Scamell's recommendations, Brian noted that soil slitting and P & K applications had been particularly beneficial to areas which were often waterlogged during the winter. Normally they would be yellow by the Spring but following this particularly wet winter these areas had recovered well. It was agreed that there was an overall benefit in the two fields which had been examined by Jo Scamell last June.

Andrew took the opportunity to discuss the work Brian had been doing to improve the productivity of an old grass sward by introducing new varieties of grass. He explained that the first stage of this operation was opening up the sward with grass harrows to expose bare soil and to get rid of as much grass matting as possible. Brian then over seeded with a specialised grass mixture containing 100% tetraploids plus clover. To further improve the establishment of the introduced grasses in this

challenging environment, the seed mixture was coated with a newly developed coating of nutrients that exactly match the requirements of a germinating seed. This gives the seedling the vitality and strength it requires in the early stages of development. The coating of each seed also gives it an increased weight (twice as heavy as conventional seed) allowing for more precise distribution and firm contact with the ground.

After the over seeding, the field was rolled.

Andrew then discussed a new coating for clover seed that has been introduced this year called CAST. The coating has the ability to absorb 100 times more water than conventional coated seed. This constant supply of water to the seed combined with multiple layers of fertiliser and nutrients means that treated seed gives the best success rate in germination and growth achievable.

The group also took the chance to re-examine the soil structure in one of the fields which Jo Scamell assessed at the end of June last year. At that time the test holes showed a soil which was dehydrated, compacted and lacking worm activity. There was little interaction between the soil and the shallow brittle roots.

This field had been slitted in the Autumn and this Spring, had received separate P & K applications in the Autumn and 1 cwt of 25:5:5 per acre in April. There was evidence of a stronger root structure with more soil attached, compared to the first sample, plus a more friable moist soil. However, there did not appear to be any significant increase in the worm population.

The very favourable Spring weather may be a factor which has encouraged vigorous growth but it is also encouraging evidence of the improvement which can be achieved.

3.2 Sheep & Lambs

The group were given that chance to view Black Faced ewes with Lleyn lambs at foot. They required minimal assistance at lambing.

Janet explained that in September Ian Gill and the group recommended the gimmers be vaccinated against toxoplasmosis. Viewing a group of 40 half cross Lleyn gimmers which lambed at 164% provided a good example the benefits which could accrue from this.

John McNaughton who in addition to running his own croft in Cowal gathers the sheep at Plan confirmed grading of the cross lambs in both groups viewed, will be the acid test in what could be a weak market in the Autumn. John also described the hill at The Plan as being a better winter than summer hill. Janet confirmed that to ensure that more finished lambs are produced at The Plan the flock is likely to be more dependant upon in bye land in the future. Addressing both issues could influence Plan policy in the future.

In the run up to lambing the feeding regime had been

3.2.1 Feeding – Run Up to Lambing 2007

FLOCK	FEED	START	FINISH
Hill ewes - singles	NONE		
Hill ewes - twins	500 gms concentrates	7 February	30 April
Hill gimmers - twins	500 gms concentrates	7 February	26 February
	Silage introduced	19 February	27 March
	1.5 kgs concentrates	27 February	27 March
	1.0 kgs concentrates	27 March	30 April
In bye ewes- singles	NONE		
In bye ewes - twins	High Energy Block	7 February	15 March
In bye ewes - twins	500 gms concentrates	15 March	30 April

Comment

The flock has been further reduced from 750 to 700 for 2007. Other changes include the use of Zincosol boluses, the shutting up of the hill in the summer, and tugging a group of ewes away on a neighbouring farm.

3.2.2 Electronic Tagging - EID

In February the group had recommended that electronic tagging should be trialled at The Plan. The equipment which was delivered 10 days before lambing was on view during the Open Day.

So far 200 ewes and gimmers scanned with twins have been recorded. All lambed outside.

The aim is to identify productive, reliable, milky ewes which can lamb unaided - outside.

Traits recorded:

- Lambing Ease
- Maternal Behaviour
- Maternal Ability (milkiness)
- Health (e.g. prolapse)
- Feet

These results will be used to identify ewes who fully meet the above criteria. This grouping will be distilled further as a basis for developing an “Elite” flock which will be put to the best ram in 2007.

All gimmers entering the flock for the next 2-3 years who are scanned with twins will be tagged and recorded as above. Thereafter Elite flock replacements will be selected only from offspring of ewes who consistently perform and maintain their place in the Elite Flock

Setting up the project has been expensive in terms of time spent tagging 200 ewes and linking electronic tags to management tags. Computer records had to be established and a whole new software operating system learned. However, hopefully this is a one-off process that will not have to be repeated, and which will show rewards in the future.

On a daily basis during the height of the busy lambing period, it took approximately one hour per day to tag and record the lambs.

To date the system has been robust, weather-proof and easy to use.

3.3 Cattle

John Dickson explained the heifer calving policy at The Plan.

The aim is to calf the heifers at two years old to be introduced as replacements. Any surplus heifers are to be sold as in calf heifers at any thing up to three years old. The group of heifers viewed with calves at foot was a mix of two to three year old as 2005 had been the final year of Autumn calvers at The Plan. Given how even the group looked in size and condition it was not easy to detect which were the more mature heifers. This would indicate that calving at two years old is a viable

proposition. During the winter the in calf heifers had received 2 kgs of cake plus silage until the end of January. Thereafter silage only until calving.

From early May the cows and calves plus the heifers and calves have access to Harbro Super Suckler buckets.

Brian intimated that all but three of this year's bulling heifers had attained 380 kgs by the end of April putting them on course to reach the targeted 400 kgs bulling weight. Based on last year's results the heifers will be bulled within a six week period by natural service rather than synchronised A.I. Results had been disappointing with only 4 of the heifers holding to the A.I. which was for the first cycle only. The bull will be with the heifers within a six week period to identify the most fertile heifers as the replacements to be added to the herd.

Viewing the group of 2006 Spring born heifers the group agreed that they will be fit for the bull this year. Although growing on, some of the Autumn group had suffered a 50kg weight loss during the winter. In February FEC test indicated the need to worm them, at which time they were also treated for fluke. The lightest joined the younger heifers on silage and cake. The remainder had been returned to the hill on silage and molasses.

Euan Warnock discussed with Brian his marketing objective to be a recognised supplier of high quality HI Health female stock which, at present, is based on a three way cross of South Devon, Simmental and Limousin. The bulling heifers have shown that the required size of heifer can be produced. However the weight loss experienced by the older Simmental cross heifers over the winter may indicate that this larger animal may not be suitable for an out wintering herd.

The discussion moved on to Brian's decision to purchase two Luving bulls. The objective is to reduce the size of cattle and produce replacements cows with greater foraging ability. There was an understanding for the reason to purchase the bulls. However, some of the group would have liked this decision to have been discussed with them beforehand.

What to do with them was the next stage. One option is to put them with the best of this year's bulling heifers. Rob Livesey took the view that it would be preferable to put the bulls with a selection of the best 30 cows. There were two reasons for this. Heifers considered to be the best of the crop now may not go on to be the best cows in the herd. Inexperience on the part on the part of both heifers and the bulls could result in the first cycle being missed and a stretched calving pattern.

4.0 CONCLUSION

At an extremely busy time in the farming calendar Brian and Janet spent considerable time on the preparation for the Open Day. Participation by individual group members in explaining various policies was complimented with some forthright discussion within the group.

All made for an entertaining and informative day.

5.0 NEXT MEETING

Our next meeting will be Thursday 28 June at 11.00 a.m. We shall be joined by Ray Keatinge who is a specialist in getting the best out of extensively managed hill and upland grassland. Rod McKenzie and Janet will also be previewing our meeting on Thursday 20 September at 11.00 a.m. when our speaker will be Lesley Stubbings an independent sheep consultant.

15 Mar 2007)	1st cow calved (due to commence 20 March - based on 287 days
20 March -	sold Limousin bull, Pantomime - failed semen test £460 (purchase £1500 2001)
25 March -	first heifer served by Simmental bull calved
9 April -	first rain since beginning of calving, first indications of scour on one group (Dunagoil Hill) - moved silage feeders on to completely new area, rain stopped and scour disappeared after three days.
11 April	- foxhunting
13 April -	11 cows/calves to hill
17 April -	28 days into calving. 79 out of 107 calved inc. 14 of 16 heifers.
18 April -	Scanned 8 cows ran with Lim bull in November - all in calf and now for sale
19 April -	Last heifer calved
20 April -	First calving loss - calved in shed and pushed calf head out under sheeted door.
21 April -	Now 20 cows/calves on hill
22 April -	20/10/10 and 25 5 5 on to in bye fields
23 April -	More rain, so stopped feeding silage on Dunagoil Hill to avoid dirty ground.
29 April -	20 cows on hill now so spread will have to get them back in (not enough keep out there for them with some cake).
29 April -	Slit ARDE field/Middle field
30 April -	Harbro Super Suckler buckets delivered
3 May -	Cow 143 calved, seen bulling 290 days before.
4 May -	1st Pregsure vaccination to all heifers. 10 bled for BVD screen
5 May -	Experimental Gafsa on to Hawkes Nib - 1,000 kg on say 20 acres.
6 May -	Slit Boathouse, ARCE and CRS
8 May -	approx 300 bales silage remaining, which means have used 730.
9 May -	25 -4 - 13 on to Boathouse and CRS

<i>MARCH</i>	
2nd	Heptavac Lleyn hogs & all tups
6th	Faecal Egg Count (FEC) Stock Twins - only 15 eggs per gram (epg)
7th	FEC Gimmer twins - 270epg
6th - 7th)	Heptavac & Zincosel Gimmers & Ewes (twins
10th	FEC Broken mouth ewes (twins & singles) - 165 epg FEC crossing twins - 630 epg (came back from Kelspoke in poor condition since scanning) - gave Cydectin Drench
13th	FEC singles - 180 epg
14th	FEC BF Gimmer singles - 285 epg
14th	Heptavac, Zincosel, Dysect Pour On (ticks), Cydectin drench all Gimmers & Ewes (singles)
17th)	Cydectin drench Gimmer & stock ewes (twins
24th	Heptavac Lleyns Dysect Pour On, Zincosel bolus , Footvax tups
24th	FIRST LAMBS BORN Single Ewes all drenched Cydectin before turn out to hill
27th	Heptavac, Dysect Pour On, Zincosel all hogs & turn away to hill
<i>APRIL</i>	
18th	Broken Mouth Ewes sold with lambs at foot - not good
24th	LAMBING FINISHED
30th!	Easy Care tup - finished shedding his fleece
<i>MAY/JUNE</i>	
7-9th	Polytunnel clean up ready for: 10th Open Day

1. Via St Blane's Chapel to High Lubas.

15 heifers with calves at foot. (Also some second calvers/sundry cows in the field) Heifers aged two and three years. All were synchronised using CIDR's and AI'd for the first cycle only. Only 4 held to AI service (Limousin, Killerton Travis) the remainder by natural service using Simmental, Dirnanean Siegfried (you will see him later).

2. To the east of High Lubas is the field that was oversown with Johnny Watson's coated seed last June, a field which had a very open sward last year (ley at least 20 years old and not limed for 7 years +).

3. Return via Covin Hill to Dunagoil, Middle Field below the road.

To the North side is the Bay End Field with the Spring born 2006 heifers. All considered fit to bull in June except 3 lightest.

The 'Middle Field' had separate P & K applications in the autumn and 1 cwt of 25 5 5 three weeks ago. The ley is 6 years old. It has been slit aerated in the autumn and again this spring

On the seaward side is the Shell Field which last year was becoming invaded with rashes and docks. It was wiped with Round-Up with the wiper set very low to the ground. The comb harrowed three times and overseeded. The overseeding has been markedly more successful where the Round Up hit hardest.

4. Stock in the Middle Field: Black Faced ewes with Lleyne lambs at foot.

5. Stock in the Shell Field: Half cross Lleyne (out of BF ewes) with Lleyne lambs at foot (i.e. $\frac{3}{4}$ Lleyne lambs)

6. Knoll Field. A new Johnny Watson's Mingary mixture sown last September under difficult (wet) conditions. Proving to be tremendous at putting milk on TLC cows.
Sheep in Knoll Field: Pure Lleyne hoggs.

7. Pump Field.

11 Heifers born autumn 2005, turned away for the winter now for bulling in June.

8. Sherriff Field.

Pure Lleyne ewes with Lleyne lambs at foot

9. Garrochty Yard.

South Devon. Oaktree Hawk born May 2002

Simmental. Dirnanean Paddy born Feb 2003

Simmental. Dirnanean Siegfried born April 2005

Luining. Benhar Hagrid born February 2006; Luining. Benhar Hobbit born April 2006

Limousin. Homebred born April 2006

10. Woodchip Corral.

95 cows calved here in five weeks.

11. Silent Valley

Cows with calves at foot, born April.

12. Return to The Plan

