

INCREASING STOCKING RATES AND REDUCING COSTS

Sharing ideas and developing systems to make farm businesses more profitable are key aspects of the QMS Monitor Farm programme, and host farmer **Andrew Baillie** of Carstairs Mains in Lanarkshire, has introduced a variety of changes to his farm business as a result of his experiences over the past three years.

Andrew, who farms in partnership with his wife Jennifer, has managed to increase stocking rates significantly on the 253 hectare unit as a result of adopting a rotational grazing system during his time as a monitor farmer. He has also reduced fertiliser and fuel bills by introducing changes identified at group discussions with the help of the monitor farm facilitators.

QMS VIDEO  

A video highlighting improvements Carstairs Mains Farm has made can be viewed on QMS's Facebook page and on QMS's MooTube channel on Youtube.



Since Carstairs Mains became a monitor farm in 2012, Andrew, a self-confessed sheep enthusiast, has more than doubled the ewe flock. The pedigree Beltex and Texel flock has been increased by 50 to 200, while commercial ewes have been increased from 85 to 300. As part of a benchmarking and business planning exercise, increasing output from sheep was deemed the optimum strategy to lift output and make best use of the farm's resources, including its reliance on family labour. As a consequence cow numbers have been reduced, with a core herd of 30 retained.

Andrew said: "I have made these changes as a direct result of the monitor farm experience and plan to increase ewe numbers further to between 800 and 1,000 over the next two to three years."

In summer 2014, Andrew began using a rotational grazing system with the cattle. He then tried it with the sheep over the winter and in 2015 had all the stock on the system. He said: "For around £1500 investment in electric fencing, I have been able to double my stocking rates and reduce my grass fertiliser costs. I have kept 30 cows for grass management, but I am exploring other cattle options such as summer grazing or rearing dairy heifers."

Andrew is no stranger to the rotational grazing system as he worked on a farm in New Zealand a few years ago. However, he said it was still a surprise to him how well the system worked on his own farm and how much more productive it has become.

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Another idea he is in the early stages of adopting from the New Zealand-style system is changing his traditional Blackface and Cheviot cross-commercial ewes to Aberdales, a type of prolific Texel cross which uses New Zealand genetics bred for a forage-based system. In 2015, he put 50 ewe lambs to the tup and is looking forward to seeing what difference they make to his commercial enterprise.

CARSTAIRS MAINS FARM : AT A GLANCE

Monitor Farm since November 2012



Farmed by **Andrew Baillie** in partnership with wife, **Jennifer**.

253 ha

Pedigree **Beltex** and **Texel** flock

300 commercial ewes

He praised the input of the community group who attended the regular monitor farm meetings, saying he felt the open discussions that were held were hugely beneficial, not just to him as the host farmer, but also to other members of the group who adopted some of the ideas into their systems.

One such idea, which arose at the very beginning of the three-year programme, was to install a biomass boiler. As highlighted in the short QMS video, there are around 40ha of woodland at Carstairs Mains which were quickly identified as an under-utilised resource. Now the 60kw biomass plant heats the house, office and pedigree lambing shed and returns £7000 per year on RHI (Renewable Heat Incentive) payments and oil savings. As a result of this, several other members of the Clyde group have installed similar boilers.

Another area of the farm business to benefit has been the 100ha of arable land. Following soil analysis a fertiliser trial was carried out on the spring barley which showed that, due to the amount of slurry applied to the land, big savings could be made on phosphorus and potassium. Andrew said he has been able to cut his arable fertiliser bill by £4000 but would not have been aware of this without the investigation initiated by the monitor farm group discussions.

"I would encourage anyone to take part in the Monitor Farm programme. By benchmarking and scrutinising every part of the business, I realised how I could do so many things better," said Andrew. +

