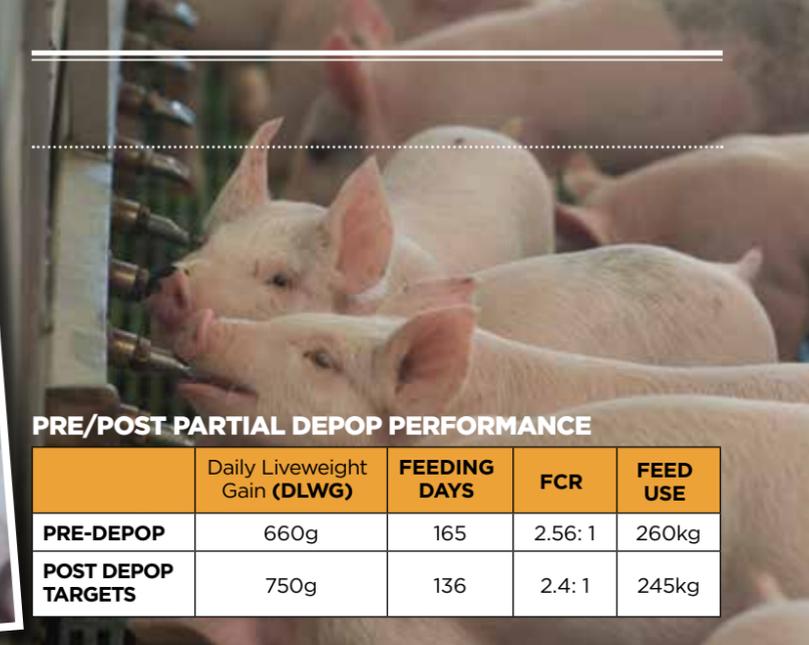


BOOSTING PERFORMANCE

“Being QMS pig monitor farmers gave us the push we needed to carry out a partial depopulation and put up our new grower shed. Encouragingly we have seen a 20% increase in the liveweight gain of the first batch of pigs following the completion of the partial depop, with pigs gaining 820g/day.”



PRE/POST PARTIAL DEPOP PERFORMANCE

	Daily Liveweight Gain (DLWG)	FEEDING DAYS	FCR	FEED USE
PRE-DEPOP	660g	165	2.56:1	260kg
POST DEPOP TARGETS	750g	136	2.4:1	245kg

The cost of the partial depop was estimated at £97,000, but the budget would suggest that the improved performance will amount to £130,000 and so cover the costs in just one year.

The new grower accommodation has recently been completed. It is made up of two individual buildings, with an indoor pass between them, and will house 2,400 pigs from 35kg to 105kg in a totally slatted building. Danny said, “Pigs need an even, constant environment which is very difficult to achieve in straw yards. In the new grower accommodation we have complete control over the environment.”

The Skinners have also taken the opportunity to switch to a wet feeding system for the growing and finishing pigs, which Danny hopes will result in higher intake, improved feed conversion ratio (FCR) and quicker growth.

Danny kept the costs of the new build as low as possible by using farm labour to assist with the building work and feeding system, and to make the troughs in the farm workshop. They also assisted the local joiner to fit the roof and do the internal finishing.

Nevertheless, the £600,000 cost of the building is a significant investment. However, Danny added that it came down to a choice between “spending the money or stop keeping pigs”. Prior to the depop and new build the breeding performance of the pigs was excellent, amongst the best in the North East, producing 28.88 pigs weaned per sow/year with pigs achieving a daily liveweight gain (DLWG) of 660g and a feed conversion ratio of 2.56:1, with an output of 2.152 tonnes deadweight per sow/year.

However, Danny is expecting a considerable improvement in performance now the underlying health issues have been addressed; blood samples taken from piglets at monthly intervals throughout the project have all come back negative, and pigs are now in the new accommodation.

He is targeting a DLWG from weaning to finish of 750g and a FCR of 2.4:1. This will result in a decrease in feeding days from 165 to 136 days and a decrease in feed use from 260kg to 245kg.

Initial results are very encouraging, as the first pigs finished since the depop have exceeded this target, achieving an impressive DLWG of 820g.

Danny markets all his pigs through Scottish Pig Producers, who are based in Huntly. He finds that “it is essential having this farmer co-op to do the marketing.”

Danny has 160ha of cereals – winter and spring barley and wheat – all of which he uses in the pig feed. He added, “The feed is mixed on farm and with feed amounting to 70% of business costs, the £15 /tonne saving made by home mixing is very important.”

He continued, “Pigs and cereals really complement each other, as the pig slurry, applied to the cereals with a dribble bar, produces lush, high-yielding crops with little purchased fertiliser needed.”+

For general information on monitor farms, plus detailed reports of meetings, visit www.qmscotland.co.uk/monitor-farms

These were the words of Danny Skinner, QMS monitor pig farmer, who farms at Lazyfold, Insh, in partnership with his wife Alison and parents Dan and May.

Under the QMS monitor farm programme, facilitated by consultants Jim Booth of SAOS and Jamie Robertson of LMS, pig farmers meet regularly to discuss the performance of Danny’s farm and share ideas and experience regarding how to implement practical, profitable strategies on pig units.

A partial depopulation (depop) involves the removal of all pigs from the unit, except the breeding sows which are treated on site, in order to eliminate underlying disease and return them to hi-health. Danny undertook a partial depop in the autumn of 2014.

The £600,000 cost of the building is a significant investment. However, Danny pointed out that it came down to a choice between “spending the money or stop keeping pigs”.

He outlined the reasons for the decision: “Through our benchmarking group, and with the monitor farm, we looked at growth figures for finishing pigs and it became clear that ours were poor.

“We felt there were two reasons for this: firstly, underlying disease – health problems of porcine reproductive and respiratory syndrome (blue ear) and enzootic pneumonia, which although nothing sinister, were definitely holding back growth. Secondly, the old straw yard buildings in which we were keeping the pigs were not letting them achieve their full genetic potential.

“We had thought about replacing the old building for a number of years, but it never seemed to be the right time. Sharing knowledge with those in the monitor farm group, our thoughts turned to a partial depop and replacing the building; we knew we had to just go for it.

“It was a great opportunity to invest in state-of-the-art grower accommodation, refurbish other areas of the unit and improve our health.”

A partial depop has the advantage of maintaining a regular cash flow compared to a full depop, with the income basically unchanged; however, costs are increased.

Pigs have to be accommodated off the farm, incurring bed and breakfast (B&B) costs, extra transport costs and the costs of treating the sows, all of which have to be taken into account. Danny said, “It wasn’t that expensive to treat the breeding herd; we found more than three quarters of the costs we incurred were on B&B and transport. If I was doing it again I would sell the weaners, providing there was a decent market for them. Having them in B&B was difficult; however, pig growth was good.”