

# CHANGE OF FOCUS SEES BORDERS FARM HALVE VARIABLE COSTS

A complete change of focus at Jim Logan's Pirntaton Farm near Galashiels has led to variable costs - and feed costs in particular - being slashed, while livestock numbers have increased.

Jim, who farms in partnership with his mother, Elizabeth, realised a few years ago that he was spending a disproportionate amount of time on pedigree sheep and cattle, and took the brave decision to pull out of the pedigree world and concentrate on improving the commercial side of the business.

Pirntaton has been one of the host farms for Quality Meat Scotland's Grazing Group project since July 2014.

It extends to 570ha, rising from 750 feet to 1700 feet, and has a mixture of temporary and permanent grass with a significant area of rough grazing and some plantain fodder crop.

The farm traditionally ran a stratified system of 1450 sheep - breeding pure Blackface and crossing these to produce Scotch Mules.

These were then crossed with Texel and Suffolk rams to produce prime lambs. But over the last few years, Jim has taken the big step of introducing Romney, Lley and Abertex genetics with the aim of producing an efficient, functional, easier kept ewe, more suited to an outdoor lambing, forage-based system.

## WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

### Principal Change

Rely far more on grass, far less on concentrate

### Decisions Made

Stop bull beef and graze second summer  
Delay lambing to late April  
Serious commitment to utilising grass much better

### Change is never simple - dealing with the challenges

Sub dividing fields - paddock design and water  
Right entry heights and residuals. Too much grass  
Trace elements a challenge

### Results

80% reduction in sheep feed bill  
65% reduction in cattle feed bill  
20% increase in sheep numbers  
30% increase in cow numbers (planned)



Last year Jim also replaced the Blackface flock with Lairg Cheviots, half of which he crossed with Lleys. He said: "I think the higher ground here is good enough to support Lley crosses, and I am keen that the hill sheep should also benefit from the hybrid vigour of a first cross."

Rotational grazing has allowed better utilisation of grass across the farm. This has enabled Jim to increase ewe numbers on the hill from 400 to 540, with lowground numbers rising from 800 to 1100 crossbreds, plus the 135 ewes in the pure flocks of Suffolk, Texel and Abertex.

Lambing date is now a month later so that peak grass growth coincides with peak lactation, ensuring excellent lamb growth rates and massively reducing reliance on concentrates. This year the majority of lambs were sold off grass, with only 70 fed a small amount of concentrate for two weeks and the final 30 fed for four weeks.

"The ability to finish lambs and rams off grass has cut the amount of concentrate they require by 90%, or 65 tonnes."

Grazing efficiency is also key for the ewes, which are flushed and tugged on grass. Already ewe concentrate usage is down by 75%, equivalent to 90 tonnes, and Jim hopes that having made good silage and by adding a little soya before lambing in late April/May, he should be able to reduce his feed costs further.

All the pure-bred sheep are electronically tagged and recorded from birth, and the Abertex system - which records many female traits - should, Jim pointed out, result in a more productive ewe. The lambs' performance is also monitored throughout the season.

Looking to the future, Jim can see an opportunity to sell more forage-reared rams. Traditionally Texels and Suffolks were sold at Kelso, but this autumn he sold his 75 rams either directly off the farm or at an Innovis sale, with 60 of them never having been fed any concentrates. Jim said: "The ability to finish lambs and rams off grass has cut the amount of concentrate they require by 90%, or 65 tonnes."

Jim had dabbled in rotational grazing before he joined the Grazing Group, with some success, but he is now fully committed, with the task of erecting semi-permanent fencing and providing water supplies to paddocks ongoing.

There have been some teething problems, however, and Jim said: "We have seen trace element deficiencies this year. One possible explanation is that the fast-growing, lush grass has a lower concentration of them, but with the support of the Grazing Group, I have tested soil and forage, in addition to carrying out blood analysis to find a solution."

The pedigree Aberdeen Angus cattle enterprise has been replaced with a more commercial system, too, and two years ago Jim took the decision to use a Hereford bull over some cows and to stop producing

bull beef. He was delighted that the first rotationally grazed heifers and steers sold straight off the grass at 16 to 17 months at 570kg, having achieved an average daily gain at grass of 1.2kg. Finished weights after housing are around 590kg to 600kg.

This has led to significant feed savings on the cattle side, too. He said: "By the end of this financial year, I am hoping the reduction in bought-in feed for the cattle enterprise will be around 65%, equivalent to 90 tonnes."

He continued: "Although I have taken massive amounts of variable costs out of the system, the fixed costs for the cattle are still too high, so the plan is to increase suckler cow numbers from 100 to 130 in order to spread these fixed costs."

QMS's Michael Blanche and Emily Grant have organised the Grazing Group meetings, and Jim said he has really appreciated the opportunity to speak with like-minded and innovative farmers as well as experts such as Trevor Cook and Murray Rohloff.

"I think the business has improved greatly as a result of hugely enhanced utilisation of grass and spending more time analysing our cost of production and getting that back under control. It is all about making the best use of the resources you have," Jim concluded.



There are six Grazing Groups throughout Scotland run by QMS with an overall objective of increasing the kilos of meat produced per hectare through better utilisation of grass. For further information about the grazing groups please visit [www.qmscotland.co.uk/grazing](http://www.qmscotland.co.uk/grazing)