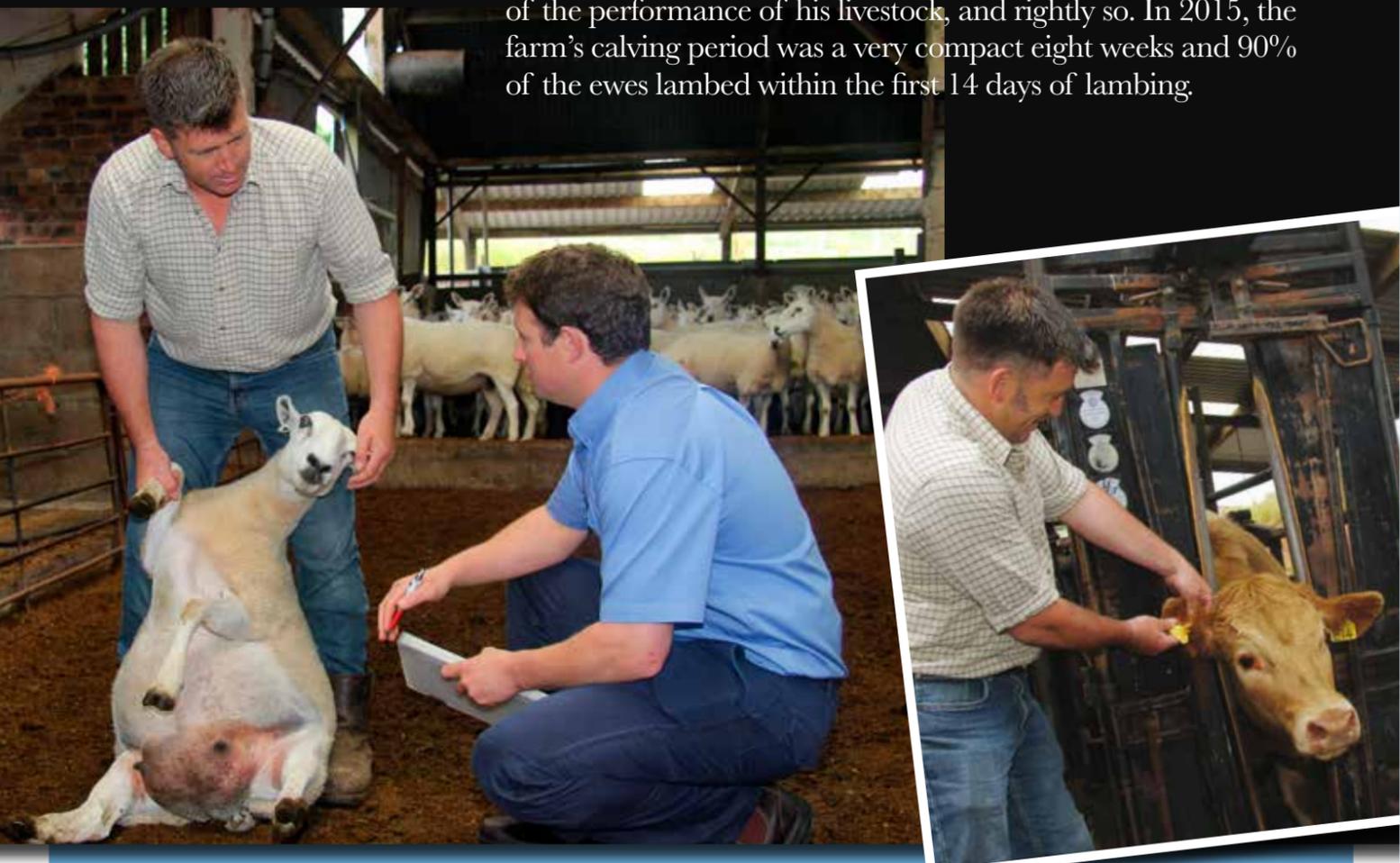


HEALTH PLANNING UNDERPINS STRONG PERFORMANCE

Andrew Nelson of Cogarth Farm, Castle Douglas is proud of the performance of his livestock, and rightly so. In 2015, the farm's calving period was a very compact eight weeks and 90% of the ewes lambed within the first 14 days of lambing.



COGARTH: AT A GLANCE

500 acres owned

Farmed by Andrew Nelson with his parents, John and Margaret

150 suckler cows, mainly Angus x Friesian and Angus x Montbeliarde

500 Cheviot mule and Texel cross ewes

Calves sold store as yearlings through Walleys Market, Castle Douglas
Lambs finished and sold through Farm Stock Ltd and Galloway Lamb

96% of lambs sold off grass by Christmas

Flock vaccinated against enzootic abortion and toxoplasmosis

Sheep feet problems managed through swift treatment for lameness and culling of persistently lame sheep

Achieving these targets is the result of striving to get the genetics and nutrition right but Andrew also maintains detailed health plans for his stock to help improve performance. The remarkable figures are indicative of livestock in excellent health.

"We have always prioritised the health and welfare of our stock," says Andrew, who runs the 500-acre upland farm with his parents, John and Margaret. "We were early adopters of BVD eradication and one of the first to recognise the benefits of quality assurance. We became members of Quality Meat Scotland's Quality Assurance scheme quite early on. Our membership number is 402," he adds.

As Cogarth moved away from breeding their own replacements, Andrew and I discussed how to minimise the disease risk from bought-in stock and now have particularly robust quarantine procedures in place."

The heifers calve to an Angus bull, with the main herd put to Charolais bulls that are selected for ease of calving and on the basis of their EBVs for 200-day and 400-day weights. Only five out of the 150 required assistance at calving this year and 97% calved within eight weeks. Andrew's proactive approach to health and nutrition means the calves face little in the way of disease challenge; he finds he has a very even batch of yearling stores, which he sells through Walleys Market in Castle Douglas.

On the sheep side, the flock follows an annual programme to prevent losses from clostridial diseases and the gimmers are vaccinated to protect against the main risks of abortion. However, problems with feet are managed without the use of vaccination and this is recorded in the health plan. Andrew will treat a lame ewe swiftly with antibiotics and record her tag number in his diary; any ewe with recurring lameness will be culled, thus quickly reducing the risk to the rest of the flock. The programme works and lameness is less than 2%.

With a reputation for healthy stock, he has regular customers for his ewe lambs, with about 150 sold privately each year for breeding. The remainder are sold off grass through Farm Stock Ltd and Galloway Lamb. Last year, all but a handful were finished by Christmas. The average sale weight was 19.8 kg, and 97% reached the target specification of an R3L or better with a third of these being E and U grades.



"Health planning is an ideal opportunity to weigh up the benefits against the potential costs. Prevention of disease is usually more straightforward than trying to cure an outbreak."

The health of the spring calving suckler herd and flock of 500 Cheviot mules and Texel crosses is managed in conjunction with Stewartry Veterinary Group. Andrew works closely with his vet, David Nelson, to formalise the routine health procedures, initially on paper – though more recently he has started to utilise the web-based Sheep and Suckler Cow Animal Health Planning System (SAHPS).

David comments: "Sitting down together to plan livestock health is what we try to do with all farmers in the practice. It's an opportunity to evaluate the past year and highlight where to improve performance.

This year, the steers at the first sale weighed 423 kilos to realise £1075 and the heifers weighed 402 kilos at £960. Andrew comments, "The store calves sold in April 2015 averaged 1.4 kilos liveweight gain per day over the winter."

The Stewartry practice consists of a team of five farm vets who all advise on day-to-day enquiries from farmers. It's often a case of reassuring farmers that they can use products effectively and at the correct time to prevent overuse. "Health planning is an ideal opportunity to weigh up the benefits against the potential costs. Prevention of disease is usually more straightforward than trying to cure an outbreak," comments David.

Replacement and Quarantine Policy at Cogarth

Stock	Purchase information	Tests and treatments	Quarantine
100 Cheviot mule ewe lambs	Bought through Longtown Auction Market	On arrival, they are isolated and treated for sheep scab with an Ivermectin injection. Another wormer is administered at the same time to reduce the risk of introducing resistant worms. They are also treated for liver fluke and run through the footbath.	Grazed away from the main flock until lambing at two years old.
30 Angus x Montbeliarde heifer calves.	Bought from a local dairy farmer at six weeks old. This source has provided calves for five years and is TB & BVD free and herd vaccinated for leptos.	BVD tested and vaccinated for BVD and leptos before bulling.	Kept separately from the main herd until calving at 2 1/2 years old.