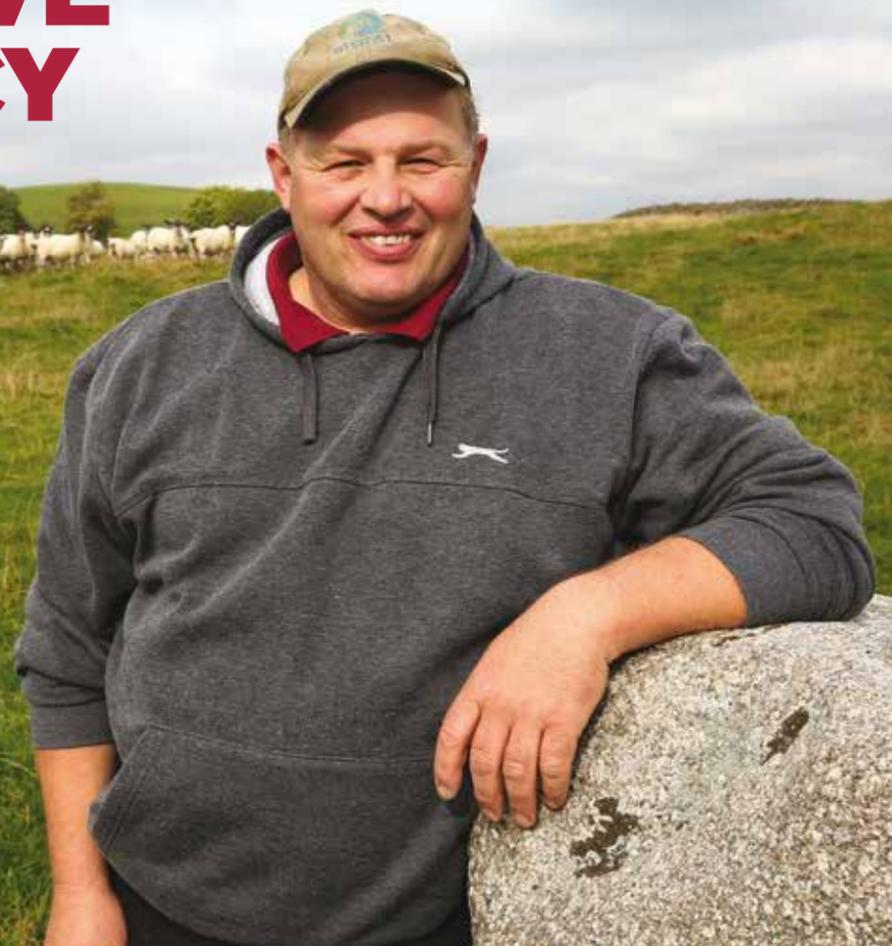


# SEEKING OPPORTUNITIES TO IMPROVE EFFICIENCY

Having the confidence to make changes and the focus to cut costs and improve margins have been two of the greatest benefits of taking part in the Quality Meat Scotland (QMS) Monitor Farm programme, according to Wigtownshire farmer Kenny Adams and his wife, Marianne.



**K**enny and Marianne were monitor farmers from 2007 to 2010, when their Torhousekie Farm came under the scrutiny of a community group of local farmers run by facilitators Seamus Donnelly and David Keiley from SAC Consulting, a division of Scotland's Rural College (SRUC).

Kenny said, "One of the best things to come out of the experience was the many friends we made. There was so much to learn from other farmers, young and old, who were dealing with similar issues as we were at the time. Beef and sheep farmers tend to be less aware of costs and prices, but we learned to be more focused."

One of the main aims of the project was to reduce variable cost expenditure for this typical south-west Scotland family beef and sheep unit. Over the three years, variable costs fluctuated quite dramatically due to unstable feed and fertiliser costs and also due to increased medicine bills to combat health problems in the sheep flock. However, gross output improved year on year and variable costs as a percentage of gross output reduced from a high of 54% to 45% while net profits also improved from 3% to 20%.

Kenny has continued to work on his variable costs with the aim of getting them down to less than 40% of gross output.

**Quality Meat Scotland is hosting a series of Monitor Farm Legacy events in November and December to highlight how five businesses have progressed since their time in the spotlight as monitor farms.**

**Wednesday 11 November**

Kenny Adams hosts at Torhousekie Farm, Wigtown, DG8 9BJ

**Thursday 26 November**

Janet and Brian Hill hosts at Plan Farm, Isle of Bute, PA20 9LX

**Thursday 3 December**

Robert and Ian Chapman host at Tophead Farm, Lonmay, Fraserburgh, AB43 8UY

**Wednesday 9 December**

Robbie and Kirsty Newlands host at Cluny Farm, Rafford, Forres, IV36 2SJ

**Thursday 10 December**

John Scott hosts at Fearn Farm, Tain, IV20 1TL

For further information about these events and to register your place visit [www.qmscotland.co.uk/events](http://www.qmscotland.co.uk/events)

He believes he is nearly there as a result of making management decisions based on analysing the accounts every month with Marianne. An example of this has been overwintering cows to reduce winter feed and bedding costs. He said, "Our feed wagon needs replaced, but we cannot justify the expense on a new one and the cows are healthier and happier overwintered on kale and rape with big bale silage."

Torhousekie runs to 192ha, and during the Monitor Farm programme Kenny also took on 28ha of seasonal grass and some wintering. However, in 2013 the opportunity arose for him to buy 40ha of permanent pasture next to the farm. He said: "Financially there is not much difference, but this has allowed us to increase cattle numbers from 110 to 130 and we are planning on increasing ewe numbers from 500 to 600."

The cows are still split into spring and autumn calving to ease the workload in the spring but, following a period during the monitor farm days of buying in replacement heifers and only using terminal sires, Kenny has gone back to breeding his own Aberdeen Angus cross sucklers.

He said: "I struggled to get what I really wanted when buying in and now use an Angus bull on the heifers and some of the cows to breed replacements."

He still buys Charolais bulls with good EBVs for ease of calving and growth in order to maintain a good ratio of kilos of beef produced per hectare.

Scotch Mule ewes crossed with a Texel or Beltex, which also give him a good ratio of kilos of lamb produced per hectare. He said: "I don't flush the ewes because I don't want too many triplets and usually achieve a lambing percentage of 190 to 200%. They lamb outside in April and the first lambs are finished off grass by the beginning of July."

"I have learned from the monitor farm project to look at costs and to keep things simple, and I have the confidence to put my ideas into practice."

He has found a good private market for his Charolais cross bull calves at weaning, and last year he also sold the Charolais heifers at six months in UA Stirling, which saved him a lot of wintering costs and he was happy with the price. The Angus cross steers are kept until they are about 12 months and then sold store.

Being part of the project made Kenny more open to trying new things and, during the programme, he purchased 100 Chevease ewes to replace his Scotch Mules. However, he found them difficult to handle and he has gone back to the

One of the biggest savings Kenny has been able to make on the farm has been in no longer using fertiliser of any kind on the grazing ground and a reduced rate on the silage fields. He achieves a good clover content in the grass by feeding clover seeds mixed with barley to the cows and he soil tests regularly to check pH and nutrient levels.

He said: "I have learned from the project to look at costs and to keep things simple, and I have the confidence to put my ideas into practice. Some work and some don't, but we have been fairly ruthless when it comes to cutting costs."+

## TORHOUSEKIE FARM: AT A GLANCE



**192ha**  
typical beef  
and sheep farm

Farmed by  
Kenny Adams  
and his wife  
Marianne

**130**  
cows split into  
spring and  
autumn calving

Over  
**500**  
ewes lamb in  
April with 190-  
200% lambing  
percentage