



## Planning for Profit, Auchenbainzie

### Summary of meeting held on 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2014

#### Overview:

A wide ranging discussion was enjoyed by the 60+ farmers who attended this workshop.

Rhidian Jones, SAC Consulting, facilitated the workshop, with Robert Logan, SAC Consulting, attending as the livestock specialist. The meeting was hosted by Mr & Mrs David Kirkpatrick ably assisted by their staff members Clark and Craig. Thanks have also been conveyed to two neighbouring farmers for bringing trailers to ferry attendees around the farm and also to the farm Vet Alistair Padkin and to Ursula Taylor who attended the meeting on behalf of the Stabiliser Cattle Company.

As an introduction Rhidian Jones highlighted the fact that most farmers will have major decisions to make due to CAP reform and falling SFP. The following points were raised as being significantly important-

- Farms need to know what makes money on their farms. To do this they need to know the physical and financial performance of their enterprises. Closely linked to this point is to know what the best use of their resources are and what they are good at.
- Getting the balance of cattle to sheep based on making best use of resources and focusing on what they do well/makes money.
- Having the right system for the resources available and having the right type of livestock for that system.
- Getting top technical performance- grassland management, fertility, health & nutrition
- Know what the costs are and how to keep them under control
- Meet market specification, look for premium markets and add value where possible.

Robert Logan gave a summary of the current and potential future market situation.

David Kirkpatrick then gave an introduction to the farm business and how it has evolved to where it is today. In 2005 a Whole Farm Review suggested increasing dairy cow numbers on another unit and coming out of suckler beef production. The dairy cows were increased but David did not want to get rid of sucklers altogether so the decision was made that Auchenbainzie would carry all non milking dairy stock and that suckler cows would be reduced but they would have to be worthwhile.

Prior to this he had seen Stabilisers in the USA and decided to grade up his best cows to Stabiliser as well as purchasing embryos. His herd is now in the top 5% of the breed and sells

around 6 bulls each year from £4,000 to £7,000 for those in the top 1% of the breed. Surplus breeding heifers are sold for £1,300 + at 14-15 months. Bull calves are left entire with the majority sold at weaning to finishers in Yorkshire and 15 or so retained for assessment of breeding suitability.

Traditionally Blackfaced ewes were kept to breed Scottish Mules with a lot of success. However a similar system to the cattle was required so a flock of Lleyn ewes was established. Once numbers reached 1,000 the decision was taken to sell all remaining Blackies. The flock now numbers 1,500 ewes and 500 ewe lambs tuppied this year. All lambs are sold deadweight with ewe lambs put to Shetland tups for easy lambing.

David advocated constant review of system physical and financial performance by quarterly visits from a consultant who makes him justify all decisions and expenditure. While this can be a painful process it is a worthwhile discipline.

### **Farm Tour**

#### **Stop 1 Lleyn ewes**



#### Sheep topics discussed

- Breed choice
- Lambing date
- Tuppied ewe lambs
- Breeding replacements from older ewes
- Use of NZ Suffolk & Texel rams
- Health issues, trace elements etc



## Stop 2 Second calvers (carrying second calf)

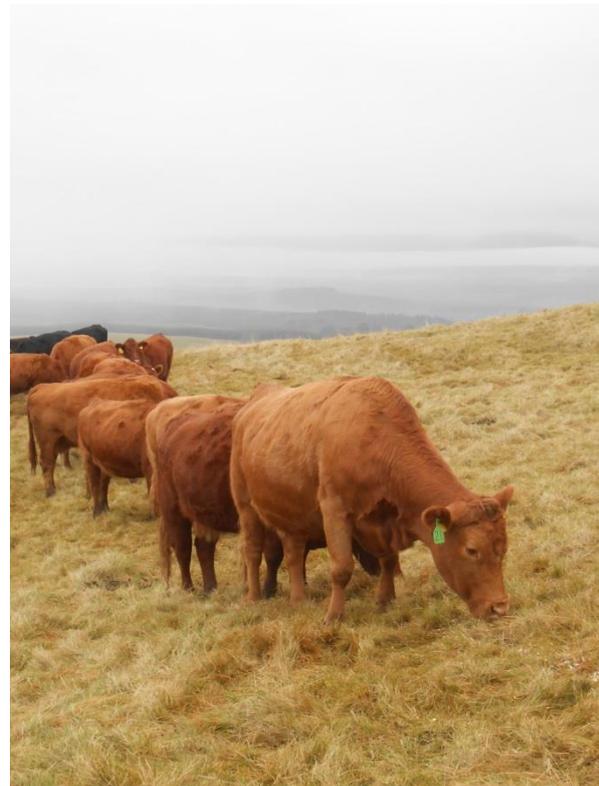


### Topics covered

- This year these cows are being kept separate as they are still growing. They will be kept on better grazing and feeding will be introduced sooner.
- Calving at 2 years of age
- Cow condition
- Synchronisation by using 5 day CIDR method
- Cow size and efficiency
- Fertility- calves reared and compact calving



### Stop 3- Hill grazing with group of 35 older cows



#### Topics covered

- Outwintering system
- Feeding concentrates, frequency & quantity
- Calving issues, supervision, problems, colostrum
- Cow condition
- Hill grass quality- deteriorating each year?
- Options to improve quality of hill grazing
- Trace element issues

After lunch there were a further two stops at the steading.

#### **Stop 4 Pure Stabiliser bulls**

Topics covered

- EBVs, bull selection
- Sale of breeding bulls
- Feed efficiency trial
- Morrisons beef supply chain (Ursula Taylor)
- Effectiveness of holly to prevent ringworm

#### **Stop 5 Youngstock shed**

Attendees were given the opportunity to look at the stock in this shed which included pure Stabiliser heifers, pure dairy heifers that were mainly obtained by using sexed semen on heifers and Stabiliser cross dairy cattle. The stock in this shed epitomised a major opportunity that David has to increase beef production from his dairy herd but also the threat to suckler bred beef that exists from the dairy sector. More use of sexed semen and better techniques will mean that over time more dairy cows will be put to beef bulls (using AI and sexed semen even). Currently 40% of UK beef comes from the dairy herd (lower in Scotland) but this is expected to rise to 60% in the next 10 years.

David had pointed out at the start that the single suckling cow is a relatively recent invention as many upland farms (including Auchenbainzie) used to have small dairy herds in the past. Many would be crossed to beef bulls to supply beef and most crossbred suckler cows. The Holstein influence has meant that most suckler cows are now beef bred but the lack of returns has put them under severe threat especially with reduced SFP in future. David is hoping that all his dairy replacements will be bred from his heifers in future using sexed semen (where better results are achieved than in older cows) which will release most of his dairy cows to be put to beef bulls. He is considering using British Blue bulls to add value to the cattle so they could be sold as calves or stores but using Stabilisers is also an option as he has the bulls on farm already and there may be a possibility of an integrated beef supply chain for dairy cross Stabiliser cattle in future.

As a summary of the day we challenged the group to come up with answers to several key questions. Results are as follows:

<b>Q1: Suggest two issues to get right, to ensure a profitable and efficient upland suckler enterprise?</b>
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Fertility- calves reared (live calf every year) and calving pattern</li><li>• Good herd health</li><li>• Control costs</li><li>• Use a suitable breed</li><li>• Good grassland management &amp; use of forage</li><li>• Have a simple management system</li></ul> |
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**Q2: Write down a suggestion or idea to improve the performance of the beef and sheep enterprises at Auchebainzie**

- Improve grassland management
- Rotational grazing
- Manage second calvers separately and feed according to condition and growth requirements
- Graze a section of the hill with sheep in summer to improve grass – do this on a 4 -5 year cycle. Or strip graze hill in smaller blocks and move on every 1-2 weeks
- Test for trace element requirements (cattle and sheep)
- Breed more Lleyne ewes pure and sell breeding sheep
- Tup ALL Lleyne ewe lambs to Shetland to get more lambs sold – surplus could be sold as gimmers

**Q3: Write down two things you have learned/seen today that you would implement at home**

- Calve heifers at 2 years of age
- Creep feed heifers' calves earlier to reduce pressure on heifers
- General creep feeding to take pressure off the cows
- Sell breeding bulls
- Use EBVs
- Utilise hill grazing better
- Breed replacements from proven older ewes
- Think out of the box, be open to change and don't worry what the neighbours think!
- Work out figures to see where you are at and identify opportunities to increase income and/or reduce costs.

**Finally a vote of thanks was given to hosts and contributors and the meeting closed at around 3pm.**