

LIVESTOCK+



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SPRING 2015

+ Features

SHARING BEST PRACTICE
CONFERENCE INSPIRES DELEGATES
THE VALUE OF FIFTH QUARTER
PEEBLES MONITOR FARM
BENEFITS FROM SILAGE CHANGE

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WELCOME

“ Spring is without doubt one of my favourite times in the farming calendar. With much of the 2015 lambing and calving behind us and work on the land well underway, it is a great time to take stock and relish the promise which the month of May annually brings as the ground eventually warms and the grass starts to grow in earnest.

Seizing opportunities to make the most of grass was a popular theme at our industry development conference in February when around 140 delegates gathered to hear from a top line-up of speakers. We were very pleased with the feedback from the conference. Our thanks go to all the farmers and others who took time out to attend and also to those who spoke at the event. A report on the conference appears on pages 10 and 11.

A very significant step forward for the Scottish beef industry was heralded in March when Cabinet Secretary Richard Lochhead confirmed the Scottish Government has broadly accepted the recommendations of the Beef 2020 industry expert group report.

Key recommendations within the report have resulted in the launch of the Beef Efficiency Scheme (BES) to equip Scotland's farmers to improve the efficiency, sustainability and quality of their beef herds. The BES is to be introduced ahead of next year's calving season and will be backed by the £45 million Scottish Rural Development Programme (SRDP) beef support package announced last year. More details can be found on page 5.

The implementation of these recommendations will present a fantastic opportunity for the beef industry in Scotland to move forward with confidence.

I am pleased to say that we are now looking at a new chapter in Scottish pig production as a result of the welcome investment in increased slaughter capacity at Brechin. Indeed, the opportunity to move our pig sector forward will be a focus of our pig industry conference in November.

The start of April saw us welcome three new board members to QMS – Scott Henderson, Jock Gibson and Kate Rowell – following appointment by the Scottish Government. I am confident all three will provide valuable input to future board discussions.

The countdown is now well and truly on to the Royal Highland Show, a fantastic showcase during Scotland's Year of Food and Drink. QMS is also proud to be supporting Scotland's Beef Event at Mains of Mause on 27th May and Highland Sheep in Tain on 9th June and I look forward to seeing many of you at these and at other industry events this summer.

Jim McLaren, Chairman, Quality Meat Scotland

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Front cover image: New QMS Board member Kate Rowell, who farms at Hundleshope, just south of Peebles.

Rewards of Careful Planning



Spring is a very important time for the QMS team, as April marks the start of a new financial year for the organisation and the launch of our activities for the 12 months ahead after a careful, structured planning process.

Input from those who work in the different sectors of our industry is crucial to ensuring we are targeting our resources in the best way to deliver strong results and value for money for levypayers. As well as ensuring we have strong grassroots membership of the various working groups which help to inform our direction of travel, we also have a very much open door approach as an organisation.

We were very encouraged by initial analysis of feedback from the survey we included with the winter edition of Livestock+ and our sincere thanks to all of you who took the time to complete and return it to us.

The survey results indicate confidence among sheep and cattle farmers and your feedback about the activities we are undertaking was also positive. There were also a number of very constructive suggestions included in the survey results which we will take on board.

QMS's latest campaign to promote Scotch Beef PGI ran during February and March. Its aim was to showcase Scotch Beef and the flavour, provenance, traceability and integrity which underpin the brand's PGI (Protected Geographical Indication) status. Over 4.7 million consumers were targeted across Scotland and Greater London in this £300,000 campaign to inform, educate and inspire them to use Scotch Beef when they cook.

On the industry development side of our remit we are pleased to be working in partnership with other levy bodies across the UK in a two year RamCompare project. This initiative will enable the UK sheep industry to drive genetic improvement forward through the inclusion of commercial data in genetic evaluations.

Our comms team included video content as a key part of our recent LambCam initiative which saw five lambing video diaries viewed by around 100,000 people over a few days. The objective of this project was to encourage better understanding by the public of the skills, commitment and care involved in modern-day livestock farming.

Our sincere thanks to the Dykes family from South Slipperfield for their support with this very successful initiative which also saw live footage being streamed from their lambing shed which allowed the public to share one of their busiest weeks of the year.

For more information about the work we do for the industry please visit www.qmscotland.co.uk or follow us on Facebook and Twitter.✦

Uel Morton

Uel Morton,
Chief Executive
Quality Meat Scotland

QMS Welcomes New Board Members

QMS has welcomed three new members to its board, after a rigorous selection process by the Scottish Government.

The new appointees are Jock Gibson, who runs Macbeth's butchers in Forres, Scott Henderson, a farmer from Dumfries and Chairman of the Scottish Beef Association, and Kate Rowell, a qualified vet and farmer from Peeblesshire.

The appointments will be for four years.

Jim McLaren, Chairman of Quality Meat Scotland, said: "It is extremely encouraging that so many skilled and knowledgeable people applied for the positions and I welcome the selection of three individuals who are well respected in the industry.



"We are delighted to welcome Jock, Scott and Kate on board. I am confident they will bring a valuable combination of skills, fresh ideas and experience to the board.

"Our thanks go to John Craig, who stood down this month, for his commitment and enthusiasm during his term on the board."

Scottish Government announced the re-appointment of Jim McLaren as Chairman of Quality Meat Scotland in January, when board member John Scott was also re-appointed.✦



✦ For the latest information on QMS activities, including detailed reports of meetings, visit www.qmscotland.co.uk

Images: from top left, Jock Gibson, Kate Rowell, Scott Henderson.

Beef 2020 Report Leads to new £45 Million Beef Support Package

Rural Affairs Secretary Richard Lochhead has announced that a new £45 million beef support package to equip Scotland's farmers to improve the efficiency, sustainability and quality of their beef herds will be introduced ahead of next year's calving season.

The scheme will include a national livestock database and support for farmers to identify the key actions they are going to take on-farm including measures to improve cow fertility, reduce disease, optimise nutrition through feed analysis, and maximise grass and soil management.

The scheme is just one of the recommendations made by the Beef 2020 Report that has been accepted by the Scottish Government.

On a visit to a cattle sale at the ANM Thainstone Centre in Inverurie, Mr Lochhead said: "Beef is the jewel in Scotland's agricultural crown. It is our single biggest farming sector and makes up more than a quarter of Scottish agricultural output. This extra support from the Scottish Government will give the beef sector the opportunity to adapt and prosper as the full impact of the new Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) regime takes effect.

"It is therefore vital that government, industry organisations and beef producers work together to energise the sector and deliver the Beef 2020 vision of sustainable and long term growth."



Jim McLaren, Chairman of QMS, who chaired the industry expert panel that produced the Beef 2020 Report, warmly welcomed the Cabinet Secretary's broad acceptance of the Report's recommendations and confirmed he is to lead a group to oversee their implementation.

He said: "The implementation of the recommendations in the Beef 2020 Report will present a fantastic opportunity for the beef industry in Scotland to move forward with confidence. The adoption of these measures will strengthen our industry's resilience to the wide range of factors, many out with our control, which influence the beef market."✦

Visit the QMS website to view the full Beef 2020 report.

Dykes Family Share Lambing Experience via QMSLambCam

The farming family which hosted BBC Lambing Live last year shared their lambing experience with over 100,000 people in March, as part of a QMS LambCam project.

Hamish and Susie Dykes and family, who run South Slipperfield Farm, West Linton, agreed to install a "LambCam" camera in the roof space of their lambing shed which streamed live action to the world. They also shared the highs and lows of lambing their 950 ewes in a series of daily lambing video diaries.

The QMS initiative aimed to encourage members of the public to learn more about the hard work, dedication and care which goes into rearing top quality livestock.

The camera, installed by Dundee-based Farmer's Eye, streamed live action and sound from the lambing shed via a dedicated page on the QMS website between 24-27 March.



"Lambing Live last year was an incredible experience to be part of which our whole family enjoyed. It was also a really self-reflective process and made us really appreciate what we have," said Hamish Dykes. "We were delighted to get involved with the QMSLambCam project this year, and have been amazed just how popular the video diaries and live stream have been."

Carol McLaren, Head of Communications with Quality Meat Scotland said: "We are very much indebted to Hamish and Susie and team for being willing to get involved in the project at such a busy time of year.

They were brilliant hosts and explained the work that livestock farmers undertake and the importance of good welfare and quality assurance in a way that everyone could understand and enjoy hearing about.

"The feedback we have had from the public has been brilliant and made the logistical challenge of getting a widely accessible live stream from a lambing shed for the first time in Scotland all very much worthwhile."✦



✦ You can find more information about this project and watch the lambing diaries at www.qmscotland.co.uk/lambcam

Masterchef Winner Toasts Success of New Scotch Beef Campaign



BBC Masterchef: The Professionals winner Jamie Scott launched QMS's latest campaign to promote Scotch Beef PGI which was recently named Scotland's favourite food.

Jamie, who is sous chef at Rocca Restaurant, St Andrews, joined staff at The Macallan distillery in Speyside to raise a glass of one of the world's most iconic Scotch whiskies to the success of the campaign, which aimed to very clearly differentiate Scotch Beef.

The campaign had a strapline of "There's beef, there's Scottish beef, then there's Scotch Beef". It showcased Scotch Beef and the flavour, provenance, traceability and integrity which underpin the brand's PGI (Protected Geographical Indication) status.

Over 4.7 million consumers were targeted across Scotland and Greater London during February and March to inform, educate and inspire them to use Scotch Beef when they cook.

Jamie, who selected Scotch Beef for his main course dish in the final of Masterchef, donned his chef whites to serve up a delicious Scotch Beef dish at The Macallan Distillery to celebrate the launch of the campaign.

"Scotch Beef is a premium product and I am not surprised in the slightest that it has been named Scotland's favourite food," said Jamie.

"I want to help share our love of Scotch Beef with consumers across the UK especially given that 2015 is Scotland's Year of Food and Drink.

"It is such a versatile product and although it is simple to cook, it is also very impressive which is the main reason I chose to include it in my final dish on Masterchef. I always look for the Scotch Beef logo so I know I'm getting the very best."

Laurent Vernet, Head of Marketing at QMS, said: "By targeting professionals, food enthusiasts and busy families alike, this campaign aimed to show just how simple and versatile cooking with Scotch Beef can be. It is an everyday premium product that can be enjoyed as part of a healthy, balanced diet.

"By choosing Scotch Beef, we want consumers to know they are choosing the best product out there in terms of quality, taste and provenance. Scotch Beef is also underpinned by one of the longest-running quality assurance schemes in the world."

QMS Secures Deal with Sweden's Largest Retailer

Scotch Beef PGI and Scotch Lamb PGI will be on retail shelves throughout Sweden as a result of a successful new partnership involving Quality Meat Scotland on behalf of the Scottish red meat industry, and Swedish retail giant, ICA.



ICA, the leading grocery supplier in Sweden, has been stocking Scotch Beef and Scotch Lamb at selected stores in Stockholm since 2011. However, following a visit to Scotland at the beginning of this year to meet farmers and processors, ICA announced in February that it will be offering both Scotch Beef and Scotch Lamb for sale in all of its stores across Sweden, more than 1300 outlets, in the coming months.

QMS has been working to widen distribution of Scotch Beef and Scotch Lamb in Sweden for some time and has undertaken a

range of in-store sampling activities aimed at showcasing their high quality, flavour and versatility to Swedish consumers.

Encouraged by the positive response from their customers, Dan Jacobson, ICA's Head of Fresh and Joakim Skold Ostling, ICA's Chief Protein Buyer, travelled to Scotland in January and visited farms and processors. They also met representatives from Quality Meat Scotland, to discuss how they could extend the range of this premium product more widely in Sweden.

Mr Skold Ostling commented: "We are delighted to offer Scotch Beef PGI and Scotch Lamb PGI for sale in our stores across Sweden. We pride ourselves on selecting the very highest quality produce to offer our customers. Having met with representatives from Quality Meat Scotland as well as farmers and processors across Scotland, we are excited to be able to offer Scotch Beef and Scotch Lamb through our 1,300 outlets."

Both Scotch Beef and Scotch Lamb are underpinned by one of the longest-running quality assurance schemes in the world, guaranteeing that the meat is sourced from selected Scottish farms which must adopt best practice in terms of animal welfare and natural production methods.



QMS Highlights its Commitment to Animal Welfare

Quality Meat Scotland's commitment to animal welfare in the production of beef, lamb and pork in Scotland has been highlighted in the "Animal Welfare and Wellbeing Charter", launched in March.

The aim of this new corporate document is to clearly articulate and formalise the priority placed on animal welfare and wellbeing by QMS and others working in the Scottish red meat industry. The Charter also reflects the importance of animal welfare to the long-term growth of red meat production in Scotland and consumers' growing expectation of high standards of animal welfare.

The guiding principles of the Charter are embedded in all QMS Quality Assurance Schemes and activities, ensuring existing high standards of welfare in the production of red meat in Scotland - from farm to processor.

Jim McLaren, Chairman of QMS, welcomed the development of the Charter. "This Charter reflects Quality Meat Scotland's on-going commitment to animal welfare in the wide-ranging work we undertake.



"Importantly, the Charter is also a clear indication of the long-established commitment of our industry to animal welfare, which our market research clearly indicates continues to increase in importance in terms of consumers' expectations."

The Charter was launched at a time when there was considerable media attention on the issue of non-stun slaughter. QMS was able to remind consumers of the priority given to animal welfare in the quality assurance schemes behind the three brands.

"To be sold as Scotch Beef PGI, Scotch Lamb PGI or Specially Selected Pork, meat must come from animals which have been born, reared and slaughtered in Scotland," said Jim McLaren, Chairman of QMS.

"QMS Assurance Scheme Processor Standards require that animals are stunned before slaughter and high welfare standards are also a priority in our other assurance schemes which cover farms, hauliers, feed companies and auction markets.

"We work closely with the Scottish SPCA, Scotland's leading animal welfare charity, to ensure that high welfare standards are achieved in all six of our schemes."

Consumers seeking reassurance about the welfare of animals at slaughter can be confident, said Jim, that animals have been stunned before slaughter if they buy meat carrying the Scotch Beef, Scotch Lamb or Specially Selected Pork logos.

"Likewise, farmers who have their animals slaughtered in Scotland by a processor who is a member of the QMS Quality Assurance scheme can be confident their animals will be stunned before slaughter and that animal welfare is a priority," he added.



Miss Scotland Serves Scotch Lamb Broth at 'Happier Mealtimes' Roadshow

Miss Scotland, Ellie McKeating, helped out at the Happier Mealtimes roadshow when it visited Glasgow recently.

Shoppers at Asda, Bishopbriggs, were treated to some delicious Scotch Lamb broth as part of the Scottish Government campaign championing local, in season produce.

"I've loved helping out and spreading the message to residents in Glasgow that local, in season produce is tasty, delicious, and right on your doorstep!" said Ellie McKeating.

"I believe strongly in sourcing from Scotland's abundant larders, and the lamb broth is a personal favourite of mine - it certainly got us all through the cold weather!"

The roadshow was part of the Scottish Government's Happier Mealtimes campaign. The campaign champions the eating and sourcing of fresh, in-season food, which is nutritious, tastes delicious and also has environmental benefits.



Moray Rugby Club Star in Scotch Beef Campaign



Members of Moray Rugby Club star in the latest Aldi television advert promoting Scotch Beef. The squad were also on hand to encourage shoppers to the Elgin store buy Scotch Beef, which was also filmed by Aldi.



You can watch videos of both events on YouTube 'Love Scottish beef, like Aldi'



SILAGE POLICY CHANGE SAVES TIME & MONEY



A change in silage-making policy over the last two years has resulted in savings in money and time, plus prizes, for new QMS Board member **Kate Rowell**, who farms at Hundleshope, just south of Peebles, with her husband Ed.

Hundleshope is one of the QMS monitor farms and totals 1,797 acres (727 ha). It is a diverse mix, with approximately 1,450 acres being heather hill (peaking at 2,200 feet), home to a 350-ewe Scottish Blackface flock. On the lower ground, the Rowells run an out-wintered herd of 70 suckler cows and 430 home-bred Scotch Mules and Texel cross Mule ewes, plus 170 hogs.

The grain and straw from approximately 30 acres of spring barley are all used on-farm. In early 2013, the monitor farm community group persuaded the Rowells to aim to make better silage. "Previously we had gone for quantity instead of quality, traditionally silaging towards the end of July, aiming for bulk," recalled Kate.

"The group convinced us to take an earlier cut from younger grass. So, in 2013, we cut a field of one-year-old Italian Ryegrass on 20th June, which had been grazed up until 23rd/24th May."

The cut of young grass analysed at (Dry Matter basis):

Dry Matter (DM) – 428g/kg (42.8%)

Metabolisable Energy (ME) – 11.9 MJ/Kg DM

Crude Protein (CP) – 136g/kg (13.6%)

Samples of this silage won second prize in the silage competitions at the 2013 AgriScot and Scottish Winter Fair events.

The Rowells house their in-lamb cross-bred ewes prior to lambing. Traditionally, housed twin-bearing ewes had been fed twice a day with heavy bags of barley and protein, along with haylage. Ewe feeding had consumed three hours of every day.

Thanks to the feed quality of their young-cut silage, in 2014 Kate and Ed were able to replace the barley and haylage with the high-energy value silage, fed ad-lib with added minerals. Protein was supplied in the form of soya.

Sheep specialist Dr John Vipond from SAC Consulting (a division of SRUC, Scotland's Rural College) had spoken at one of the Peebles monitor farm meetings, when he had recommended to the group to supply the increased protein demanded by multiple-bearing females in the modern sheep breeds, by feeding extra Digestible Undegradable Protein (DUP) to in-lamb ewes in the lead-up to lambing.

John had explained that soya bean meal is an accepted source of DUP. He recommended feeding soya daily at the rate of 100g per lamb carried, from three weeks before the ewes are due to start lambing.

Working with John, Kate and Ed ran a soya comparison trial in 2014 and fed one group of twin-bearing ewes 200 grammes per head/day conventional soya bean meal (Hipro soya), while the other group, also twin-bearing, was fed 100 grammes per head/day of protected soya. John explained that protected soya has a similar overall protein content as normal soya but has approximately double the DUP content (90% vs. 45%). He added that by feeding protected soya instead of Hipro soya, the actual soya feeding rate can be halved, while still providing the same amount of DUP.

"We split 156 twin-bearing ewes of similar weight and body condition score into two equal groups," explained Ed. "They weighed around 65 kilos at 2.5 condition score."

"Four weeks before lambing, five ewes from each group were blood tested to measure energy supply," added Kate, who is also a veterinary surgeon. "All were normal."

"We recorded the birth weights of lambs in each group, with the Protected soya group lambs weighing, on average, 0.3 kg (11 ounces) less (4.6 kilo versus 4.9) than lambs born in the Hipro soya fed group."

"The feeding of good quality silage, minerals and soya saved us a lot of time when there are not enough hours in the day as it is."

The Rowells are enthusiastic about their new in-lamb feeding regime. "The better silage meant that we didn't have to heave heavy bags of barley up and down the feeding troughs, which was a very welcome bonus," commented Ed. "The feeding of good quality silage, minerals and soya saved us a lot of time when there are not enough hours in the day as it is. It made a big positive difference to us – instead of taking three hours a day to feed the ewes, we spent, at the most, three quarters of an hour."

In 2014, high-quality and prize-winning silage was again made at Hundleshope, with two fields cut on 29th June analysing at 11.4 and 11.9 for ME. In February this year, the Rowells learnt that they had won second prize in the East of Scotland Grassland Society Annual Silage Competition for Big Bale Silage.

During this year's lambing, Kate and Ed, based on the success of last year, tried to establish more information on the comparative performance of lambs from ewes fed Protected soya pre-lambing.

"We split the equal weight and Body Score twin-bearing ewes into two groups again this year," explained Kate. "However, this time, instead of daily feeding Hipro soya to one group and Protected soya to the other group, we just fed Protected soya, but at different intervals. We fed one group 100 grammes per head, per day, with the other group receiving 233 grammes per head on Monday, Wednesday and Friday."

"We also recorded lamb birth weights, plus lambing ease and assessment of colostrum, and plan to weight the lambs from the two groups again in May, two months after lambing, to compare their performance."

HUNDLESHOPE: AT A GLANCE

Monitor Farm since November 2012



Peaking at
2,200 ft
Heather hill
approx.
1,450 acres

1,797
acres
(727 ha)

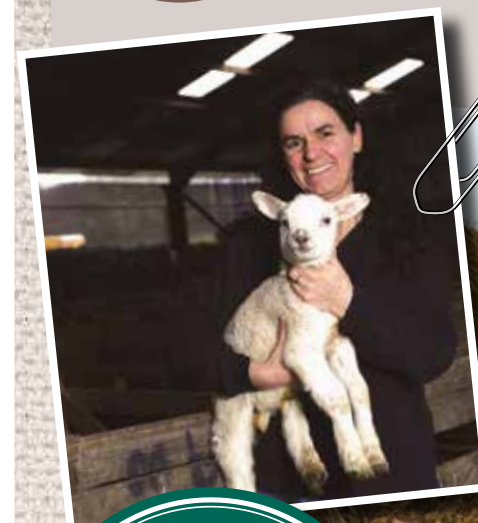
70
out-wintered
suckler cows

170
hogs

30 acres
Spring barley
grown

350
ewe Scottish
Blackface flock

430
Scotch mules
and Texel
cross mule
ewes



The results of this
farm study will be presented
at a future monitor farm
meeting held later this summer.
For more information about the
monitor farm programme,
please visit
[www.qmscotland.co.uk/
monitor-farms](http://www.qmscotland.co.uk/monitor-farms)





SHARING BEST PRACTICE CONFERENCE INSPIRES DELEGATES

The QMS "Sharing Best Practice" conference at Airth Castle in February attracted some great speakers from across the industry, and the 140 delegates who attended left with their heads crammed with ideas of how they could improve productivity and profitability on their farms.

Freelance journalist **Erika Hay** reports on some of the highlights.



The event received some great feedback from the delegates who attended.
Comments included:

"Very informative, wide range of experienced speakers covering a lot of relevant information."

"Very good, topical, inspirational and at the right time of year for us to act on things we heard."

"Inspire couldn't have been titled more appropriately."

"Fast moving and stimulating conference."

"Great source of info. Thought-provoking to drill into your own business."



Stuart Ashworth, Head of Economics Services with QMS, opened the conference with a warning shot across the bows in the form of a quote from "The Economist". This quote described agriculture as "an industry where the gap between the top and bottom quartile is greater than anywhere else."

Stuart also said there is evidence among cattle and sheep farmers that the best are getting better and, therefore, the gap is increasing. He said the challenge is to close the gap and encouraged farmers to think about waste, use of resources and marketing, all of which are within their control.

He held up the example of the pig industry where the productivity trend measured in pigmeat per sow has been steadily upwards since 2006, whereas the kg of beef per breeding cow has fluctuated dramatically, and he questioned whether best use was being made of the science available to improve.

Robert Gilchrist is a member of the QMS Industry Development team and believes that benchmarking is one of the most useful tools available to farmers. QMS set up Business Improvement Groups, followed by Focus on Figures, which have allowed farmers to compare their businesses. One East Lothian farmer who has been part of the project is Niall Jeffrey, who has 210 Angus cross cows of his own at Bielgrange and contract farms another 160 Angus cross sucklers nearby.

Niall said he benefited greatly from the discussions and openness within the groups. He said, "BIG highlighted problem areas within the herd such as calf losses and calving period; there was nowhere to hide, and it was the kick up the backside I needed. Focus on Figures has taken that a step further."

QMS is very aware that these programmes are only of benefit to those who join them, and Robert Gilchrist said it was crucial to get more farmers involved and, by doing so, close that gap between the top performers and the rest.

In the afternoon session, Justin McCarthy, editor and CEO of the Irish Farmers Journal, gave delegates a positive message regarding the future of beef farming and cited examples of a Better Farm beef programme which, over a three-year period, achieved a 125% increase in gross margins of the farms involved in the programme.

One Caithness farmer who has taken positive steps to improve his margins is Danny Miller, who has 500 spring calving cows on 1740ha and finishes all the progeny. He has taken the unusual step of negotiating an annual contract with an abattoir at an agreed price.

He said: "Occasionally I will lose out on the market price, but on the whole I am better off and the contract takes the risk out of selling and allows me to budget accurately."

Carol McLaren, head of communications with QMS, and West Linton farmer Hamish Dykes closed the conference with a talk on how farmers can make the most of PR opportunities. Hamish described his positive "Lambing Live" experience, while Carol stressed the importance of getting consumers on the side of the farmer and told the delegates: "You can all be great brand ambassadors."

For those who were unable to attend, the programme, speaker information and links to the presentations which were given on the day can be found at: www.qmscotland.co.uk/QMSinspire2015

Speakers



Justin McCarthy
Irish Farmers Journal



John Scott from Tain



Niall Jeffrey from East Lothian



Louise Urquhart from Aboyne



Danny Miller from Caithness



Jamie Robertson
Livestock Management Systems



Hamish Dykes from West Linton



Stuart Ashworth
QMS Head of Economics Services

Justin McCarthy, editor and CEO of the Irish Farmers Journal really held the delegates' attention at the QMS 'Sharing Best Practice' conference when he said he was convinced that the next CAP reform will see a return to coupled payments.

He said: "I believe, and it is generally accepted in Europe, that the current payments system is a flawed policy. The US is a cycle ahead of us and its farm bill has just returned to delivering support based on production. I have no doubt that the next CAP will see a return of coupled payments per head of livestock and for tillage."

Food security and climate change will play a more significant role in food production according to Justin. He said: "Research has shown that the best way to produce more food to keep up with demand, but which also meets food security standards and climate change targets, is through intensive, efficient farming – and the only way Europe can meet these challenges is to re-couple payments to production."

He highlighted potential threats to future profitability of beef farming such as weather, food scares and government policies which are out of the farmers' control; however, Justin believes there is plenty which can be done from within the farm gate such as improving technical efficiency.

The Irish Farmers Journal has done much to help in this field – in both Northern and Southern Ireland – by setting up the Northern Ireland Suckler Beef Programme, which is focused solely on improving technical efficiency to get farmers to the £570 per ha gross margin target.

This was followed by the Better Farm beef programme, which aims to turn efficiency into profit, and over a three-year period the farms involved in the programme achieved a 125% increase in gross margins. He admitted that one third of this was due to an increase in the beef price, but the other two-thirds was down to technical efficiency. He said: "It is not rocket science: most farmers don't look as though they are doing anything differently, but they are making small improvements in grass management, stocking rates and generally getting more from their farm resources."

SAFEGUARDING PROFITABILITY

A clear vision for the future combined with a desire to make money from his cattle business drives Caithness farmer Danny Miller to succeed, and he shared his ideas and experiences with delegates at the recent QMS "Sharing Best Practice" conference.

Despite coming from a farming family, Danny never intended farming to be his career, and has no agricultural qualifications other than the most important: access to land! Since he moved back into farming in 1995 he has held various NFU and farming Co-op positions, and has also been a board member of QMS and founder/chairman of a local food marketing company with the backing of HRH Prince Charles. All of which, he has found, has given him a useful insight into the industry.

Danny farms two units totalling 740 ha plus 1000 ha of rented hill on which he runs 500 spring-calving Aberdeen Angus cross cows. He measures and analyses everything while striving to achieve his mission of making a profit of £100,000 from the core farm business excluding SFP. He is an advocate of writing down a goal and then looking at how best to use resources to achieve it.



BILBSTER MAINS: AT A GLANCE

Two units
totalling
740
hectares

1000
hectares
rented hill

500
spring-calving
Aberdeen Angus
cross cows



The farm used to have 2000 ewes and half the cattle numbers, but Danny felt the interest and skill sets he had were more suited to cattle, so there are no longer any sheep. He has also taken on more land, which allowed him to scale up the cattle enterprise.

He believes strongly in benchmarking and said: "My vision is for the business to be measured alongside the best against all technical performance benchmarks set by SAC Consulting and QMS, and to consistently produce the highest quality beef." He realises that he will not always achieve this but said: "Technical performance is something we have some control over, unlike the price of beef or what CAP might bring."

Danny said: "If you don't measure and analyse everything then how else do you know where you are?" He writes down every death and looks back at the end of the season to see what could have been done better. He also uses EID to record performance, fertility and calving ease, and endeavours to increase total herd weaning weight year on year from the same resources.

He uses Aberdeen Angus and Saler bulls, and each cow is scored on its temperament, feet and udder. Cow size has crept up over the years, however, and he feels that one way to improve his cow efficiency could be to look at different breeds. He said: "The Angus suits our system but frame size is getting bigger. If we can reduce the size of cows by 100kg then we can carry more stock for the same cost."

Cheap growth from grass is crucial to the profitability of the farm. He has always used rotational grazing as opposed to set stocking rates, but recently he has been measuring the grass and paddock grazing with temporary fencing. This has been very successful, and the plan is to graze more cattle this way with permanent fencing. He said: "This way grazing days can be analysed, and we can identify the poorest performing fields so we can improve the amount of grass produced from them by fixing the problem, which may be pH, drainage or just grazing management."

One thing which puzzles Danny is why farmers, and he includes himself, are just talking about all this now and not ten years ago. He said: "This baffles me – support or not, for years we could have been making more money, or at least losing less, by doing all these things which are in our control. "Cattle production is our core business and we should constantly be getting better. Unfortunately the impetus for change often comes from outside influences, but once you make the changes, you wonder why you did not do it years ago."

Danny employs three-and-a-half members of staff on the livestock side and, while the farm is self-sufficient in arable crops, contractors are used for that side of the business as he said: "I hate anything that rusts!" He has also avoided investment in new buildings by renting wintering sheds from other farmers in the area to ease the pressure at busy times – such as weaning in October. Most of the cows are out-wintered after they are weaned, and he is currently considering how he could keep more outside on the hill during parts of the winter.

Some heifers are kept for replacements and everything else is finished, but for the last three years Danny has taken the unusual step of agreeing a contract with an abattoir every year. In August, he phones a few abattoirs to negotiate a fixed price which gives him security and the abattoirs consistency of supply for his six-to-eight week marketing window. He said: "This reduces the risk from market fluctuations and also allows me to budget accurately; however, if a price cannot be agreed, I still have the option of selling them store."

Cattle are usually finished at around 18 months and sold in November/December. Danny said: "I believe strongly that weights and grades do not matter per se; it is profit that counts, not getting the highest price." He tries to get as many cattle as possible marketed off grass, and the average time they are inside on a home-grown barley ration is only about 20 days.

With an eye on continuous improvement, Danny has a "to do" list for the future, which includes rearing more calves at heavier weaning weights from the same number of cows and feed, looking at new technologies, and – the big one – reducing fixed costs. +

"Technical performance is something we have some control over, unlike the price of beef or what CAP might bring".



You can view
Danny's presentation,
as well as the presentations
from the other speakers
at the QMS conference,
on the QMS website
[www.qmscotland.co.uk/
QMSinspire2015](http://www.qmscotland.co.uk/QMSinspire2015)

STAMPING OUT LAMENESS

Sheep lameness is a significant problem in Scottish flocks and can affect lamb production, growth rates and – ultimately – profitability. However, having a lameness strategy in your flock health plan can help keep lameness at bay.



Farmers like Steven Knox from North Balloch, Alyth, pictured here with vet Ian Gill, know the importance of including a lameness strategy in their flock health plans.

QMS has produced a free guide on the diagnosis and treatment of lameness in sheep to help farmers identify the risks and prevent problems, as well as giving guidelines on treating existing problems.

Vet Ian Gill from Thrums Veterinary Practice in Kirriemuir has first-hand experience of farms with lameness issues and has been instrumental in helping to reduce problems by supplying medication, providing advice on good practice and promoting lameness strategies in flock health plans. Ian, a past president of the Sheep Veterinary Society, holds a certificate in sheep health and production and is a Moredun regional advisor.

“Nationally the most worrying cause of lameness is Contagious Ovine Digital

Dermatitis, also known as CODD, but in our area foot rot, scald and shelly hoof are the main problems,” he said.

Farmers with flock health plans who are in regular contact with their vets are more likely to prevent lameness problems. CODD is often brought onto farms from bought-in sheep; Ian’s advice is to check where sheep are coming from and, if possible, avoid buying from places with a known problem. Acknowledging this is easier said than done, he advised that all bought-in sheep should be quarantined for at least four weeks and foot bathed twice before being turned out with others. He also said that, ideally, the quarantine fields should be those targeted for ploughing and reseeded.

He explained: “CODD is a very contagious condition which can be brought onto upland farms when hogs have been away-wintered on dairy grass where cows have suffered from digital dermatitis. Farmers should ask about this when they are negotiating winter grazing lets.” Another source of foot rot or CODD is bought-in tups, and infection can quickly spread when they are turned out with ewes.

The Thrums practice has almost 100 sheep farmer clients, of which seven have had their whole flocks injected with antibiotic to control foot rot or CODD. Ian injected one flock in 2012 with antibiotic to combat CODD at a cost of approximately £2.50 per head; however, the farmer believes the move was worth it due to the improved welfare, the extra production he achieved and the reduced labour costs. Lameness problems had led to veterinary treatment costs of £1.40 per head in 2011, £3.04 in 2012, reducing to £0.21 in 2013 and £0.50 in 2014 after flock treatment.

Strict quarantine and/or (in the case of foot rot) vaccination has avoided having to repeat flock treatments in the other six flocks.

The advice now is not to routinely trim and, in fact, the old treatment method of trimming, purple spray and turning back into field will only cause the condition to spread.

Ian said: “We found that, on average, lame ewes were a condition score less and were more likely to be barren. We believe that if there is 10% lameness due to CODD in a flock then injections are worthwhile. Over 2% lameness requires some treatment, but it can often be controlled by changes in husbandry, use of a footbath or, in the case of foot rot, vaccination.”

The shelly hoof problem often found in hill ewes can be hereditary, according to Ian, and care should be taken not to retain ewe lambs from female lines prone to it. It may also be down to a nutritional problem, and if it is proving a significant issue then it may be worthwhile testing for trace element deficiency.

Foot rot is probably the most recognisable of sheep lameness problems, and it is now

believed that scald is an early stage of foot rot. The advice now is not to routinely trim and, in fact, the old treatment method of trimming, purple spray and turning back into field will only cause the condition to spread. According to Ian and the information from the QMS leaflet, sheep with foot rot should be isolated and treated with antibiotic sprays and if necessary, injections. If trimming is necessary then shears should be disinfected after each foot and sheep pens also swept and disinfected to avoid further contamination.

Ian said: “My advice would be not to pare feet routinely, even if they are a bit overgrown. Leaving them untrimmed does not usually do any harm and if they can be turned out onto a bit of rough ground or hill, the natural wear usually solves the problem.”

Wet or poached ground, particularly around feeding stations, leads to a higher incidence of foot rot and Ian said that wherever possible feeders should be situated on hard standing or spread some builders’ lime around the base of feeders and keep feet as dry as possible.

One of the best times to check for lameness is at scanning and Ian said that, in his experience, it is often the lame ewes which are barren or carrying singles. If they are to be housed for lambing then he said it was best to try to keep lame ones separate and treat. He also advised putting lime under the straw.

Other good times to check over the flock and carry out treatments are at weaning and pre tupping, when there are fewest feet on the ground, with only the ewes and tups to check. A period of dry weather at this time can help kill the bacteria. He said, “The bacteria that causes foot rot will not survive in the soil for more than 10 days, so whenever sheep are being moved to clean grazing, it is worth walking them through a foot bath.”



Ian said that one of the problems with lameness is that, unless the farm has a health plan where annual discussions with a vet highlight problems, few farmers ask a vet’s advice regarding lameness. Correct diagnosis is important, as the many products available from agricultural stores are not always the most appropriate for certain conditions.

He said: “Now that the recommended treatment for many of the lameness problems is antibiotics, as highlighted in the QMS leaflet, hopefully more farmers will consult their vet and get to the root of the problem.”+

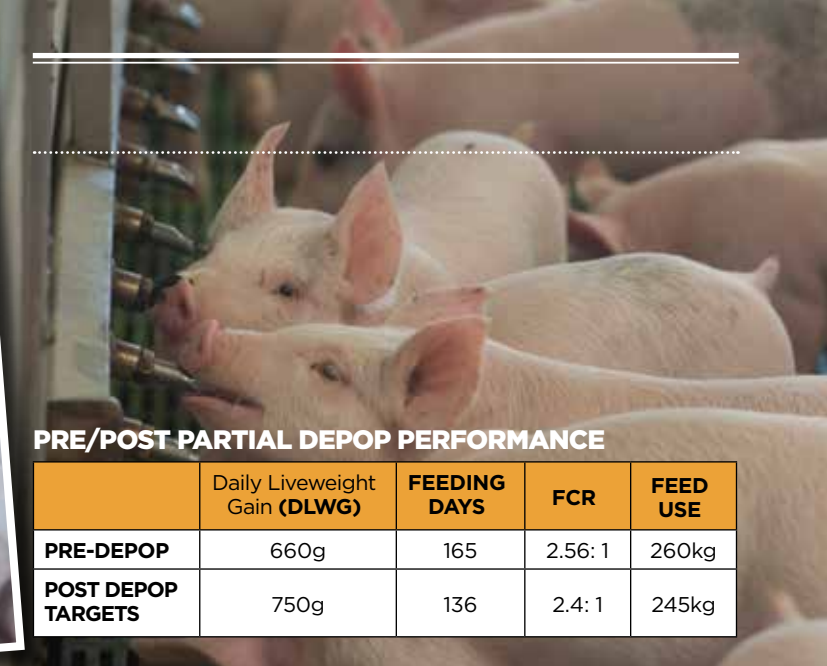
+ The QMS booklet lists and describes the most common causes of lameness in sheep and how to recognise them. It offers practical advice on both prevention and treatment, and on general foot care, and is available from the QMS website www.qmscotland.co.uk. If you would like to receive a free hard copy in the post, please phone QMS on **0131 472 4040**.

DIAGNOSIS & TREATMENT OF LAMENESS IN SHEEP

QMS

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, Insch, 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.”



A LOOK AT FIFTH QUARTER

Producers often use killing out percentages as part of their judgement on the efficiency of their production system and value of their animals. However, how often do we reflect on the remainder of the animal, known as the fifth quarter, what it is and what value it has?

By **Stuart Ashworth**, QMS Head of Economics Services

In simple terms, if a cattle beast kills out at 58% then what is the remaining 42% and what happens to it? Similarly if a lamb kills out at 47%, what is the other 53%? The obvious starting point is the hide or sheep skin.

On a slaughter weight cattle beast a hide typically makes up about 7–8% of liveweight and weighs in at about 40–45 kg. Similarly, a lamb skin weighs about 4–5 kg – but clearly varies with the amount of wool growth; hence why early season lambs kill out at higher percentages than late season lambs and hogs.

Equally, skins and hides have useful value when sold to those making leather goods. The value can, however, be badly affected by blemishes or damage to those hides, which may not be apparent until they are removed from the animal; damage such

as scars from injection sites, scratches from barbed wire or insect bites from lice and ticks. Having an equal or greater effect is the basic retail demand for leather and sheepskin products – whether that be shoes, fashion products or aircraft upholstery. More recently, though, the environmental impacts of the tanning process have impacted on prices.

For example, over the past 12 months sheepskin prices have been badly affected by reduced demand from processors in China as a consequence of environmental impact actions imposed by the Chinese government on their tannery businesses. The fall in demand from China could not be taken up by processors elsewhere in the world, and skin prices collapsed. Meanwhile, although demand for upholstery leather is steady, other users of leather such as the footwear and

clothing sector report slowing demand. Also affecting trade are the various global trade disputes with Russia and a weakening of the Russian rouble which has disturbed normal trade patterns, with both Turkey and China reporting low demand for products.

The edible offals (heart, liver, lung) has a ready-made market. However, even here revenue can be lost when livers, for example, are downgraded by meat inspectors because they are affected by fluke or other conditions. For example, during 2013, one third of cattle livers had evidence of fluke damage. There are also some less familiar edible offals that have a food use market including tripe, skirt and products which are more likely to be exported such as reproductive organs, lungs and tendons.

There are other parts of the carcass that can also be harvested and sold, with extra work done in the abattoir. For example feet, which again have export potential, and trimmed fat, which can be used in a number of ways including tallow production. In the case of sheep under one year old the head can also be harvested.

Abattoirs also have the challenge of managing blood, which can amount to between 3.5% and 4.5% of an animal's live weight. Some of this can be used for food products such as black puddings. Additionally, useful pharmaceutical and industrial products can be extracted from blood. However, strict rules apply as to what applications different categories of blood can be used for. For example, blood from ruminants cannot be fed to animals. However, if an abattoir can separate blood from animals that fail post mortem tests then the remaining blood can be used for blood products.

The complication comes in respect of managing these offals, blood or animal by-products in an abattoir, specifically if there is no or a limited consumer market or the by-product is not suitable for food use. This is because for industrial use, or disposal, offals are classified into one



EXAMPLE OF FIFTH QUARTER YIELD

	600kg liveweight R4L steer		
	Kg	% of 5th quarter	% of liveweight
Hide	42	15	7
Fat	32	11	5
Edible offal (e.g. liver, kidney, cheek)	19	7	3
Edible co-products (stomach & feet)	27	10	4
Other edible organs (e.g. lungs, sweetbreads)	7	2	1
By-product for disposal (e.g. blood, intestines, gut contents, spinal cord)	155	55	26
Total fifth quarter	282	100	47

	40kg lwt R3L lamb		
	Kg	% of 5th quarter	% of liveweight
Skin	4	21	11
Fat	2	9	5
Edible offal (e.g. liver, kidney)	1	6	3
Edible co-products (stomach, intestines & feet)	3	15	8
Edible offal for export (e.g. lungs, head)	3	13	7
By-product for disposal (e.g. blood, gut contents)	8	36	19
Total fifth quarter	21	100	52.5

Source: Eblex

of three categories, each with specific handling and disposal requirements. The handling of these products is governed by EU regulations put in place as a response to BSE but also wider Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathies (TSEs), such as scrapie, that may be found in other species. The rules for managing these different categories of animal by-product are complex, and the summary below gives a very broad overview.

Category 1 is considered the most high-risk material and includes Specified Risk Materials. In general this material can only be disposed of by incineration, resulting in abattoirs carrying a significant cost to dispose of this material.

Category 2 is also considered high-risk and uses the basic rule that this product cannot be used as food but, subject to suitable treatment, can have wider use than

category 1 as fertilisers and compost, as well as being used for anaerobic digestion. It includes fallen stock, manures and gut fill and condemned carcasses or part carcasses.

Category 3 includes parts of animals which are fit for human consumption but, for commercial reasons, are not used for this purpose – for example, hides, skins and blood. While these products can be incinerated or rendered or disposed of as landfill like other categories of animal by-product, they can also be processed as pet food or technical products. However, they cannot be used as a ruminant feed.

The fifth quarter contributes significantly to the value of a prime animal. Its value could be maximised throughout the supply chain if the industry were able to promote the value in edible offal to the consumer and improve market access. The regulatory framework covering animal by-products would also need to be revisited.✚

For the latest market reports, sign up for our FREE weekly newsletter. Just email 'YES' to info@qmscotland.co.uk to subscribe.

The fifth quarter contributes significantly to the value of a prime animal



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