

LIVESTOCK+

QMS Sharing best practice from Scottish livestock businesses **WINTER 2015**

+ Features

BUTE FARMERS BENEFIT
FROM CHANGES

BORDERS PIG FARMER
UPBEAT ABOUT FUTURE

WHY BIG ISN'T ALWAYS BETTER

UPDATES

Monitor Farms Revisited

**New Video Promotes
Safety at Calving**

**EID Technology Can
Benefit Cattle Industry**

Inside

Latest news, innovations,
case studies...
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MONITOR FARMS REVISITED • MARKET FOCUS • NEW TECHNOLOGY • CALVING SAFETY

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY



QMS supports over **200 free events** a year focused on the uptake of new technology to support the Scottish cattle, sheep and pig industries. Here is a highlight of some of the events being held over the next two months.

➤ Tuesday 10 November

Ruminomics Workshop.

Norton House Hotel,
Ingliston, Edinburgh, EH28 8LX

This event will look at aspects of livestock breeding, feeding and management to lower environmental footprint and improve feed conversion efficiency and production.

➤ Wednesday 11 November

Monitor Farm Legacy Event.

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

➤ Tuesday 17 November

Pig Industry Conference.

Forbes of Kingennie, Kingennie, Broughty Ferry,
Dundee, DD5 3RD

A one day event covering pig health, production, processing and marketing.

➤ Wednesday 18 November

Agriscot.

Ingliston, Edinburgh, EH28 8NB

This year's Beef Demonstration, supported by QMS, will focus on the benefits of EID.

The demo will be held in the main ring at 11.30am.

➤ Thursday 26 November

Monitor Farm Legacy Event.

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

➤ Thursday 3 December

Monitor Farm Legacy Event.

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

➤ Wednesday 9 December

Monitor Farm Legacy Event.

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

➤ Thursday 10 December

Monitor Farm Legacy Event.

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

Cattle EID workshops

➤ Wednesday 9 December

Scott Henderson hosts at Carswadda,
Lochfoot, Lochhead, Dumfries, DG2 8JE

➤ Monday 14 December

Stephen Allardyce hosts at East Town Farm,
Tarland, Aboyne, AB34 4TD

Details of further workshops can be found at **www.qmscotland.co.uk/events**



For further information about these events and details of how to register, please visit **www.qmscotland.co.uk/events**



LIVESTOCK+

How to contact QMS:

visit www.qmscotland.co.uk

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WELCOME



As a farmer, and in my various roles working on behalf of the Scottish livestock industry over the past decade or two, I have never failed to be impressed by the pride and passion shown by Scottish farmers.

No matter how tough times are it seems farmers' commitment to the job they do remains undaunted.

That has certainly been the case in recent months when as farmers we have all been feeling the pressure and facing significant challenges, often from factors outwith our control, including cash-flow and volatile prices.

There is no question that our industry is under pressure but there are very encouraging signs that a great many farmers are now really focusing on the longer term and scrutinising their businesses to find chinks in performance and opportunities to improve returns.

We're seeing a real thirst for innovative ideas from farmers keen to rise to the challenge of the factors limiting the potential of their businesses and tackle those factors they can control.

The vast majority of QMS levy income, over 70%, is spent on consumer-facing activities including marketing and promotion behind the brands.

Marketing is, of course, a very important area of our work in terms of its potential to stimulate consumer demand but our work to help farmers look at ways of improving returns is also crucial to meet both our statutory remit and overall strategy to shape a sustainable and prospering Scottish red meat industry.

During the past year more than 3,000 farmers keen to look at ways of further reducing their costs and improving their returns have attended meetings supported by our Industry Development team.

The good news is that increasingly we are seeing that pride and passion our industry is renowned for being combined with a determination to move forward positively – and that can only auger well for the future of our industry.

I hope that you enjoy the Winter issue of Livestock+ and that you find the information and ideas shared by the farmers featured in this issue useful.+

Jim McLaren, Chairman, Quality Meat Scotland

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Engaging with the industry



A priority for QMS, along with the day-to-day delivery of activities on behalf of the Scottish red meat industry, is ensuring that we take time to listen carefully to the views of those who work in the industry.

As well as speaking directly with farmers and others who work in our industry, we also have a very structured approach to ensuring representatives from the various parts of our industry have an opportunity to influence the way we deliver activities.

One way we do this is by ensuring we have strong industry input to our decision-making processes by operating various committees relating to our areas of work eg the Scotch Lamb Marketing Strategy Group.

We hope that this commitment to industry involvement and interaction along with our open, transparent communications helps to promote good understanding of the activities we undertake and prevent confusion.

One area which we have been asked about recently is how much of the levy we receive goes on consumer facing activities (eg marketing) compared with industry-facing activities to help farmers improve their returns.

By far the biggest area of budget spend in QMS continues to be directed to the work our marketing team undertakes to promote the brands.

Last year around 70% of QMS's levy income was spent on marketing and communications activities behind the brands. In fact when you add the additional income we secure from grants, for every £1 of levy collected, £1.10 is spent delivering activities on behalf of the Scottish red meat industry.

Of this £1.10 total, 75 pence is spent on consumer-facing activity and 28 pence on industry-facing activity.

That said, while activity aimed at increasing demand for beef, lamb and pork is clearly a priority, it is also important to recognise that work to help farmers reduce costs is just as important in terms of the future sustainability of the industry.

Our industry development work, therefore, remains a key aspect of our activities behind our top line strategy of shaping "a sustainable and prospering Scottish red meat industry."+

Uel Morton

Uel Morton,
Chief Executive,
Quality Meat Scotland

Scotch Beef PGI and Scotch Lamb PGI Promoted Internationally

Scotch Beef PGI and Scotch Lamb PGI were successfully showcased earlier this month at Anuga, the world's largest food trade fair.

QMS's stand highlighted the Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) status of Scotch Beef and Scotch Lamb and the guarantees of quality assurance, provenance and welfare that underpin the brands.

With an exhibition size of over 284,000 m², the trade fair, which is held in Cologne, Germany, attracts over 155,000 trade visitors from 187 countries, making it a major event for many of Europe's most influential buyers.

Ten Scottish exporters were joined by QMS staff and European agents to promote the Scottish red meat industry

to buyers and traders from across the globe. Catering was provided by hospitality students from Fife College, who ensured that visitors had ample opportunities to experience the great taste of Scotch Beef and Scotch Lamb.

QMS Marketing Manager Margaret Stewart said: "The Scotch brands and PGI label already enjoy strong trade awareness on the continent. Anuga gives us the opportunity to continue to grow that awareness as well as offering exporters a great opportunity to build business."+



Masterchef Presenter Backs Scotch Lamb Campaign

Masterchef presenter Gregg Wallace urged consumers to make the most of the versatility and simplicity of cooking Scotch Lamb PGI.

Speaking at the launch of QMS's campaign to raise the profile of the fantastic taste of locally produced lamb, he said there was huge scope for many more people to enjoy Scotch Lamb routinely.

"Lamb has always been my personal favourite and there is real potential for lots more of us to be making the most of this natural, easy-to-cook product, which is bursting with flavour and such a great ingredient for a whole range of quick, tasty dishes," said Gregg.

During a visit north of the border, hosted by QMS, Gregg met farmers, butchers and chefs and learned more about what makes Scotch Lamb one of the finest ingredients in Scotland's larder. His trip included a visit to a Perthshire sheep farm, where he saw first-hand the dedication, care and stockmanship skills behind the production of top-quality Scotch Lamb.

John Ritchie and his wife Alix, along with John's parents George and Karen, run the 750 acre farm near Dunning which is home to 650 ewes.



Masterchef presenter Gregg Wallace joins the Ritchie family on their farm Montalt near Dunning, Perthshire..

Animal welfare is a key aspect of the quality assurance schemes behind Scotch Lamb, and Gregg also heard about QMS's partnership with the Scottish SPCA and the "Welfare and Wellbeing Charter" during his visit.

This activity was part of the launch, by QMS, of a high-impact advertising campaign behind Scotch Lamb PGI targeting 3.7 million consumers. The 2015 Scotch Lamb PGI campaign – which

reached over 90% of Scottish adults this year – built on last year's very successful campaign which boosted retail sales of lamb in Scotland by 11%.

The target audience for the campaign was principally young professionals and busy working parents, and the message is very much that lamb is not just for roasting at the weekend – it can also make a quick, nutritious mid-week meal for all ages to enjoy.+

Local Farmers Support QMS Scotch Lamb Sampling Activities



Sheep farmers joined QMS ambassadors in supermarkets around Scotland as part of this year's campaign to encourage shoppers to re-discover the delicious versatility of Scotch Lamb PGI.

QMS delivered over 112 days of sampling activities, covering

the length and breadth of Scotland, as part of its marketing campaign behind Scotch Lamb. The samplings aimed to show the public how simple it is to cook succulent, tender Scotch Lamb, and recipe leaflets packed with simple dish ideas were handed out to take home.

The farmers were keen to get involved with the sampling events and engage with consumers about what goes into putting fresh, tasty Scotch Lamb on their plates.

Andrew Wilson, who farms near Cupar in Fife, said: "We are extremely proud of the Scotch Lamb we produce, which is reared in Scotland to very high standards of animal husbandry and welfare.+



Fife farmers, Andrew and Pat Wilson join QMS Scotch Lamb ambassador Mo Ahmad (centre) at a QMS Scotch Lamb sampling event in Tesco Perth Extra.

Burger Initiative Proves Big Hit in East Ayrshire

The recipe for the winning burger in a QMS schools competition has proved so successful it is now being introduced to 45 primary schools and nine secondary schools in East Ayrshire.

The #TasteScotland burger competition, run by QMS's Scotch Butchers Club, was won by Greenwood Academy S1 pupils with their 'Clapshot' burger, supplied by local butcher Pollok Williamson.

Nutritionist Jenni Henderson, QMS Health and Education Executive, said that the decision to include the burger on the menus of other schools in the area emphasised what a great idea the 'Clapshot' burger had been. She said: "The pupils should feel really proud that their burger can now be enjoyed in schools across East Ayrshire."+



First Minister Backs Scotch Lamb Campaign



Scotland's First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, gave her backing to QMS's Scotch Lamb PGI campaign while on a visit to Hamish Dykes' South Slipperfield farm near West Linton.

During the visit, which was organised by NFU Scotland to promote the issues of the Scottish sheep industry, the First Minister was presented with one of the Scotch Lamb ambassador kits which QMS has been offering free of charge to Scottish farming families.+

QMS Appoints New Head of Industry Development

QMS has appointed Douglas Bell as its new head of industry development.

Douglas, who took over the reigns from Johnny Mackey at the end of October, was previously the Head of the Agricultural Policy Unit of SAC Consulting, part of SRUC, Scotland's Rural College.

A BSc Agriculture graduate of Edinburgh University, Douglas has 30 years experience of delivering high level management advice and training through routes ranging from consultancy and project design to facilitation and a hands-on approach. He is also involved in running the family farm near Carnwath in Lanarkshire.

Uel Morton, QMS Chief Executive, said: "We are delighted to welcome Doug to QMS. He brings a wealth of experience, as well as core skills, to the role."+



New Top Quartile Project Launched

The first reports from an anonymous Scottish cattle and sheep farm taking part in an exciting new QMS project are now available on the QMS website.

The 'Top Quartile' project will track the performance of this average-performing farm business and aims to lift the business's net margin performance from "average" to "top 25%" over a three-year period. The project will focus first on the cattle enterprise but will later move to focus on the sheep side of the business.

The identity of the farm will not be revealed during the project, but the lessons learnt along the way will be shared by QMS with the Scottish farming community.+

To read the first reports from this project, visit www.qmscotland.co.uk/top-quartile



Farmers Flock to Lameness Meetings

A series of six free sheep lameness meetings held in September were very well received by the farmers who attended them. Run by specialist sheep vet Fiona Lovatt, these QMS-funded meetings highlighted practical solutions for controlling a range of foot problems in sheep.+

To request a free QMS guide to controlling sheep lameness, phone 0131 472 4040 or email info@qmscotland.co.uk



Love Scotch Lamb Weekend Delivers Results

Farmers, chefs, butchers and retailers around Scotland threw their weight behind "Love Scotch Lamb Weekend", which took place on 5th and 6th September.

The focused weekend of activity behind the "Wham Bam Lamb" campaign promoting Scotch Lamb saw activities held around the country to raise the profile of the simplicity and versatility of one of Scotland's most natural foods.

Twenty-five Scotch Lamb sampling events were run by QMS at Scottish retailers over the weekend, with farmers joining QMS ambassadors in several stores around the country.

Scotch Lamb was also one of the main ingredients showcased in the Scotch Lamb Cookery Theatre at Dundee Food and Flower Festival during the weekend. The line-up of high-profile chefs included Masterchef presenter Gregg Wallace, who launched the Scotch Lamb campaign.

QMS also attended the Let's Eat event in Glasgow, where Taggart star Alex Norton joined a line-up of foodies and chefs and cooked a fantastic lamb dish for the crowds – Cajun Spiced Shepherd's Pie.

A group of leading food and lifestyle bloggers also visited Scotland on a visit organised by QMS. During two days of activity to showcase Scotch Beef and Scotch Lamb, they met butchers and farmers from Edinburgh and the Scottish Borders and also took part in a hands-on butchery workshop from Scottish Meat Training.

QMS has also been encouraging Scottish farming families to help spread the word about Scotch Lamb by offering free Scotch Lambassador kits. Several hundred kits have been requested by farming families, who are being encouraged to share their love of lamb and cook a Scotch Lamb dish for friends, families or neighbours. +

Image: Staff and professional chef students from Dundee and Angus College in the Scotch Lamb Cookery Theatre at Dundee Food Festival gets underway.

Free Suckler Cow and Bull Workshops Attracted Large Numbers

Over 150 farmers attended a series of suckler cow and bull workshops held around Scotland recently.

The workshops were held on farms in Fort William, Thurso and Orkney and covered suckler cow nutrition, bull management, cattle health issues and genetics.



Speakers at each workshop included Robert Gilchrist, QMS Knowledge Transfer Specialist; Gavin Hill, SAC Beef Specialist; Karen Stewart, SAC Feeding Consultant; and a local vet. Time was given for group discussions to allow farmers to discuss the issues they faced.

The workshops were funded by QMS with support from the Scottish Government's Public Good Veterinary and Advisory Services Programme. +

New Scotch Lamb Guide Available

QMS has produced a new guide to help consumers understand the quality and versatility of Scotch Lamb PGI.

A new Lamb Guide with Recipes has over 120 pages and is packed with delicious Scotch Lamb recipes and information about why Scotch Lamb is a cut above the rest, both in production and taste. +

It is being distributed to top chefs and food writers and can be downloaded **free** of charge from www.scotchkitchen.com.



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.



Kenny 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

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

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

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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

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.

"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 Cheviot ewes to replace his Scotch Mules. However, he found them difficult to handle and he has gone back to the

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."

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



NEW VIDEO PROMOTES SAFETY AT CALVING

Quality Meat Scotland (QMS) has produced a short video to promote the importance of safety when working with cattle at calving, including a range of steps which can help reduce risk of injury or loss of life.

QMS VIDEO ▶

To view the safety at calving video and Basil's four point plan keep you, your family and staff safe at calving, visit www.qmscotland.co.uk/video-library



Dr Basil Lowman of SAC Consulting, a division of SRUC (Scotland's Rural College), highlights a range of tips in a four-point plan which he talks through in the video. Much of the advice in the video is also applicable to those working with animals in a bull beef system.

"Every farmer knows that even the most docile cows can sometimes be extra-protective towards their calves and, therefore, all cows should be treated with respect," said Basil.

"It is important for cows to be familiar with staff or family members who may be assisting with calving so they do not feel threatened by people they are less used to," he added.

In the QMS video, Basil recommends some measures to reduce risks during indoor calving, based on simple planning.

He said: "Three to four weeks before calving is due to start, take family or staff members who will be working with calving cows into the calving area and identify the escape routes. You should also check if you have a mobile signal in the pen so you can call for help if need be."

OVER THE PAST DECADE

9 

PEOPLE HAVE BEEN KILLED IN LIVESTOCK-RELATED INCIDENTS ON SCOTTISH FARMS.

He points out that a ring feeder can be a useful tool in a calving pen, either to keep between yourself and the cow or to jump into and call for help.

"Cull aggressive cows from the herd and, in the case of very aggressive animals, their daughters too."



Another possibility being successfully used by some farmers is erecting a temporary electric fence across part of the pen. This can give a quick escape to a safe area if needed and should be put in place two to three weeks before calving starts, to allow the cows time to learn to respect it.

In the unfortunate event of being knocked down by a cow, Basil said: "By far the quickest method to get out of the way is to roll away, so it is essential to make sure the gap under gates is large enough, and clear of muck or other obstructions, to get under."

Looking at outdoor calving situations, Basil's advice flagged up the value of having a vehicle close by. "Never be too far away from your vehicle – either to jump into or to roll under.

He also recommends the use of a calf catcher or ring feeder when tagging calves so they can be handled safely, isolated from their mothers.

All the above are practical measures relating to planning or steps taken during calving. However, the best preventative measure, according to Basil, is to cull aggressive cows from the herd and, in the case of very aggressive animals, their daughters too.

He pointed out that research shows that aggressive cows actually spend less time licking their calves and are generally, therefore, worse mothers. He also recommends selecting bulls with above average EBVs for docility. ➤

CASE STUDY



One family who know first-hand what it is like to be at the receiving end of a head-butt from a newly calved heifer, is the Penny family from Shannas Farm near Peterhead.

Margaret Penny works with her husband John and their herd of 130 pedigree Limousins on a daily basis and the couple pride themselves on breeding docile cattle, so she thought it would never happen to her.

In April 2014 Margaret had been taking the precautionary steps of walking through the calving heifers every day, but when the last one calved she popped into the pen with a stick to try to stop an older calf pinching the colostrum. As she walked away, the heifer butted her in the back, she turned round and was hit in the ribs and neck before escaping over the water trough.

She suffered multiple bi-lateral fractures of her ribs, a punctured lung and a neck injury but fortunately has since made a full recovery.

Margaret said, "This heifer had never shown any signs of aggression before, so it just goes to show you can never be sure. I am fortunate as my injuries could have been a lot worse, but next time I see an older calf pinching colostrum, I'll just leave it."

The Pennys gave this heifer another chance; however, this year when she came to calving again, she showed signs of aggression towards Margaret so she is now with a batch of cows to be culled. Margaret said, "We breed all our own replacements and our cattle are all very quiet, but this heifer definitely took a dislike to me and it proves that you can never be too careful when handling cattle, particularly around calving time."



MONITOR FARM LEGACY

- Reaping Rewards of Changes Made

When Brian and Janet Hill of Plan Farm on the Isle of Bute became monitor farmers in May 2006, they had three main objectives.

These were: more grass of better quality; a fertile, productive, easily managed, three-way cross herd of foraging cows, which would out-winter and produce quality heifers suitable for breeding, plus marketable steers; and more lambs from fewer ewes.

Nine years on and the Hills, the first island monitor farmers in the QMS network of monitor farms throughout Scotland, have made great improvements in all three areas.

For more information
about the monitor farms
visit:
[www.qmscotland.co.uk/
monitor-farms](http://www.qmscotland.co.uk/monitor-farms)

Improvements Made

1. Grassland is much improved on the lower and some of the higher ground, facilitating an increase in cow numbers from 100 to 120.
2. The bracken crushing and foraging talents of the out-wintered herd – now a blend of Luing and South Devon, have helped to improve the higher grazing. Herd replacements are home-bred, and some Luing X steers are finished on forage at 18–20 months.
3. What was a 1,000 ewe flock lambing at under 135% is now an outside lambing flock of 650 Lleyms which achieve around 180%, with most of the ewes now weaning more than their own body weight.

In the south of the island, the 1,600 acre (650ha) Plan Farm has sea on three sides, with 210 acres of in-bye, of which 70 acres are suitable for silaging. Land peaks at 500 feet. Annual rainfall on this Gulf Stream-kissed island is approximately 60 inches, with grass growing almost all year round.

“Grass underpins everything we produce,” explained Brian Hill. “Before the monitor farm, in our quest to grow grass, we simply slapped on compound. By the time we’d done that, we reckoned we couldn’t afford lime.

“But the monitor farm taught us how crucial it is to prioritise soil pH. Ever since, we’ve applied calcium lime annually, which has significantly lifted pH levels. Pre-monitor farm, the soil-tested areas averaged 5.05. In 2014 all these areas were at least 5.6, with a peak of 6.4.



"We can clearly see the overall improvement and are convinced that grass is now growing earlier in spring and lasting longer into the winter."

Livestock duties at Plan are split equally, with Brian in charge of the cattle and the sheep enterprise being Janet's domain.

When the Hills began their three-year monitor farm term, both enterprises had fertility issues.

"In 2006, just 87% of females to the bull were in calf," recalled Brian.

"My sheep were also disappointing pre-2006, with around 13 to 14% of the ewes empty at scanning," added Janet.

"Thanks to the monitor farm programme, we were able to sort this major problem, with one of the solutions for cattle as well as sheep being twice-yearly trace element boluses.

"Disease was also causing infertility, and some sheep tested positive for toxoplasmosis.

"The sheep are now routinely vaccinated as gimmers for toxoplasmosis, which has been a major turning point. The cattle are BVD-accredited and vaccinated for ongoing protection."

Brian added: "The group also recommended regularly semen testing bulls, which has resulted in a couple getting their marching orders."

Six years after the monitor farm programme ended at Plan farm, the Hills are continuing to see the benefits of the advice and guidance they received from specialists and fellow farmers who supported them at the time.

Brian commented: "Back in 2006, the group suggested reducing the bulling period from twelve to nine weeks. This year, of the 115 females calved, 84 had calved by day 21. By day 42, there were only 4 left."

"It's almost 10 years since our first meeting, and looking back has made us realise just what the monitor farm experience helped us to achieve."

He added: "Before becoming monitor farmers, if some of the cows weren't in calf, we might have given them a second chance. I was told to stop doing that. I did and won't ever do it again!"

Sheep fertility has also increased as a result of the changes Janet has put in place. "Just one ewe scanned empty ahead of this year's lambing," she explained. "And my rams, which now get 80 ewes each thanks to monitor farm advice, all get a pre-tupping MOT.

Monitor Farm Legacy Events

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Electronic Identification offered the potential of a host of useful sheep performance information, and the group encouraged Janet to EID her sheep to improve productivity. By easily identifying the better and poorer performing lines, Janet could ensure that only ewe lambs from the good lines were kept, and all passengers were culled.

Ask the Hills to summarise what their monitor farm experience did for them, and you get double-barrelled enthusiasm at full blast.

"It's almost 10 years since our first meeting, and looking back has made us realise just what the monitor farm experience helped us to achieve," said Brian.

"Throughout the three-year term, we needed to make sure that everything we did was done right and that we could justify why we did it at the next meeting. We admit some of the things we were advised to do, did challenge us and push us outside our comfort zone."+

BORDERS BEEF FARMER HIGHLIGHTS BENEFITS OF EID IN CATTLE

There is huge potential for cattle farmers to use Electronic Identification (EID) to unlock data which could improve the profitability of their herds, according to **Robert Neill** who uses EID extensively in his herd of 350 breeding cows and their progeny.

Robert, who farms with his wife Jak at Upper Nisbet, near Jedburgh, is using a panel Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) reader on the side of the cattle crush so he can now run 40 cattle through the crate in ten minutes, reducing stress and handling. He said: "I believe there is definitely a need for cattle EID; it speeds up the process of weighing cattle for market and removes human error."

Robert is well qualified on the subject, having completed a Nuffield Scholarship on cattle EID. He studied systems in Canada, Australia, New Zealand and Argentina and concluded that a national database needs to be developed to be used for benchmarking and analysis. He said: "For the beef industry to survive in an ever-changing world, farmers need to be using the information that can be collected to make more informed decisions about their business."



To register for
the EID workshops
please visit:
[www.qmscotland.co.uk/
events](http://www.qmscotland.co.uk/events)

He also believes that the use of EID combined with a real-time database would eliminate the need for paper passports for cattle, which could make the system more efficient and potentially save thousands of pounds each year in administration of cattle movements by the BCMS.

Upper Nisbet lifted the QMS/Agriscot Scotch Beef Farm of the Year title in 2012, and Robert's accolades include being a former Farmers' Weekly Beef Farmer of the Year and, more recently, a recipient of the Future Farming award. Robert has been at the forefront of trials and developments in cattle tagging and ID.

He now routinely uses DNA tissue sampling tags and explained: "As the new-born calves are tagged with these new tags, a sample of tissue from the ear is stored in a small pre-printed sealed test tube, which is then sent to a laboratory and tested for BVD."

In 2014, he started to work with Scot EID as part of their Ultra High Frequency (UHF) trial and has fitted UHF/LF hybrid tags to all breeding stock and all calves born in 2014.

He also started using Farmplan's Psion Workabout Pro, which is a handheld device that can scan RFID tags and

has all the herd information stored on it. As well as being able to read tags, this device allows births, movements and drug administrations to be recorded, as well as any other observations that might need to be recorded whilst out in the field. This information can then be synchronised with the data held on the farm computer.

Recently, Robert has also developed a bar code labelling system. He said: "The system is really useful when the vet comes to blood-test animals and saves a lot of time looking for the appropriate bar code for each animal. A bar code printer is linked to the weigh head so that as the ear tag is scanned it prints the correct label for that sample."

Robert found that there were health and safety benefits to electronic tagging of cattle, too. During the last decade in the UK there have been 50 fatalities as a result of working directly with cattle. He said: "The ability to read tags from fixed panel readers and long pole readers will reduce the likelihood of injury, and if the use of EID can reduce the risks involved then this must be an incentive to introduce compulsory electronic tagging."

The technology may seem daunting, but there are no real barriers for farmers to embrace it. Most have smart phones now, and the opportunity to have herd information available at their fingertips and stored securely in the cloud will appeal to them.

Robert believes that EID is the equivalent of precision farming for the livestock sector and said: "We need to attract more young people into farming; this sort of technology makes farming sexy and will hopefully encourage young people to choose it as a career."

Robert will be speaking at a series of workshops to promote the use of EID to be hosted by QMS this December. The workshops will highlight the benefits, both to farmers and to the industry as a whole, of using EID in cattle.

Robert Gilchrist, Knowledge Transfer Specialist with QMS, said: "While cattle EID is not currently compulsory, that time is coming and rather than just using EID tags to satisfy legislative requirements, businesses have a fantastic opportunity to make use of the technology in a number of different ways."

He added: "We are fortunate to have Robert presenting at our workshops; he is a fantastic example of a farmer embracing the latest technology and using it to add to his bottom line."+



"For the beef industry to survive in an ever-changing world, farmers need to be using the information that can be collected to make more informed decisions about their business."

Cattle EID demo at Agriscot

➤ 18 November at 11.30am.

Cattle EID workshops

➤ Wednesday 9 December

Scott Henderson hosts at Carswadda, Lochfoot, Lochhead, Dumfries, DG2 8JE

➤ Monday 14 December

Stephen Allardyce hosts at East Town Farm, Tarland, Aboyne, AB34 4TD

Details of further workshops can be found at www.qmscotland.co.uk/events

INVESTING IN THE FUTURE

Pig producers have faced some challenges in recent years, but the investment in increased slaughtering capacity at Brechin is sending out positive signals to the industry in Scotland.

Recently, one farming family in the Borders has had the confidence to double the size of its unit. Adam Marshall is the fourth generation of his family to farm the 230 acre Slighhouses Farm near Duns, where there have been pigs since 1954. Up until 2013 they crossed standard Landrace Large Whites with JSR Titan boars, but Adam and his father, also Adam, felt they could achieve better results by de-stocking and re-stocking with high health stock, changing genetics and improving the facilities.

Their first 220 Danbred high health gilts arrived from Denmark in December 2013 to be housed in the new Finrone Powerhouse building, complete with 36 farrowing crates and weaner accommodation for 1,200. The £850,000 investment also included a 450kW biomass boiler which heats the farrowing and nursery buildings. In addition, there are four Finrone Portapig houses on a neighbouring farm for the finishing pigs.

Adam explained: "Due to the high health status of the sows, we decided to keep the finishing pigs on a separate unit two miles away to avoid any contamination risk from lorries or strangers."

They have a good relationship with the neighbouring farmer who was keen to develop a new enterprise, so the neighbour owns two houses which the Marshalls pay rent on, plus he gets the muck back for his arable land.

The driver for change, according to Adam, was to develop the business in a direction which would provide good opportunities for both him and his younger brother, Charlie, who has also come home to farm. This has led to them becoming the only commercial pig farm in the UK with Danbreds.

He said: "The advantages of the hybrid Danbred is the number of piglets they produce per farrowing and the faster finishing times. After four farrowings, the new sows have averaged 18.1 piglets born alive and they should peak at the fifth parity."



Adam (pictured middle) farms with his father, also Adam (left), and his brother Charlie (right).

Replacement gilts are purchased every month from Robin Traquair, and the Marshalls have already expanded to around 250 sows – from which the target is to finish 150 pigs per week at 75kg deadweight. The best result so far from birth to bacon has been 17.5 weeks."

The Marshalls need 1200 tonnes of barley per year to feed all the pigs; they produce half at home and buy in the rest locally while concentrates come from Harbro.

The bacon pigs are all marketed through Scotlean and are slaughtered at Brechin, except for 20 to 25 per week which are finished at pork weight (50kg deadweight) and sold through the family's catering business and two hog roast retail outlets in Edinburgh – Oink.

Oink was the brainchild of Adam senior, who originally set up several butchery businesses to try to add value to his pig enterprise. However, his small-scale hog roast catering business was proving popular, and confident of the quality of his product, he and his business partner, fellow farmer Sandy Pate, opened their first Oink in the Grassmarket in 2007 and the second one in The Canongate two years ago.



"As a family we really care about the pigs and give them our very best attention with good results."

Such is their confidence in the future of the pig industry in Scotland, the Marshalls deliberately built their new units to house up to 500 sows, finishing 250 per week.

Adam said: "This is our future. The new system is very easy and efficient to work with and although the large litters from the Danbreds mean extra care and attention post farrowing, as a family we really care about the pigs and give them our very best attention with good results."+

REGISTER NOW FOR PIG INDUSTRY CONFERENCE

QMS is holding a Pig Conference on **17th November** at Forbes of Kingennie, Broughty Ferry, Dundee, where the latest developments in the Scottish pig industry will be discussed in depth. If you would like to register to attend, please phone QMS on **0131 472 4040** or email info@qmscotland.co.uk.



Allan Ward, Pig Specialist at QMS.

Allan Ward, pig specialist at QMS, said: "This is an exciting time for the Scottish pig industry, with the upgraded Brechin facility due to open in 2016. The doubling of the abattoir's capacity will ensure there will be sufficient capacity for all pigs born in Scotland to be slaughtered in Scotland."

SIZE MATTERS TO PRODUCERS, PROCESSORS AND CONSUMERS

A striking feature of the beef market in the UK has been the steady increase in carcase weights over the past few years.

There are many drivers of increase of carcase weights including improved genetic performance of animals, the availability of cheap feed or a desire to use heavier weight to offset lower per kg prices.

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



It is not just in the UK that this growth in weights has been seen; it has also happened in the USA. However, the trend has been less marked in the Southern Hemisphere. In Australia, for example, carcase weights increased slightly when there was an abundance of rain and good grass growth, only to fall when drought occurred.

South American carcase weights are lower than those found in Europe and America. Even though Brazil carcase weights have increased from 225 kg/head in 2005 to around 238 kg/head in 2015, they are still over 100 kg/head lighter than cattle in the UK or USA.

Typically, South American countries have carcase weights in this zone, choosing to kill animals at around 500 kg liveweight.

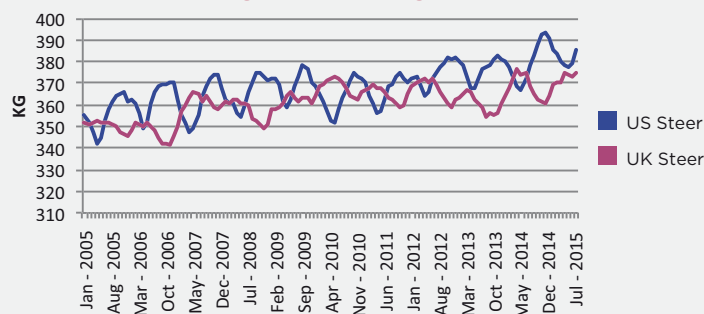
**Average beef carcase weights
2005-2014 (kg)**

	Australia	Brazil	USA	UK
2005	270	225	355	350
2006	270	225	362	347
2007	267	225	362	360
2008	269	230	365	357
2009	272	235	369	362
2010	278	235	364	368
2011	287	236	366	365
2012	287	238	374	367
2013	278	238	376	361
2014	277	n/a	380	368

However, there is some evidence to suggest that in Argentina, for example, animals destined for the home market are slaughtered at a considerably lower liveweight than cattle destined for export, i.e. cattle are being managed with specific markets in mind.

Defra is reporting current steer carcase weights of around 375kg and even higher in Scotland. Comparing these carcase weights to those in the Southern Hemisphere begins to raise the question "are carcase weights too high?" However, when compared to the USA (currently around 385kg for steers) perhaps not. While heavier weights may benefit the producer from a per head income perspective, there are a number of other factors that begin to play on the efficiency and value of these animals to the supply chain.

Average carcass weights



For the latest market information please visit: www.qmscotland.co.uk/market

From the producer's point of view, the balance between the daily cost of adding weight to an animal and the return from doing that must be considered. For the processor the debate becomes one of suitability of increased carcass size for their customer requirements. Here the trade-off becomes the balance between mince and diced product – where large carcasses may be beneficial; however, given the size of prime cuts such as steak and roasts needed by supermarket or catering buyers, these carcasses become too large.

In a market where cattle numbers are tight, timing of sales can be critical in maximising the value of the carcass.

Where the specification is for, say, an 8oz steak, carcass size can have an impact on whether that basic steak is half an inch or an inch thick. Depending on the answer, the way in which that cut is cooked to best advantage changes and so may the consumer's eating experience, thereby compromising their willingness to make a repeat purchase.

Issues over carcass size are less pressing in the sheep and pig sectors, but similar debates are relevant. For example, UK prime pigs are some of the smallest in Europe despite an increase in size in the past three years.

However, UK producer price for pigs is one of the highest in Europe, reflecting a

strong demand for pigs of this type in the UK. Indeed prices for heavy pigs in the UK can be discounted by four to five percent compared to those producing 80–82 kg carcasses, as they are less suited to the home market (in that they require more processing to be attractive) or have to be sold in a market that prefers heavier pigs – for example, Germany.

Lamb carcass size has moved little over the past decade and, not surprisingly, the production systems of Ireland produce lambs of very similar weight. In contrast, New Zealand lamb carcasses have increased in size but remain smaller than UK lambs. In the spring of the year, when New Zealand lamb is often available on the UK retail shelf, their carcasses weights are typically around 17–18kg; meanwhile, UK lambs are typically at their highest weights of the season and over 19.5kg.

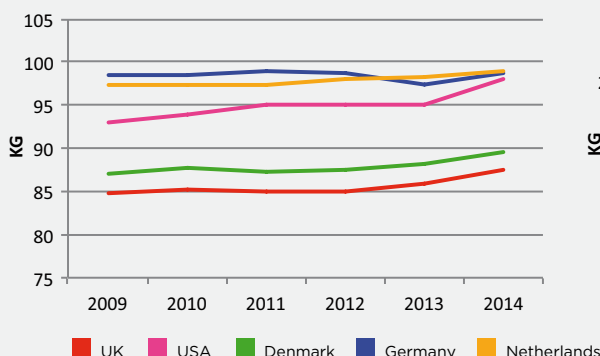
So it is fair to say that “size matters”. It matters in respect of revenue for the producer. It matters in respect of differentiating market segments, it matters in respect of profit margins for processors and producers, and it matters for the eating experience of consumers.

Not all these factors necessarily pull in the same direction, and at times the market signals can be conflicting or not strong enough to outweigh economic demands of individual businesses.

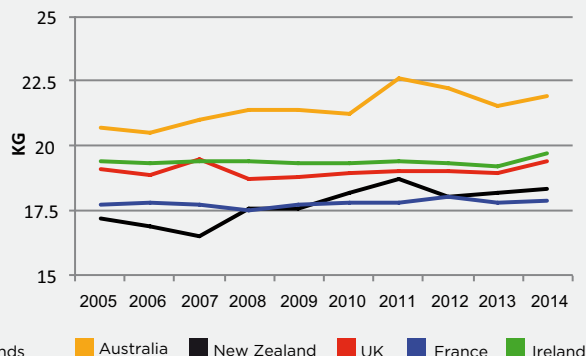
Nevertheless, it is apparent from this brief overview that there is significant variation in the demands from the market place globally and locally, and that both producers and processors trying to plan their businesses would benefit from working more closely in order to produce the right carcass for the market.✚



Prime pig carcass weights



Lamb carcass weights





“Quality Assurance is essential to the future of my cattle finishing enterprise”

Leslie King, Cairnfauld Farm, Banchory



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