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AUTUMN 2016

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FEATURES

**The Benefits of Using EBV
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**Perthshire Farmer Sees
Benefits of Rotational Grazing**

**Borders Farmer Highlights
New Breeding Project**

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Scotch Beef Farm of the Year 2016

- open for entries!

Your farm could be the next Scotch Beef Farm of the Year



Supported by
AGRI SCOT THE FARM BUSINESS EVENT **QMS**



"We were delighted to be nominated and having been through the process, I would definitely encourage others to apply and play a part in promoting Scotch Beef"

**Peter Watson of Darnford farm ,
2015 Scotch Beef Farm of the Year winner**

QMS and AgriScot are looking for entries and nominations for the next Scotch Beef Farm of the Year. The application process is simple and the winner will play a valuable role in promoting the Scotch Beef brand.

To enter, nominate a farm or find out more email enquiries@agriscot.co.uk

From left to right - 2014 winners The Tilson family from Wedderlie farm near Berwickshire, 2013 winner Alistair Foubister from Netherton farm on Orkney and 2012 winner Robert Neill from Upper Nisbet farm near Jedburgh.



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How to contact QMS:

visit www.qmscotland.co.uk

email: info@qmscotland.co.uk

or call us on 0131 472 4040



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WELCOME



In recent weeks I've attended a range of different agricultural events around the country and something which consistently shines through is the huge benefit of consumers meeting producers.

There is no better way of inspiring the public about Scotch Beef PGI, Scotch Lamb PGI and Specially Selected Pork than for them to hear direct from the farmers who look after the animals.

The passion and commitment of Scottish livestock farmers to producing a quality product can be hugely impactful. It is fantastic to see agricultural shows starting to introduce food charters, showing their commitment to quality, local produce.

One example of this is the recent Perth Show where, as well as introducing a Food Charter, the show organisers worked with the local Chamber of Commerce to deliver Perthshire on a Plate – a fabulous initiative bringing local producers, chefs and butchers together to showcase the area's larder.

This pioneering Perth Show initiative is a great example of what can be done by farmers and I very much hope that other producers around the country will insist on Scotch Beef, Scotch Lamb and Specially Selected Pork at the events in which they are involved.

QMS has this month launched a marketing and PR campaign behind the Scotch Lamb PGI brand and, as part of that, we are again encouraging farmers and others to be "Lambassadors" and help to spread the word about how simple, tasty and quick it is to cook lamb.

The potential benefit to the brand and the industry, of livestock farmers uniting behind their brands, is huge and QMS will be offering quality assured farmers a "Lambassador toolkit" to help producers spread the word.

Many thanks to all the farmers who will be giving us their time to help with sampling activities in retailers around the country in the coming weeks and visits by chefs, food writers and press. Your support is very greatly appreciated and adds hugely to what we can deliver for the whole industry.+

Jim McLaren, Chairman, Quality Meat Scotland

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Front cover image: Robbie Milne of North Bethelnie Farm, near Old Meldrum.

Delivering Value for Money



One of QMS's priorities is to ensure we deliver value for money for levypayers in the wide-ranging activities we undertake each year.

One way we ensure that we continue to punch above our weight in terms of what we achieve for the industry with the limited budget we have, is the work we do behind the scenes to secure grant income to support our activities for the industry.

However, we also believe strongly in the benefits of working closely with other organisations to magnify the reach of our campaigns and other activities.

For example we are working with the National Sheep Association and NFU Scotland during our on-going campaign behind Scotch Lamb PGI.

We are also working closely with partners, including Scotland Food & Drink, on activities such as Scottish Food Fortnight (Sept 3 – Sept 18) which falls within the Scotch Lamb campaign.

Among the many other organisations we work with on our activities are the Royal Highland Education Trust (RHET) and the Scottish SPCA, where our focus is on communicating the work undertaken by farmers to look after their livestock to a high standard and to achieve good animal welfare.

The various committees we have in place which feed into the planning process behind our activities also include representatives from throughout the Scottish red meat chain.

The involvement of so many people who work in the different areas of our industry is crucial to the success of what QMS does and to ensuring the activities we deliver are carefully developed to achieve what is needed for our industry.

The team of staff at QMS is very small so the involvement of others in our planning process, and in the roll-out of our activities, is vital to allowing us to deliver a huge workload for our industry.

Our sincere thanks go to all those who support us throughout the year.✚

Uel Morton

Uel Morton,
Chief Executive,
Quality Meat Scotland

Sixty Second Recipe Videos Now Available!

New family friendly, quick step recipe videos launched by QMS

Good family FOOD

In less than 60 seconds these snappy, fun videos show how to rustle up simple, nutritious meals for any day of the week using Scotch Beef PGI, Scotch Lamb PGI and Specially Selected Pork.

The first three videos, featuring Braised Pork Ragu, Beef Wellington and Mushrooms stuffed with Scotch Beef can be watched on QMS's Good Family Food Facebook page. More videos will be added in the coming months.



To view the tempting new video recipes, please visit the Good Family Food Facebook page.

These videos highlight to busy parents just how easy it is to cook with quality local ingredients.

The recipes have been created in simple steps using short, fast-motion videos which are optimized for Facebook to ensure they appeal to today's social media savvy consumers who are increasingly looking online for recipe inspiration. ✚



Scotch Lamb PGI Campaign Focuses on Speed and Versatility



A high-impact advertising campaign behind Scotch Lamb PGI has been launched by QMS.

The 2016 Scotch Lamb PGI campaign - set to reach over 88% of Scottish adults - is building on last year's campaign which boosted retail sales of fresh lamb in Scotland by 8%.

This year's "Wham Bam Lamb" campaign includes billboard, press and radio advertising as well as on-line and in-store activities such as sampling activities by Scotch "Lambassadors" in Morrisons and Tesco.

Recipe leaflets and other point of sale materials are also being distributed via the members of the Scotch Butchers Club, run by QMS.

A range of new recipe videos for on-line and social media use, created in simple steps using short, fast-motion videos which are optimized for Facebook, will also be launched during the 11 week campaign.

Following the success of last year's "Love Lamb Weekend", "Love Lamb Week", which will run from September 1st-7th, will incorporate a range of activities around the country to celebrate all that is wonderful about Scotch Lamb PGI.

Suzie Carlaw, QMS Marketing Controller, said: "The target audience for the campaign is very much 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". ✚

FARMERS ENCOURAGED TO USE SPECC

Farmers are being encouraged to use the Scotch Potential Eligibility Cattle Checker (SPECC) to check their cattle before presenting them for sale or slaughter, or when bringing new stock onto their farm.

SPECC is a free tool launched by QMS last year, which allows farmers, auction markets and abattoirs to check whether individual animals are potentially eligible for the Scotch Beef PGI brand. Designed with users in mind, SPECC is easy to use and returns quick search results.

Sex	DOB	Last Move	Status
Female	18/04/2014	18/04/2014	Scotch Potential Eligible (SPE)
Female	27/07/2015	27/07/2015	Scotch Potential Eligible (SPE)

There is a simple two step registration process in order to use SPECC. Alternatively, an unregistered user can manually enter the eartag number or scan the short barcode at the top of the passport.

Margaret Walker of Newton of Lewesk Farm, Aberdeenshire who finishes cattle with her husband Bruce, cannot speak highly enough of SPECC. She said: "Bruce goes to the market specifically to buy Scotch animals. Once the cattle have been brought home and I know the on move has been registered, I can log into SPECC very quickly to check the cattle are Scotch." She added: "SPECC is really easy to use, I'd highly recommend it". ✚

A free SPECC app can also be downloaded on Google play or Apple App Store.

For more information about SPECC and to start using it please visit: www.scoteid.com/qms/specc.



New Report Highlights Key Trends in Scottish Red Meat Industry

The 2016 Scottish Red Meat Industry Profile is now available. The report draws together a wide range of information on the Scottish red meat sector and the trends over the last 12 months. ✚

You can request a free copy by emailing info@qmscotland.co.uk, or you can download a copy from www.qmscotland.co.uk/publications



NINE NEW MONITOR FARMS SOUGHT FOR SCOTLAND



A new monitor farmer project, which will be funded by £1.25million secured from the Scottish Government and European Union's Knowledge Transfer and Innovation Fund, will be run jointly by QMS and AHDB Cereals & Oilseeds.

Monitor farm project managers Douglas Bell (QMS) and Gavin Dick (AHDB C&O).

A recruitment campaign to establish nine new monitor farmers across Scotland is underway.

The aim of the programme is to establish farms, typical of their area, as monitor farms to help improve the profitability, productivity and sustainability of producers through practical demonstrations, the sharing of best practice and the discussion of up-to-date issues.

We are looking for interested farmers in the following areas: Nithsdale; Scottish Borders; North Ayrshire; Lothians; Mearns & Angus; Lochaber; Morayshire; Sutherland and Shetland.

QMS Head of Industry Development, Douglas Bell, said that the new programme would build on the success of the initial programme which launched in 2003.

"Previous programmes have taken a sectoral approach, but in order to address the challenges currently facing farmers, this new joint initiative between AHDB Cereals and Oilseeds and QMS will focus on improving whole business management and profitability," said Mr Bell.

Each of the nine new monitor farms will have its own management team and an associated business group that will evaluate solutions and best practice before sharing its findings, both with the wider community groups and more generally, through various media channels including a dedicated website.✚

If you are interested in becoming a monitor farmer or would like more information about the project, visit www.qmsscotland.co.uk/monitor-farms-2016-2020



Farming Stars Reunited at Royal Highland Show

The stars of the hit BBC series "This Farming Life" were reunited at the Royal Highland Show this year to share their experiences of farming and their recent TV stardom.

The farming families, who won the hearts of the nation during the hit series at the start of this year, were interviewed by presenter Bryan Burnett and answered a wide range of questions from visitors to the QMS stand at the show.

The five couples voiced their huge appreciation of the tide of public support they have received following the airing of the series, saying the feedback they had received and are continuing to receive has been quite overwhelming.✚

To watch a short video of when the couples were reunited, visit www.qmsscotland.co.uk/video-library



Stars of This Farming Life were reunited by QMS at this year's Royal Highland Show.

The BBC are looking to find families in Scotland to star in **This Farming Life** Series II. If you are a farmer working in Scotland and interested in sharing the most rewarding and challenging moments of your working life over the next 12 months - the BBC would like to hear from you.

If you would like to be involved or can recommend someone, contact **Nichole Dryburgh** on nichole.dryburgh@bbc.co.uk or call **0303 0826 240**



Callum MacRichie, winner of the 'My Town, My Burger' competition receiving his prize from singer and TV presenter Michelle McManus whilst judges and his local butcher look on.

Lewis Pupil Wins School Burger Challenge

A pupil from The Nicolson Institute on the Isle of Lewis has emerged as the overall winner in the schools burger challenge run by Quality Meat Scotland's Scotch Butchers Club.

Twelve-year-old Callum MacRichie lifted the overall top prize in the competition, which had a "My Town, My Burger" theme with his Gaelic "Big Marag Burger". The burger, created using Specially Selected Pork along with ingredients including apple and the famous Stornoway Black Pudding was produced by Callum with help from butcher Neil Finlayson from Charles Macleod butchers.

Jennifer Robertson, Health and Education Co-ordinator with QMS said: "The competition was a brilliant opportunity for Scottish pupils to show off their imagination and creativity. Our congratulations go to all the finalists and, indeed, to all the schools who took part and showed off their pride in the fantastic ingredients we have here in Scotland."✚

PERTH SHOW LAUNCHES FOOD CHARTER

QMS was proud to work in partnership with Perthshire Agricultural Society and Scotland Food & Drink to develop a new Food Charter for Perth Show, which was held on 5th and 6th August.

The Charter meant that, where possible, the public catering and hospitality at the event served only locally-produced food, such as quality assured Scotch Beef PGI, Scotch Lamb PGI and Specially Selected Pork.

Perth Show also hosted "Perthshire on a Plate", the area's largest food festival, which celebrated the very best in local produce and culinary talent.



Perthshire On A Plate celebrity chef Rosemary Shrager pictured with Perth Show Chairman Hector Campbell (right) and Ian Gibb (left), Head of the Hospitality Department at Perth College UHI and some of the students who supported the cookery demos at the event.

Organised by Perthshire Chamber of Commerce, "Perthshire on a Plate" is a unique annual event to showcase top quality produce from the local area, and serves as a double celebration of food and farming. Visitors to the show enjoyed demonstrations from celebrity and local chefs and also had the opportunity to dine in one of the many pop-up restaurants.

Jim McLaren, Chairman of Quality Meat Scotland, said QMS was delighted to support the Perthshire on a Plate and Perth Show Food Charter initiatives.

"One of the challenges we face as an industry is lack of understanding by consumers of the benefits of buying quality, local produce and this year's Perth Show was an excellent opportunity to inspire, entertain and educate the public through a fabulous celebration of food and farming."✚

Search is on for Next Scotch Beef Farm of the Year

Nominations are now being sought for the Scotch Beef Farm of the Year 2016.

Now in its fifth year, this award, which is organised by Agriscot and QMS, sets out to find, and reward, a Scottish farm which exemplifies the best in beef cattle production.



Peter Watson from Darnford, winner of Scotch Beef Farm of the Year 2015, launches this year's competition with (l) John Kinnaird from Agriscot and (r) Douglas Bell from QMS.

Peter Watson of Darnford, winner of Scotch Beef Farm of the Year 2015, commented: "We were delighted to be nominated last year and having been through the process I would definitely encourage others to apply and play a part in promoting Scotch Beef."

This award is a tremendous opportunity to celebrate all that is good in Scottish agriculture.✚

If you would like to apply, or would like to nominate another farm please send an email in the first instance to enquiries@agriscot.co.uk

ROTATIONAL GRAZING KEY TO OPTIMISING PRODUCTION

Rotational grazing is a key factor in the management of a Perthshire farm where 150 cattle are successfully finished on just 36 hectares.

Members of Perthshire Grazing Group recently visited West Rottearns Farm, near Braco, to hear about the simple and practical implementation of rotational grazing on the unit, which is run by Jason Hodgson.

Jason, who has been the farm manager at West Rottearns for two years, is no stranger to maximising output from grass. He originally hails from a mixed dairy, beef and sheep farm in the middle of the North Island, New Zealand.

Rotational grazing has been one of the main focal points for the members of the Grazing Groups run by Quality Meat Scotland. Although the practice originated in the northern hemisphere, the financial pressure on farming in New Zealand forced significant adoption and refinement of the practice.

Jason believes that Scotland has many advantages over New Zealand, including the low risk of drought.

"All in all, a rotational grazing system in Scotland grows more grass than parts of New Zealand. The disadvantages are, of course, the long winters and high rainfall, but it is simply a case of setting up the right infrastructure to utilise the grass," he said.

"By increasing our inputs we hope to maximise the output, which is important for a small farm like this."

He said that it was possible to grow three tonnes per hectare more grass at West Rottearns than it was on his family farm in New Zealand. He pointed out: "At least in Scotland you know that when the grass comes, it is pretty reliable."

West Rottearns extends to just 36 hectares, but Jason finishes around 150 cattle every year on a forage-based system. The farm belongs to Andrew Hornall, who has a farm shop and butchery at his home farm of Falleninch, near Stirling, and Jason splits his time between the two places. The cattle finished at Braco are sold through Falleninch Farm Shop.

The system is based on sourcing six-week-old calves from local dairy farms and these are taken through to finishing. The majority of the calves are Belgian Blue cross Jersey, although if Jason cannot source enough calves, he will supplement the stock with store cattle from the market.

The cattle are grazed in one batch, and the importance of varying rotation length was a key message to come out of the recent meeting.

"It is important that there is always grass in front of the cattle, so Jason operates a 19-day rotation in the summer which increases to 30 days in August and by October is 60 days," said QMS Knowledge Transfer Specialist, Michael Blanche.

By the end of October the cattle are on a 120 day round and are only housed when the weather doesn't co-operate, which last winter amounted to about 60 days.

Another target is to have very low pasture covers on 15th May to maintain grass quality for the rest of the year.

At the moment the cattle are finished at two years old, but Jason is aiming to reduce this to 18 months."

He said: "The current system is very much forage-based with small amounts of concentrates used to transition freshly-weaned calves and help late finishers going into winter."

Last year, the cattle ate an average of 2.6 bales of silage per head during the winter months. However, Jason plans to increase this and introduce small amounts of concentrate to push them on so they only spend one winter on the farm.

"We will miss out on compensatory growth in the spring, but the average lifetime daily gains should improve," he said.

Due to the high quality of grass available this spring, the cattle regularly achieved a daily liveweight gain of 2kg. Overall he is aiming for a gain of 1kg per day, which ties in with his target age at finishing of 18 months. This will equate to one tonne of carcass per hectare per year. Given the price of beef, this represents a very high financial output per hectare for a relatively low cost.

The carcasses which have been sold through the shop to date have averaged 325kg, with a killing out of 57%, and the feedback from customers has been very good.



Although the farm is small and heavily stocked, Jason said that about 45% of it is being kept for silage just now. However, he was quick to point out that only surplus grass is used for silage. "We would never give stock supplementary feed in order to make silage; we would rather buy silage in if we cannot make enough."

"I think many in the group found the visit an eye-opener," said Michael Blanche following the meeting at West Rottearns.

"Jason operates an incredibly straightforward system, with all the cattle in one group, and he simply allocates a bit of ground each day.

"He does not typically measure his grass but has a real feel for its management. He estimates his pasture covers by eye, knowing how much residual cover he wants to leave. By feeding the equivalent dry matter of grass to equal 4% of the total bodyweight of the cattle, maximum daily liveweight gains are achieved."

For further information about the grazing group project and future meetings in your area visit www.qmscotland.co.uk/grazing





EBVs DELIVER RESULTS ON NORTH EAST STOCK FARM

North East farmers **Robert and Barbara Milne** have seen significant improvements in the weights, grades and time to finish of both lambs and calves on their farm since using estimated breeding values (EBVs) to help select terminal sires for their livestock.

The Milnes are among a number of Scottish farmers who feature in a series of videos produced by QMS to raise awareness of the use of EBVs as a management tool, and the stock at the Milnes' North Bethelnie Farm at Old Meldrum are a good advert for this.

The 500-acre farm is all grass, except for around 20 acres of turnips for strip grazing cows in the winter. It supports a 300-cow suckler herd and 250 breeding ewes, with all the progeny finished on the farm.

The cows are nearly all Salers, crossed mainly with Charolais bulls – but Salers, Simmental and British Blue bulls are also used. Robert explained that to reduce the workload the cows are split into early and late spring calvings, with the first batch calving over a six-week period from January until mid-February and the remainder calving over nine weeks from April until June.

Cows are left outside as long as possible but come inside on a diet of draff and straw to calve before going on to a silage ration until they are turned out. Robert said: "This year we managed to leave the late calvers out until March. I think it is much healthier for the cows to be outside but, of course, we have to work with the weather."

The aim is to finish all the calves, although they took advantage of a respectable store price in January and sold 20 heifers through Thainstone. Up until this year, the male calves have been kept entire and finished at around 14 months at 380 to 400kg deadweight and mostly U grade to McIntosh Donald and Scotbeef. However, Robert and Barbara are great believers in producing what the market wants and, as there has recently been a move away from bull beef, they castrated all the male calves this spring.



Robert said: "As long as the market gives us plenty of notice, we are happy to provide what it wants – but we cannot change overnight. The feedback from McIntosh Donald was that less bull beef would be required, so we responded accordingly."

The Milnes have been using EBVs as a tool to help select bulls for about 10 years now, and have seen an improvement in growth rates and grades. Robert said: "Our priority changes all the time; at first we selected for good liveweight gains, but now we pay particular attention to ease of calving. Number one priority must be to have a live calf on the ground."

"Nothing is 100% accurate, but the longer we work with EBVs and record the results, the better we get."

He reckons the EBVs are pretty reliable and finds he can be more relaxed about cows calving to bulls with good ease of calving figures, while the calves from those with high growth rate figures are generally the earliest finished. He said: "Nothing is 100% accurate, but the longer we work with EBVs and record the results, the better we get."

Barbara is largely responsible for the 250-strong ewe flock. It is a mixture of continental cross ewes, some Suffolk crosses and some bought-in Lleyns to bring in some fresh blood. She said: "We buy our rams at on-farm sales where we know how they have been fed and managed."

Recently they have been buying hybrid Texel cross Charollais rams from the Ingrams at Logie Durno, who record their flock and publish the EBVs of their rams in a catalogue before each of their on-farm sales. Robert said: "When we go to a sale, we initially select visually and then check the EBVs for growth rates as well as the breeder-derived indication for lambing ease. Of course, we do not always get the rams we want as price has to come into it too."

Since using recorded rams, the Milnes have noticed that they are getting their lambs away earlier. The ewes lamb from the last week in March, and this year the Milnes sold their first batch of 40 lambs in the last week of June at an average 19kg.



To view a short video of the Milnes talking about how they use EBVs in the sheep flock, visit www.qmscotland.co.uk/video-library

"Since using recorded rams, the Milnes have noticed that they are getting their lambs away earlier."

Barbara said: "The lambs go to Woodhead Brothers, and the aim is to get them as close to 21kg as possible and mostly U grade. The first batch always acts as a guide as to how they kill and then we can focus on getting the rest of the draws just right."

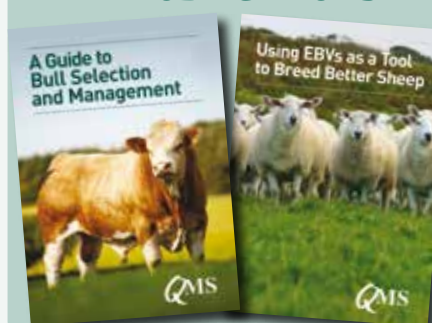
As with the cattle, the priority with the sheep is getting live lambs on the ground. The average lambing percentage based on the numbers sold is 175% and Robert said: "We would rather aim for a slightly lower percentage and have a lower mortality, which at the end of the day gives us a good number of lambs to sell and lets

us get them all away off grass before November to free up grazing."

The Milnes believe that selecting terminal sires based on both visual appraisal and EBVs has allowed them to finish stock more efficiently and get them off the farm quicker, providing them with improved margins.

Their plans for the future are to continue to finish lambs and calves as economically as possible and perhaps to increase stocking rates to spread their fixed costs, which they believe can be done with the help of faster-finishing stock making better use of the grass available.+

FREE PUBLICATIONS



QMS has produced two new publications which are available to farmers free of charge.

A Guide to Bull Selection and Management and Using EBVs as a Tool to Breed Better Sheep can be requested by calling **0131 472 4040** or emailing info@qmscotland.co.uk or downloaded from our website www.qmscotland.co.uk



RISING TO THE CHALLENGES

The afternoon session at Quality Meat Scotland's "Rising to the Challenges" conference concentrated on the practical ways in which farmers can improve efficiency and returns.

One topic of interest to beef producers was meeting processor specifications. Whilst the optimum range of carcase weights is 280kg to 400kg, around 20% of cattle processed in Scotland are above this.

Donald Brown, from SRUC Barony, said the challenge for farmers is how they can make the most from high growth animals. He believes that some cattle have a prolonged store period and this allows them to grow into large frames which give finishers difficulty in achieving target weights.

He suggested that farmers rely too much on "compensatory gain", i.e. making up lost performance at turnout. He believes that cattle should be fed to their growth potential throughout their lives and said: "Over ambitious attempts at compensatory gain leads to cattle being presented at store sales suffering from old age!" He pointed out that six to 12-month old stores in mid-April were only £60 cheaper than 12 to 18-month stores, and that was a long time to keep them for a small extra return.

He said that every animal exhibits the same growth curve, regardless of frame size or breed, but during the growing period some breeds will lay down fat at around 1kg/day liveweight gain whereas others, such as Charolais, can grow at 1.2kg/day LWG without laying down fat. He believes that farmers should focus on producing 1kg/day LWG from grass and growing rations, and over 1.4kg/day from their finishing ration.



IMPROVE SOIL MANAGEMENT



MONITOR GRASS PRODUCTION



ADAPT GRAZING ROTATIONS

WHAT THEY SAID!



"Farmers should focus on things they can control such as genetics, nutrition and health."

Dewi Jones, Innovis



"The word 'store' should be eliminated; we are not storing it - we are growing it!"

Donald Brown, SRUC



"Soil management is top of the list when it comes to producing quality beef or lamb."

Charlie Morgan, Independent grassland consultant



"Farm soils in Britain are in danger of becoming worn out, with no resilience"

Steve Townsend, Soil First Farming

He said: "There is no reason why any cattle of any breed should be more than 20 months of age before entering the finishing phase."

Donald reckoned the word "store" should be eliminated and said, "We are not storing it - we are growing it!" And he described the finishing phase as: "A short, sharp period of maximum weight gain to allow well-grown animals to maximise meat yield and optimise fat cover."

Some of Donald's tips for finishing cattle quickly within the required specification were to maximise intake by keeping the rumen healthy. Crimping and not shattering grain, keeping the feed fresh and maintaining some fibre in the ration are all critical to rumen health.

On the sheep front, Dewi Jones, Chief Executive of Innovis, told farmers to focus on things they can control such as genetics, nutrition and health.

Unsurprisingly, as an advocate of breed recording for desirable genetic traits, his message for the delegates was to select rams and replacement ewes which had been bred to make the best commercial return. He said: "Breed is irrelevant, but also do not get too hooked up on growth rates - a dead lamb will not grow! The key is to get as many lambs as possible to finish."

He is also not concerned about gaining E and U grades at the abattoir, saying it was "just bygone vanity" and that having more lambs finished at R2 and R3L would be more profitable.

The other two afternoon speakers dovetailed their talks on soil management and grass production. Steve Townsend of Soil First Farming warned delegates that farm soils in Britain were in danger of becoming "worn out, with no resilience".

Carbon is the crucial element in resilient, productive soils and for grassland farmers one way in which to help the carbon levels is to encourage grass to grow a bigger root mass by timing grazing correctly. For grass, root mass is roughly equivalent to shoot mass. Allowing grass to recover between grazings will enable it to increase root mass. Following short, sharp mob grazing, some of these roots will effectively be pruned, and these dead roots will subsequently deposit more carbon into the soil.

"Breed is irrelevant, but also do not get too hooked up on growth rates - a dead lamb will not grow! The key is to get as many lambs as possible to finish."

Charlie Morgan, an independent grassland consultant, agreed that soil management is top of the list when it comes to producing quality beef or lamb.

He urged farmers not to waste cheap feed, only to have to replace it with more expensive feed. He also said that, even if applying up to 200kg/ha of nitrogen, grass at 5.7p/kg Dry Matter (DM) is still four times cheaper than buying in concentrate at 20 to 22p/kg DM.

QMS Grazing Groups have heard a lot about "rotational grazing", and some farmers have already put it into practice successfully. Charlie believes this is the way to successful grass management, quality meat and profitability and he said: "A sward stick is an important tool. It is critical that grass is grazed at the optimum time which is at third leaf stage; when it gets to the fourth new leaf, the first one is already dying."+

To view all the presentations from this conference visit www.qmscotland.co.uk/QMSRise2016

Borders Farmer's Praise For INNOVATIVE BREEDING PROJECT



Sion Williams, Manager of Bowhill Estate.



Sion, who has been recording and monitoring his flock performance for several years, is looking forward to some initial data from the project being released by project partners at the end of this year.

He said: "I think the potential advantage of the scheme will be helping commercial farmers decide what rams are best for their flock, regardless of breed, based on EBVs and RamCompare results." Although he stressed that the appearance of a ram was still important, he believes that the "big, shapely" rams favoured by pedigree breeders, may not come out top in the results.

"The innovative RamCompare pilot project will help close the gap between commercial and pedigree producers".

Borders sheep farmer Sion Williams believes that the innovative RamCompare pilot project will help close the gap between commercial and pedigree producers in terms of desirable traits in a stock ram, which can only be good for the industry.



Sion manages the Bowhill Estate in Selkirk, one of the six commercial farms across the UK that are taking part in The RamCompare project, funded by Quality Meat Scotland (QMS) along with other partners.

The project, which aims to assist the UK sheep industry to drive genetic improvement, started in May 2015 and will run over two breeding seasons until November 2017. It involves artificial insemination (AI) and single-sire mating with 67 rams tested from five pedigree breeds. The rams that are selected have estimated breeding values (EBVs) in the top 20% and in addition, AI sires have high accuracy values (around 90%). Performance data relating to their lambs, both from the farms and abattoirs, will then be incorporated into the genetic evaluations.



Lambs are weighed at birth, 8 weeks and 12 weeks.

He said: "The problem is that pedigree and commercial breeders are looking for different things from their rams; for the commercial farmer it is all about the numbers on the ground and the yield of saleable meat per hectare of grass. Pedigree breeders tend to look for size and shape so anything that brings the two viewpoints closer together is bound to be good for the industry."

Sion, who was runner-up in the Farmers Weekly Farm Manager of the Year in 2013 and has been nominated again this year, is responsible for 3,563 hectares on the Bowhill Estate. The estate is split into seven separate enterprises, with the sheep enterprise extending to 5,200 breeding ewes. Each enterprise is benchmarked with the aim of performing in the top third of the industry.

About 3,850 Blackface ewes are grazed on 2,600 ha of heather moorland and either bred pure or crossed with Aberdale or Aberfield rams to produce female replacements for the lowground flocks. Surplus lambs from these flocks are finished and sold to Dunbia.

At the start of the RamCompare project, each of the six farms involved had to commit at least 320 ewes of similar breeding and Sion has 365 in his trial. About one-third are artificially inseminated with semen from rams chosen for the project. These rams are being used on a number of RamCompare farms, so genetics can be compared across different environments and management systems. The remainder of the ewes are served naturally by rams from the Texel, Suffolk, Charollais, Hampshire Down and Meatline breeds, which have been selected according to their pedigree, index and growth EBVs and are supplied to the farms for the duration of the project.

The performance of the first crop of lambs born earlier this year is being monitored closely.



Muscle and fat depths of lambs are measured at 12 weeks using ultrasound scanning.

Following initial birth detail recordings, including weight and ease of lambing, the lambs were weighed again at eight weeks and 12 weeks - at which point they were also ultrasound scanned for muscle and fat depths. DNA samples were also taken at this point for cross-checking parentage and abattoir data and some samples are being kept in cryogenic storage for possible future genomic analysis. At Bowhill, lambs are weaned at 12 to 14 weeks and finished on red clover leys or silage aftermath.

"This project will give commercial farmers a clear indication of the difference a ram can make to the productivity and efficiency of their flocks."

At the abattoir, weights and classifications of all lambs will be recorded and saleable meat yield and tenderness measurements will be taken on a representative proportion. All this data will be evaluated to ascertain whether its inclusion in the rams' genetic evaluations identifies differences between sires and improves their accuracy.

A ranking of the tested rams, based on commercially important traits, will then be generated at the end of the project in November 2017.

Sion admits that being part of the project has had its challenges. He said: "Being part of RamCompare has required a lot of management, time and skill in condition scoring ewes four times a year, tagging and weighing all lambs at birth and recording any lambing issues or deaths."

However, he believes the results will be worth it and will give him a good evaluation of how his breeding flock is performing. He said: "I am enjoying being part of the RamCompare trial and I am excited to see what areas the project highlights and how I can use this information to make more informed decisions on the farms within the estate."

At a time when producers are looking for ways to improve their profitability, Sion hopes that this project will give commercial farmers a clear indication of the difference a ram can make to the productivity and efficiency of their flocks.+

RamCOMPARE 2 year UK pilot project

Similar to progeny tests in Australia, New Zealand and Ireland.

6 commercial farms that will use artificial insemination (AI) and single-sire mating

A crop of over 500 lambs per farm per year

67 rams from five breeds: Texel, Suffolk, Charollais, Hampshire Down and Meatline - will be tested

Funders



Collaborators



Supporters



To find out more about the RamCompare project visit www.signetfbc.co.uk/ramcompare

TRAINING COURSES HIGHLIGHT OPPORTUNITIES TO IMPROVE PRODUCTIVITY

Improving efficiency is the best way pig farmers in Scotland can achieve better margins during difficult trading conditions, and a recent series of pig management training courses, organised by QMS, gave producers many ways to increase performance.

The courses, which were held in Aberdeen, Nairn and Perth, and were run by pig production expert John Richardson, focused on key performance targets – from the selection of gilts right through to finishing pig management.



Pig production expert, John Richardson.

John conducts training courses on behalf of Yorkshire-based vets Garth Pig Practice, and has a lifetime of experience within the pig industry – from management, nutrition, breeding and grading through to welfare and health.

He said: "Scottish units, on the whole, are performing better than those in England, but my challenge to pig producers in Scotland is to continue to improve their efficiency to a target of 30 pigs weaned per sow per year and a post-weaning performance of 800g per day."

The training courses were split into four key areas of production. Although John was aware that some of the stockpeople who attended were often only interested in the sections of the course which were relevant to their current jobs, he said: "It is important they see the bigger picture, as this is the start of a journey. It is not about what they are doing today but what they might do in the future."

One of the critical management issues in the breeding herd is minimising empty days in order to achieve farrowing rates consistently in excess of 90%, and 2.4 litters per sow per year.

John said: "For the weaner producer one empty day costs £1.85 per sow, and for the average performing herd £39 per sow per year – nearly £20,000 per year in a 500 sow unit."

"Good genetics, quality feed and careful management with constant monitoring are key".

"The efficient conversion of feed into lean, saleable meat is what pig production is all about."

Some of the factors that can minimise empty days include correct feed intakes in lactation and regular body condition scoring. John said: "Aim for a score of about 3.5 at weaning and feed to achieve a score of 3.75 at farrowing." He also suggested the use of specialist wean-mating diets, twice daily heat detection and optimal insemination timing and technique. In the session covering management of the farrowing and lactating sow, and pigs through to weaning, John said: "The ultimate measure of success during this important stage of production is rearing 100kg of litter weight at 28 days of age from each farrowing pen or 85kg litter weight from each outdoor farrowing hut."

Minimising pre-weaning mortality to 10% or less through optimised farrowing facilities is crucial, and excellent supervision and stockmanship are required to minimise chilling and maximise vital colostrum intake to at least 200–250ml per piglet in the first 24 hours of life.

John said: "Cross-fostering is also considered to be a vital skill within the first 36 hours – the maxim 'do it properly and do it once' must be applied."



However, it is during the post-weaning to finishing stage that the greatest improvements in pig profitability can be made. John believes that the immediate post-weaning period is a critical time to get management right.

The whole process starts with good gilt selection and, while it may seem obvious, John said it was important that stockmen were able to identify physically correct gilts with 14 or more functional teats, sound legs and a first mating target of 140 to 150kg and, ultimately, an above-average lifetime performance per sow.

He pointed out that it can be a shock to the piglets' systems to have a change of diet and surroundings at the same time as undergoing the trauma of weaning.

He said: "Growth rates before weaning are typically 250g per day but immediately post-weaning can drop to under 100g per day, while the body fat percentage can halve from 12 to 15% to 6 or 7%."

This stress can be reduced by a number of measures, including creep feeding before weaning and pre-heating the housing to 29°C.

He added: "The efficient conversion of feed into lean, saleable meat is what pig production is all about. Profitability depends on finishing as many pigs as possible within the correct weight range and fat depth according to abattoir specifications.

"Good genetics, quality feed and careful management with constant monitoring are key."

Feedback from one of the delegates



Nora Markus is a stockperson who works at Yonderton Farm near Ellon, Aberdeenshire. She attended one of the training courses and said afterwards:

"I was delighted to have the opportunity to attend this course. John was extremely helpful and able to answer all questions we posed. He created an environment that made the course fun.

"This course gave me a fantastic opportunity to meet people from other farms. I came away with more knowledge and lots of good ideas that could be used productively on the farm to make things better and easier, and therefore to increase productivity."



A Look At CURRENT TRADING MARGINS

"All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others."
This quote, drawn from George Orwell's novel *Animal Farm*, is one of the most famous in English literature.

In the novel it is generally considered to be a comment on a political system; however, in the meat supply chain it has resonance in respect of the suitability of individual animals, or bits of animals, for the many marketplaces in which we sell meat.

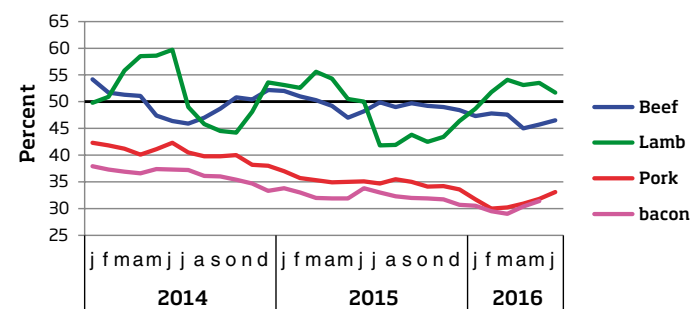
Producers often look at the retail price of cuts of meat and use these to derive what they feel is the retail value for their entire animal. They then subtract the price they received to give a margin to be shared amongst the processor, food manufacturer and retailer and use this margin to take a view on the fairness of the price they have received. Doing this exercise produces the accompanying chart which shows in general the share of the retail price received by producers has fallen over the past two years.

There is some seasonal variation in margins, particularly for lamb. For example, in the March-to-May period a producer selling prime sheep will get more than half the retail price while between July and September he will receive less than half the retail price.

While this would be fair if "all animals were equal" and all the meat were sold in the same way, it is not a fair reflection of current trading margins because "all animals are not equal".

"The more work that has to be done, or the more hands that handle the product until final sale, the less value the raw material often has."

Estimate of producer share retail price





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