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WINTER 2018/SPRING 2019

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Welcome

I am hugely proud of the beef, lamb and pork that is produced in Scotland.

Red meat production in Scotland is very different from other parts of the world and has strong sustainability credentials.

Leading environmentalists recognise the importance of livestock farming, particularly to Scotland's hills and uplands, and during the past year we've produced some great short videos highlighting red meat's role as part of a healthy diet and its positive environmental credentials.

Our industry has worked in close partnership with the Scottish SPCA for decades and the recognition and support which Scotland's leading animal welfare organisation gives to livestock farming in Scotland is, we believe, unique in the world.

Without doubt, Brexit and all the issues associated with it, poses the biggest challenge to our industry at present. Future support mechanisms, trade deals, supply of skilled and unskilled labour and the impact on profitability of livestock farming are challenges which could affect everyone involved in the industry to varying degrees.

At present, however, it is the uncertainty of what will happen which is the biggest threat as this is making planning for the future almost impossible. In an industry like ours, where the production cycle is very long and the impact of changes to businesses takes time to feed through, this is particularly concerning.

It has taken centuries of commitment and dedication to shape this industry and QMS's education and communications role, to ensure people are connected with our industry and aware of the facts about what sets it apart, has never been more important.

K.A. Rowell

Kate Rowell,
Chair, Quality Meat Scotland

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This publication is printed on an FSC certified paper, supporting responsible use of forest resources.

Chief Executive's Message



It has often been said that the only constant is change! This year we will be facing many unknowns to add to the already challenging environment that the Scottish red meat industry is operating in.

The red meat sector is currently under siege from the anti-red meat lobby and to strengthen our ability to protect our industry, we have created a new Strategic Engagement department headed up by Douglas Bell, who was previously Director of Industry Development.

This role will gather science-based evidence and work in partnership with all our key stakeholders to develop the red meat industry's position on the key issues, including those being used to discredit our industry. We take pride in promoting the role of the red meat industry in Scotland to produce meat with integrity.

In this issue you will find many examples of the work we do to support, develop, promote and protect our industry. With an uncertain Brexit we are preparing for the many challenges ahead. We have been active in working towards a potential permanent solution to levy repatriation which will mean a significant return of Scottish farmers' levy monies which are currently trapped in England. We have also received assurances from the UK Trade Minister that our PGIs will continue to be recognised in Europe and we are working to have trade mark protection in future international trade deals.

During recent months we have seen some board and staff changes and we were delighted to welcome Kate Rowell as our new Chair in October, along with two new board members Ann Irvine and Andy McGowan. We also said sad farewells to board member Alan McNaughton and previous chairman Jim McLaren.

We welcomed new staff members Tom Gibson, Emily Symonds, Kirsty Fox and Sarah Millar. The new appointments will build on the retail and commercial knowledge in our team and ensure we continue to deliver strongly for our industry as it further builds its global reputation for animal welfare, quality assurance and integrity.

Please don't hesitate to contact me at any time and I wish you a successful 2019.✦

Alan Clarke

Alan Clarke
Chief Executive,
Quality Meat Scotland

New Grassland Project

Nine beef and sheep farms in Scotland have been announced as pilot farms for a new initiative established to help farmers improve their grassland management.

GrassCheckGB aims to improve grassland productivity and pasture utilisation on cattle and sheep farms through a new grassland performance monitoring network.

The project will see the three GB levy bodies - QMS, AHDB and Hybu Cig Cymru Meat Promotion Wales (HCC) - partnering with the Centre for Innovation Excellence in Livestock (CIEL) and researchers at the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) and Rothamsted Research.



In total, 27 pilot beef and sheep farms, nine each in England, Scotland and Wales, have been selected. The GrassCheckGB initiative will collate the growth

and quality of pasture on each of the pilot farms, make predictions of future growth and report this to the industry on a weekly basis.✦



Photo (from top left): The nine GrassCheckGB pilot farmers in Scotland are: Robert Fleming of Castle Sinniness in Glenluce, John Ritchie of Montalt Farm near Perth, Ian Dickson of Scalpsie Farm on the Isle of Bute, Giles Henry of Oakwood Mill in Selkirk, Alisdair and Emma Davidson of Poldean Farm near Moffat, Dane Davidson of Brogan Farms near Ellon, J Scott and Partners of Fearn Farm in Tain, Michael Shannon of Thankerton Camp Farm near Biggar and David Girvan of Corrimony Farm in Glenurquhart.

For more information about the project visit
www.CIELivestock.co.uk

Acoura Rebranding

QMS's assurance contractor Acoura has rebranded to its parent company's name, Lloyd's Register (LR).

From 1st January 2019, all QMS assurance scheme certificates will be issued with the LR logo. There will be no impact on customer service, as phone numbers and primary contacts will all remain the same. For further information, please visit www.acoura.com or call 0131 335 6602.



Scotch Beef, Scotch Lamb and Specially Selected Pork Export Boost

QMS has been working hard to reinforce and strengthen its key brands and secure valuable business on the world market over the last three months.

In October, Scotland's meat exporters flew the flag for Scotch Beef PGI, Scotch Lamb PGI and Specially Selected Pork in Paris at SIAL – one of the world's most influential food fairs.

Ten Scottish exporters attended the event to highlight the Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) status of Scotch Beef and Scotch Lamb. The Specially Selected Pork brand was also promoted to importers from around the world.

Alan Clarke, QMS's Chief Executive, who attended the show, said: "SIAL presents a massive opportunity to highlight to importers across the world what sets Scotch Beef, Scotch Lamb



and Specially Selected Pork apart from their competitors in terms of the quality assurance, provenance and welfare that underpin each of the brands."

The Scotch Beef and Scotch Lamb brands were also promoted in a week of trade events and activities in Singapore and Hong Kong in November. During the week, QMS hosted high-profile dinners and a series of 'meet the buyer' sessions with Asian import companies in order to establish new trade relationships and secure orders for Scottish suppliers.

Emily Symonds, QMS's Market Development Officer, who arranged these events in conjunction with Seafood Scotland, said that the market in Asia offers significant potential for Scotch Beef and Scotch Lamb sales growth in the coming years.

"Consumers in Singapore and Hong Kong have a genuine appetite for grass-fed, hormone-free Scotch Beef and Scotch Lamb, so these key markets certainly offer exciting opportunities for the future."✦



Bedding Materials Amended in Assurance Standards



QMS has amended its current cattle and sheep standards to support farmers who may have difficulty sourcing bedding this winter.

After extensive consultation with industry experts and careful consideration, QMS has allowed the use of PAS100 certified composted green waste as a bedding material for livestock within its Cattle & Sheep Assurance Scheme.

QMS published its amended Cattle & Sheep Assurance Scheme Standards on 29 November 2018, and standard 6.8 – which refers to bedding materials – has now been superseded and replaced by new Standards 6.8A and 6.8B.

Letters have been sent to all scheme members notifying them of this change, including an Addendum page with the wording of the new Standard. Further details can also be found on the QMS website at www.qmscotland.co.uk/cattle-sheep-standards

Members are reminded that the 2018 Cattle & Sheep Assurance Scheme Standards document, inclusive of the Addendum on bedding, will remain effective for the 2019 assessment year period (1 January to 31 December 2019), unless otherwise notified.✦



Levy Boards Work together to Promote Environmental Credentials of Livestock Farming

QMS, AHDB and HCC have jointly commissioned a new project to pave the way for a sustainability framework for livestock production in Great Britain.

The three GB levy boards have appointed ADAS to deliver the £29,000 project, which seeks to highlight the positives of the UK's predominantly grass-fed system.

Stuart Ashworth, QMS's Director of Economic Services, said: "Sustainability credentials are increasingly being used to position products in a competitive market place.

This project seeks to build a framework that will enable us to present the many positive contributions that those involved in producing Scotch Beef and Scotch



Lamb make to sustainable, ethical food production systems, while at the same time seeking to benchmark with global competitors."

The work was financed from the £2 million fund of AHDB red meat levies ring-fenced for collaborative projects, which is managed by Britain's three meat levy bodies – AHDB, HCC and QMS.



The fund is an interim arrangement while a long-term solution is sought on the issue of levies being collected at point of slaughter in England for animals which have been reared in Scotland or Wales.✚

QMS Launches 'Go Places with Pork' Campaign



Shoppers in Scotland are encouraged to look out for the new 'Go Places with Pork' campaign which inspires Scottish consumers to try adventurous new pork dishes which are perfect for mid-week family meals.

The QMS campaign, which secured additional financial support from Scottish Government, aims to increase understanding and awareness of Specially Selected Pork and launched

on 21 January. It will run for six weeks and feature eight tantalising recipes designed to take consumers on a journey around the globe by showcasing dishes from Japan, Germany, Spain and Brazil, to name just a few.

Set to reach over 4.2 million consumers (94% of the adult population in Scotland), the high-profile campaign includes a TV advert, along with billboard, press, digital, social and radio advertising.

The TV advert will run for four weeks as part of the drive to promote pork as a versatile and tasty addition to mealtimes and is partly funded by £125,000 from the Scottish Government.

Carol McLaren, QMS Director of Marketing and Communications said: "The 'Go Places with Pork' campaign seeks to position pork as a great alternative to traditional choices, with its affordability, versatility and fantastic flavour making it the perfect choice for mid-week family meals."

As well as in-store sampling activities in retailers around Scotland, high profile chefs and Scotch Butcher Club members are getting behind the campaign to encourage more Scots to consider pork as part of their plans to lead healthier lifestyles.✚



Scotch Lamb Campaign Drives Encouraging Sales Boost

The latest QMS campaign to inspire consumers in Scotland about how versatile, tasty and simple to cook Scotch Lamb is has generated impressive results.



The "Scotch Lamb Naturally" campaign which ran in August, September and October included television advertising for the first time, along with billboard, press, digital, social and radio advertising.

Farmers from across Scotland supported the campaign and helped serve more than 16,000 samples of Scotch Lamb in Aldi and Morrisons stores during the 12-week period. Scotch Butchers Club members also received promotional posters and recipes of six different Scotch Lamb dishes to share with their customers.

The TV advertising was partly financed by £200,000 of support from the Scottish Government which was announced by the Nicola Sturgeon, the First Minister in July.

The overall campaign reached over 95% of adults in Scotland, with those who were exposed to the campaign messages typically experiencing it 13 times.

Figures from Kantar Worldpanel reveal that there was an impressive 27% increase in spend and 20% increase in volume from those who bought Scotch Lamb during the campaign period.

A key focus of the campaign was to raise awareness of Scotch Lamb as a simple, quick and simple mid-week meal and independent consumer tracking before and after the campaign by IGD revealed that 70% of those who had seen the campaign felt that lamb was quick and easy to cook with – an increase of 11%. The IGD tracking also revealed a significant increase (9%) in willingness to pay more for Scotch Lamb among those who had been aware of the promotional campaign.✚



Livestock Enterprises Report Some Improvement in Margins

The new edition of "Cattle and Sheep Enterprise Profitability in Scotland" publication is now available from QMS.

The publication covers the 2017 calf and lamb crop and highlights the technical and financial performance variation that exists when comparing Scotland's top-third producers and the bottom third. Stuart Ashworth, QMS's Director of Economics Services, said it had never been more important for farmers to benchmark their businesses and then act on what this reveals.✚

To request a free copy, phone QMS on 0131 510 7920 or email info@qmscotland.co.uk

You can also download a copy at www.qmscotland.co.uk/publications



"Meat the Facts" Booklet Now Available



QMS has updated its popular "Meat the Facts" booklet which aims to help improve the understanding of children about red meat and its role in a healthy balanced diet.

The bright and colourful pocket-sized booklet is full of simple, easily absorbed, accurate information which covers all aspects of the production of red meat in Scotland and complements the existing suite of QMS resources that aim to promote a good understanding of where food comes from.✚

You can download a copy from the QMS website or request free copies by phoning QMS on 0131 510 7920 or emailing info@qmscotland.co.uk

Proudly Sharing Red Meat's Credentials



QMS devotes a very significant amount of time and energy to proactively communicating positive messages about our industry and robustly countering misinformation about red meat.

By Carol McLaren,
Director of Marketing and Communications, QMS

In recent months there has been an increase in the scale of this activity following a wave of media interest in red meat, often founded on very poor information and with the potential to undermine the red meat industry.

While some of the work we do is very public, a lot is also done behind the scenes to brief media and others on the facts about beef, lamb and pork. A real challenge in recent months has been the fact that, despite efforts by QMS and other industry organisations, certain elements of the media appear determined to give a disproportionate amount of coverage to the anti-red meat agenda, so balance has been lost.

The key areas our industry is challenged on include animal welfare, human health and climate change, and the QMS team – particularly our health and education staff – deliver a wide range of activities to communicate the facts about red meat and livestock production in Scotland.

These activities range from school visits to sports-linked initiatives, all geared to clearly position red meat as part of a healthy diet.



QMS works with other partners, including Scotland Food & Drink, to share messages about Scotch Beef, Scotch Lamb and Specially Selected Pork.



The Figures at a Glance

OVER 80%

of Scottish land is grass and rough grazing, ideal for producing quality beef and lamb but unsuited to growing cereals, vegetables or fruit



The Scottish red meat industry contributes over **£2 billion** to Scotland's economy



Around 44% OF TEENAGE GIRLS ARE DEFICIENT IN IRON

95% OF PEOPLE INCLUDE MEAT IN THEIR DIETS



50,000 JOBS are dependant on the Scottish red meat industry



THE SCOTTISH RED MEAT INDUSTRY is proud to have a formal partnership with the Scottish SPCA

SCOTTISH SPCA
Scotland's Animal Welfare Charity

We also take every opportunity to highlight the industry's positive sustainability credentials and we offer a free meat voucher to every secondary school in Scotland, to ensure pupils can experience cooking lessons with beef, lamb or pork.

Our industry produces tasty, nutritious products which have earned a global reputation for quality and flavour; and our quality assured Scotch Beef, Scotch Lamb and Specially Selected Pork have an exceptionally strong story to tell in terms of sustainability and animal welfare.

The geography of Scotland means that over 80% of Scottish farmland is comprised of grass and rough grazing, which is not suitable for growing fruit, cereals and vegetables but is ideal for producing top-quality beef and lamb using one of our country's greatest natural assets – grass.

The role of manure from livestock is also an important natural fertiliser source which is valuable in crop rotations. The Scots were global pioneers in developing quality assurance for beef, lamb and pork, and this makes animal health and welfare a priority.

We also benefit from a world-leading partnership with our country's leading animal welfare organisation, the Scottish SPCA. Our strong working relationship with the Scottish SPCA is a huge asset and sets us apart from other countries around the globe.

QMS Free Publications

QMS has a range of free publications and videos to help communicate our industry's positive messages. Examples include our "Meat the Facts" publication for children and our "Making the Most of the Media" publication for those who may have the opportunity to engage with the media.

You can request hard copies by emailing info@qmscotland.co.uk or download the material from the publications section of the website www.qmscotland.co.uk



We also have a great message on human health. Independent dietitians and nutritionists are consistently clear on the importance of red meat in a healthy diet as an excellent natural source of protein, iron, zinc, B vitamins and essential amino acids. It is also sugar free and naturally low in salt – unlike many of the meat-free products appearing on the shelves.

Average intakes of meat are now well below official guidelines, meaning nutrients are often in short supply, particularly in the diets of young children, teenage girls and women.

The concern with the sort of headlines generated in recent months relating to red meat and health is that they can distract people from the areas which should be at the top of the health agenda such as smoking, excess drinking and body weight.

It is also important to ensure people are aware that, despite the media and vegan hype, there is no significant swing away from meat in the UK – with only around 4–5 % of the population opting to forego meat in their diets.

The evidence is clear – the 19 out of 20 people who currently enjoy meat as part of a healthy diet can continue to do so and share our pride in the top-quality, sustainably-produced meat we are so fortunate to be able to enjoy in this country.

Everyone involved in the industry can play a part in proudly sharing red meat's credentials.+



Help QMS share the facts

Anyone involved in the red meat supply chain, from farmers and auctioneers to hauliers, feed merchants, processors and retailers, can help counter inaccurate information about red meat. You can support QMS and others to get the positive messages out there by doing the following: share our social media posts; support the Royal Highland Education Trust; get involved in initiatives such as Open Farm Sunday; take the time to address any misinformation you see; share a pride in Scotch Beef PGI, Scotch Lamb PGI and Specially Selected Pork.



Paddock Grazing Success on Shetland

Jamie Leslie has improved both grass and livestock performance on his Shetland farm since adopting better grazing management.

Jamie farms in partnership with his dad, John, at Scholland, Virkie – the most southerly part of Shetland, exposed to strong west and south-west winds and salt spray. They own and rent 230 hectares and contract farm a further 120 hectares nearby.



It's a family affair: Jamie with daughters Kate and Ellie and wife Louise holding son Greg.

Jamie describes his land as the opposite to most of Shetland, which is peat and heather. Although there is some peaty soil, the majority of his land is light and sandy, merging with the sand dunes along the coast.

He said: "The biggest problem we have is salt spray from the sea, which burns the grass and can really affect production."

The farms are stocked with 75 commercial Aberdeen Angus suckler cows put to the Angus bull, producing female replacements and finished steers for the local butcher.

He added: "The butcher likes a 300 to 320kg carcase; last year we averaged 318kg at 19.1 months old for Angus steers and a few heifers."

The cattle are fed a store ration during their first winter, to keep costs down, but last year when they were turned out to good quality grass, their liveweight gain was 1.83kg/day from the end of April to mid-June. Jamie said: "I have seen real benefits in finishing the cattle on a paddock-grazing system."

"I hosted the Shetland Monitor Farm meeting here in August, where people saw that, in one block, stocking density has increased by 50% and growth rates by 40% from 0.97kg/day to 1.35kg/day, simply by putting some hot wires up."

The sheep flock comprises 850 Shetland cross Cheviot and Texel cross ewes and 200 followers, most of which are put to the tup as ewe lambs.

Jamie explained: "Up until this year we bought in ewe lambs, put them to the Texel and kept the progeny, which then went to Suffolk rams."

"However, I bought Highlander rams from Innovis to put over the Shetland/Cheviot ewes, and the plan is to keep replacements from them and eventually have the Highlander as my base ewe to avoid buying anything in."

It was a big decision to move away from Shetland genetics, but the hope is the Highlander will produce a ewe of about the right size, which will scan at the required 170% plus and boost the percentage of lambs reared and sold per ewe, which is the real driver behind the change in genetics.



Jamie believes that his farm has the right conditions to grow fodder beet.



Jamie is one of five farmers on Orkney and Shetland involved in a new QMS grazing group. Further information will be reported in future editions.

As chairman of the management group for the Shetland Monitor Farm, Jamie is keen to put into practice as much technology and as many management tips as he can. He has been paddock grazing for a couple of years, and regularly weighs and records his lambs and calves to monitor performance.

Grass quality has increased under rotational grazing. Permanent grass samples taken in September showed rotational paddocks with an ME of 11.3 and crude protein of 20.8, compared to the set-stocked area which had an ME of 10.4 and crude protein of 15.1.

Jamie said: "The performance of the 2017 lamb crop was compromised in paddocks by making them tidy up too much grass, so in 2018 we used a leader-follower system, with ewes and twins leading and suckler cows and calves following. Lamb performance has been good, with that mob of twins averaging 39kg on 25th of August. That entire block of permanent grass paddocks weaned approx 500kg live weight per hectare this year."

He said: "I pick up ideas from monitor farm visits from people such as John Scott, Trevor Cook and Michael Blanche; however, I am a member of various online chat groups involving farmers from as far away as Wales in the UK and even New Zealand."

"It is a bit weird talking to people on the other side of the world, but it is fascinating seeing what other farmers do to improve."

"I have seen real benefits in finishing the cattle on a paddock-grazing system... stocking density has increased by 50% and growth rates by 40% from 0.97kg/day to 1.35kg/day, simply by putting some hot wires up."

Jamie grows about 12 hectares of spring barley and cuts six hectares of undersown spring oats for whole-crop silage. In 2018, for the first time, he sowed three hectares of fodder beet.

He said: "I think it will be a good crop to grow here, as it likes salt and sand, and so far it is looking good. Beet is very expensive to grow, so it needs to yield well. I am aiming for 20 tonnes of dry matter per hectare, and if we can utilise 80%, it will cost us less than 6p/kg of dry matter."

The plan is to graze 300 to 400 ewes on it from early to mid-pregnancy, which will in turn free up deferred grazing on the links for mature cows.

This, he reckons, will allow him to keep cows out until at least the beginning of February, saving money on feeding and also being healthier for the cattle, which start calving on 1st March.

He is also trying a new wintering system for his in-calf heifers, which will be strip-grazed on a field of Italian Ryegrass, where he has already set out round bales of undersown wrapped straw, which he said analyses similar to good hay.

There will still be a proportion of ewes on the deferred grazing and fed from a snacker as usual, and Jamie is interested to see how their condition scores compare at scanning to the ewes on fodder beet.

Another experiment that Jamie carried out in 2018, thanks to advice from Trevor Cook, was weaning half the lambs early. The lambs weaned in July and paddock grazed on first and second-year grass did particularly well. They improved the grass by promoting tillering and the ewes are looking better too, so this is something Jamie will roll out for the whole flock this year.

He said: "By weaning early and grazing well, we doubled the number of lambs we had ready to sell in August."

"My main aims in managing the grass are to reduce winter costs and extend the grazing season, with a focus on achieving as much growth as possible in the cattle and increasing the number of lambs sold per ewe tupped."



Innovator of the Year Award

Congratulations to Jamie for winning the Innovator of the Year Award, as well as the barley gold award for yield potential at the Yield Enhancement Network Awards held in Harrogate in November.



QMS Chair Shares Her Priorities for the Scottish Red Meat Industry

Borders farmer Kate Rowell took up post of chair of QMS at the beginning of October 2018.

A qualified vet, Mrs Rowell, who has been a member of the QMS board since April 2015, is a fifth-generation farmer running the 750-hectare Hundleshope farm on the Haystoun Estate, where the family have been tenants for 150 years. She runs 75 suckler cows and around 800 sheep on the hill unit near Peebles with her husband Ed and their four children.

Kate tells us how she has settled into her new role and how she sees QMS can continue to support the Scottish livestock industry.



Q&A

You have had a really busy couple of months since you were appointed chair of QMS. How have you found it?

It's been a whirlwind couple of months, with lots of travelling around Scotland and further afield, and I've enjoyed every minute. My three years on the board have given me a good understanding of what QMS does, but it's been great to get to know everyone on the team a bit better and see how much they all do day to day. Jim McLaren was a hugely experienced chairman and has also given me loads of support as I go on this very steep learning curve!

How have you engaged with the stakeholders across the Scottish red meat industry since you have been in post?

I've been meeting farmers, processors and other key members of the industry, and listening to their views and learning more about the challenges they may face. Lots more meetings are planned, and I hope to get the chance to talk to as many people across the supply chain as possible in the near future to find out what more QMS can do to support the industry.

I've also been to the 'Meat Business Women' Conference in Birmingham and to SIAL in Paris, which is one of the largest food exhibitions in the world. It was great to meet counterparts from red meat organisations around the world, and we were lucky to have meetings with representatives from New Zealand, Uruguay and the US, as well as colleagues from AHDB, HCC and LMC. I've also been to many AGMs and conferences - ranging from the NFU Scotland to Scottish Association of Young Farmers to Scottish Craft Butchers.

"I hope to get the chance to talk to as many people across the supply chain as possible in the near future to find out what more QMS can do to support the industry."



QMS is working to repatriate levy that is lost to England when animals reared in Scotland cross the border to be slaughtered. How is that progressing?

Since the beginning of 2018, there has been an interim solution in place - known as the Ring-Fenced Fund. This involves £2 million of levy money currently held by AHDB being used for joint projects for the benefit of levy payers in England, Scotland and Wales. So far this has been used, among other things, to increase the number of export shows QMS is attending from three to five, to commission research to try to improve neonatal survival, and to begin work on a new campaign to promote the health benefits of red meat.

Alongside the NFU Scotland and Scottish Government, we have also worked hard to ensure that a permanent solution to levy repatriation has been included in the new Agricultural Bill making its way through Westminster at the moment, and I hope that this will mean the situation will be finally resolved in the next few years.

Kate visited Orkney and met with stakeholders, including cattle farmer Stephen Wylie.



What has been your biggest challenge as QMS chair so far?

The biggest ongoing challenge we appear to be facing at the moment is the growing voice of the anti-red meat lobby. Figures suggest that numbers of vegans and vegetarians aren't increasing substantially, but these individuals certainly seem to be getting louder! We need to stand together as an industry to counteract inaccurate claims and share positive messages, and the team at QMS works hard to promote the health benefits of eating red meat as part of a balanced diet. In Scotland, 19 out of 20 people enjoy meat regularly, and they need to be reassured that this is very much an investment in their present and future health.

What do you think is the biggest challenge to the Scottish red meat industry?

At the moment I think Brexit, and all the issues associated with it, poses the biggest challenge to our industry. Future support mechanisms, trade deals, supply of skilled and unskilled labour and the impact on profitability of livestock farming are problems which could affect all of us to varying degrees, and at present, the uncertainty of what will happen is making planning for the future almost impossible.



Kate has had several meetings with Cabinet Secretary Fergus Ewing since she has appointed.

How do you think QMS can help?

Obviously it's outwith QMS's power to completely sort out Brexit, but what we are trying to do is help farmers increase profits with the factors they can control. Our Industry Development team is busy running Better Grazing groups, organising 'Meat the Market' workshops and managing the ten monitor farms which are entering the third year of their programme.

As a past monitor farmer, I have first-hand experience of how important they can be in identifying potential efficiencies, tackling business improvements and spreading innovative ideas. One big win we had as monitor farmers was to increase our hill flock scanning from 80% to 120% over a three-year period, and this is the kind of practical improvement which can make a huge difference to an agricultural business.

How can we further promote Scotch Lamb and Scotch Beef and Specially Selected Pork to consumers in GB and abroad?

Over 70% of the levy money collected by QMS is spent on marketing the three brands and other consumer facing activities both here in Scotland and in other parts of the UK. We also attend many international events such as SIAL in Paris, Anuga in Germany and trade shows in Canada, Singapore and Japan. The extra funding we received from the Scottish Government has meant that we have been able to advertise Scotch Lamb and Specially Selected Pork on TV for the first time, and we are currently working on a campaign for Scotch Beef which will also include a high-quality TV advert as well as being on radio, in printed publications and in store.



The livestock farming industry is constantly under scrutiny in relation to its effects on the environment. What are your thoughts?

I believe that environmental issues will become even more important to consumers in the next few years, and it's really important that we continue to educate them about the fantastic food produced right here on their doorstep. With over 80% of Scotland being unsuitable for growing crops or vegetables, and with no lack of water, we are perfectly suited to growing the grass which ruminants convert so efficiently into high-quality protein for us all to eat.

As the world population grows and resources become scarcer, I believe it is our moral obligation to produce food as sustainably and locally as possible, and to continue looking after the countryside as farmers have been doing for generations. The positive way livestock farming in Scotland can contribute to looking after the planet is a story we all need to be shouting about whenever we get the chance.✚

Production from Forage is Key to Success

Higher output from lower input is the ideal for AgriScot Scottish Sheep Farm of the Year recipients Neil and Debbie McGowan.



Neil and Debbie McGowan with children Tally and Angus.

AgriScot
Scottish Sheep Farm Of The Year

The aim of the AgriScot Scottish Sheep Farm of the Year Award, which is supported by QMS and sponsored by Thorntons Solicitors, is to showcase excellence in sheep production in Scotland and to raise the profile of the dedication of the Scottish sheep farmers who produce Scotch Lamb PGI.

The farm was announced 2018 award recipient at Agriscot in November. On hearing the news, Neil commented: "Being announced as the Agriscot Scottish Sheep Farm of the Year is great recognition of the effort that everyone involved at Incheoch puts into what all Scottish sheep farmers try to do - produce a great product, sustainably, in a business that offers a way of life attractive to the next generation."

The couple, who farm 1,200 ewes alongside 220 suckler cows at their family farm at Incheoch at Alyth, near Blairgowrie, aim to maximise output through selling breeding rams from their 100-ewe pedigree Texel flock and their 550-ewe Lleyn stud flock.

These rams are sold through the couple's on-farm 'Working Genes' sale, having been reared solely on forage throughout their lives.

Neil explained that the aim for the flocks is to produce top-performing stock with high estimated breeding values (EBVs), which produce lambs for which their customers can earn premium prices.

"We are committed to performance recording and recognise that most of our customers produce their lambs off grass and forage crops alone. By only rearing our rams off forage, we aim to ensure our rams can thrive in commercial flocks and that their progeny do likewise.

"Efficient production from forage is becoming increasingly important as sheep farmers look to lower their costs, and we're no different from anyone else in that respect."

To that end, the couple have moved lambing back to the end of April and lamb everything outside.

Ewes and lambs are then set stocked on permanent pastures, with a block of 50 acres of red clover and silage leys used to finish lambs.

"We aim to get half of our lamb crop away off grass and red clover through the summer and autumn, with the other half then finished off forage crops, such as forage rape or kale, over the winter.

"The target is to have nearly all the lambs finished by the turn of the year, and we generally do, with very few left to be sold after New Year," he explained.

Neil added that prime lamb production always has been and always will be the bedrock of the couple's sheep business. "Knowing that we have to turn a profit out of the commercial flock keeps our feet on the ground as ram breeders, but also mean we get to trial our own Texel rams.

"On top of that, because we record all the Lleyn shearling ewes being added to the flock, we can quickly pull any which don't perform out of the stud flock into the commercial flock, without any significant cost to the system."

To identify the better performing ewes for retention in the stud flock, the McGowans measure ewe efficiency, by weighing all ewes at tupping and targeting ewes which can rear their own bodyweight by 100 days post-lambing. The stud flock is currently achieving an average ratio of 0.7 of bodyweight, but the McGowans have many better performing ewes with a ratio in excess of 1.0.

Sons of these best performing ewes are used as sires across the flock to ensure these genetics are filtered throughout the flock. Such has been the improvement within the Lleyn flock that the average EBV index of the flock has risen from 93 ten years ago to 161 now, with an increase in the muscle depth EBV of 1.5mm and a 3.8kg increase in the liveweight EBV at 21 weeks.

"We've also actively managed the Lleyn flock for prolificacy, selecting heavily for twinning and looking to reduce scanning percentage. Over the last 10 years scanning percentage has dropped from 204% to 189%, with the percentage of ewes carrying triplets reducing from 22% to 13% and quads all but disappearing.

"At the same time, barren rate has fallen to 2%, with singles increasing marginally. Thanks to this reduction in scanning, percentage lamb survival rate is now 83% under minimal shepherding," said Neil.

To help meet these breeding and management targets, the entire flock is managed using EID, from recording lambing details at birth to automatic weight recording of lambs every time they're handled and recording ewe weights and condition scores.

"This has helped significantly with data collection in the breeding programmes and has also helped with early detection of parasite challenge through discovering below target weight gains," said Debbie.

And with the flock targeting ram sales as a way of maximising income, flock health is a priority for the McGowans, with health planning undertaken in conjunction with the farm's vets.

The whole flock is MV accredited and in the EAE accreditation scheme, with a selection of the poorest cull ewes sent to SAC each year for post mortem.

Debbie explained: "The aim is to pick up on any unobvious reasons why these ewes aren't thriving. To date, we haven't found anything out of the ordinary through this screening, but we consider it a worthwhile failsafe.

"Efficient production from forage is becoming increasingly important as sheep farmers look to lower their costs, and we're no different from anyone else in that respect."

"In addition, the flock is closed to females, with only a few new sires being brought in each year. These rams go through a thorough quarantine procedure, being treated with class five anthelmintics, as well as being footbathed and receiving a spot-on treatment for lice. They are then blood tested for CLA, MV and Border Disease as well as being scanned for OPA. This testing has twice prevented CLA-carrying rams coming into the flock".

Conscious of their need to farm profitably, the McGowans monitor financial performance as closely as their flock's, with the couple taking part in the Scottish Farm Business Survey and also the Business Group of the local monitor farm programme. "We have benefited from involvement in both of these, helping analyse our financial performance more closely.

"Knowing that the sheep enterprise at Incheoch is showing a healthy net margin without subsidy gives us the confidence to face the future with a positive outlook.

"Benchmarking has raised our awareness of our own business and highlighted a number of opportunities for savings and expansion," she added.

The couple say the biggest challenge facing their business in future is likely to be labour, with their aim to overcome some of this through better genetics.

Neil concluded: "Shepherding is associated with low-tech, traditionally physically hard and unappealing work. However, with the right system and sheep, we think we can turn it in to an enjoyable job and a profitable enterprise."+



The McGowans work with a local abattoir and butcher and sell 30-40 of their lambs direct to the public each year in bespoke retail packs.

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East Lothian Farm Benefits from Partnership Working

Maximising efficiency through scale is a key objective for beef producer Niall Jeffrey, who farms in partnership with his father Angus at Bielgrange near Dunbar, East Lothian.

The farm was announced as AgriScot Scotch Beef Farm of the Year in November, in recognition of the family's efforts. The aim of the award, which is supported by QMS and sponsored by Thorntons solicitors, is to showcase excellence in the production of cattle in Scotland and to raise the profile of the dedication and stock management skills behind the production of Scotch Beef PGI.

The Jeffrey family runs two spring-calving herds of Aberdeen-Angus cross cows over three farm units. A herd of 250 cows is carried on the owned units of Bielgrange, a 300-hectare lowland farm, and Weatherly, a 240-hectare upland farm. The business also contract farms a further 160 cows at nearby Halls Farm.

Niall explained that the addition of the contract management arrangement came about after he'd returned to the farm having completed his degree.

He said: "Once I'd come back from university, Dad and I took some time to assess the strengths and weaknesses within the business and where we could better use our resources. It was clear, with both of us at home, that we had sufficient management capacity to look after more cattle and farm more arable ground."

"It was also becoming clear that changes to support regimes would mean we'd have to spread our resources further to maximise efficiency and reduce fixed costs both per acre and per cow."

At the same time, a relative was looking to get out of livestock, so Niall and his father offered to contract farm their herd for them. "It seemed like a natural fit, and with 250 cows of our own, we had the opportunity to spread our costs significantly further."

He explained: "The arrangement works well; they retain ownership of the cows and we supply all the labour, management and feed inputs and buy the progeny of the herd at weaning. Replacement heifers are supplied from our own breeding herd at home, keeping the herd size at a fixed 160 cows. In return, we charge them a management fee per cow."

Both the home herd and the contracted herd are based on Aberdeen-Angus genetics, with Hereford sires introduced in recent years to provide some hybrid vigour in the female replacements.

"These are then put back to Aberdeen-Angus bulls to produce prime cattle, which are finished and sold to Scotbeef between 18-20 months old, ideally grading at R4Ls."

Cows in both herds calve from late March through to May in a rigorous ten-week calving period, with cows going to grass at Bielgrange from the beginning of April through to early November.

"Calves are generally weaned in late September and early October through a soft weaning process. We rotationally graze the herd, so when weaning, we simply allow cows to move through to the next paddock, leaving the calves behind. This system works well, and with calves on creep feed by this stage they're not too bothered at being split up from their mothers."

"The aim is for calves to be close to 300kg at weaning, and they then move into a straw-bedded outdoor corral for the winter - usually in the third week of October. Cows then go to deferred hill grazing at Weatherly for the winter."



"We were honoured just to be nominated for the Scotch Beef Farm of the Year award but to become a finalist, and then go on to win, makes me even more proud of our team."

Another example of Niall's collaborative approach to cattle management is the arrangement to finish about 120 steers on another unit in a partnership arrangement.

"We send these cattle away in three batches - early, mid and late summer - with the sale proceeds split according to liveweight gain on each farm. It's another way of sharing the risk of our enterprise and allows us to finish all the cattle from the herd without needing to expand our housing any further."

Niall targets 1kg/day of gain during the store cattle's period of grazing over the first half of the summer, with 1.5kg/day achieved during the finishing period on a diet of straw, bruised barley, dark grains and sugar beet pulp.

While he feels the innovative system is working well, Niall is always looking to challenge herd performance and in 2016 became a beef satellite farm for Agri-Epicentre. He also installed two Ritchie beef monitor crates in the finishing sheds to enable remote monitoring of liveweight gains.

"We also have 160 activity collars, which are fitted to our 160 youngest cows, allowing us to monitor oestrus, rumination and eating habits. For us, the valuable part here is the oestrus monitoring allowing us to accurately predict service and calving dates."

"We believe that collating this data over a number of years will allow us to build up an accurate picture of herd fertility and select replacements based on that oestrus cycle length and gestation period."

Herd management software is also used in conjunction with EID to record births, deaths and movements, as well as medicine records and liveweight gains. Combined with an EID reader and weigh head, Niall says this has resulted in significant time and labour savings when weighing cattle.

"We are always looking at ways technology can be used to improve herd performance and management efficiencies wherever possible. Aligning technology with sound stockmanship and good vet advice is crucial for future success."

Looking ahead, Niall believes there are further gains to be made in the business's management, with membership of the local Business Improvement Group helping to focus his mind on where future improvements can be made.

He said: "Benchmarking ourselves against others is helping to highlight areas where we can be better. We have already made changes, including finishing cattle younger, which has helped reduce our carbon footprint."

When Bielgrange was announced as Scotch Beef Farm of the Year, Niall was keen to praise the efforts of the team, including the business's three members of staff. He said: "We were honoured just to be nominated for the Scotch Beef Farm of the Year award but to become a finalist, and then go on to win, makes me even more proud of our team." +



Inset image: The Bielgrange team: (l-r) Rarald Forsyth, Scot Mitchell, Niall Jeffrey Lee Manning, Angus Jeffrey.

AgriScot
Scotch Beef Farm Of The Year

It's Okay to Say "I'm not okay"

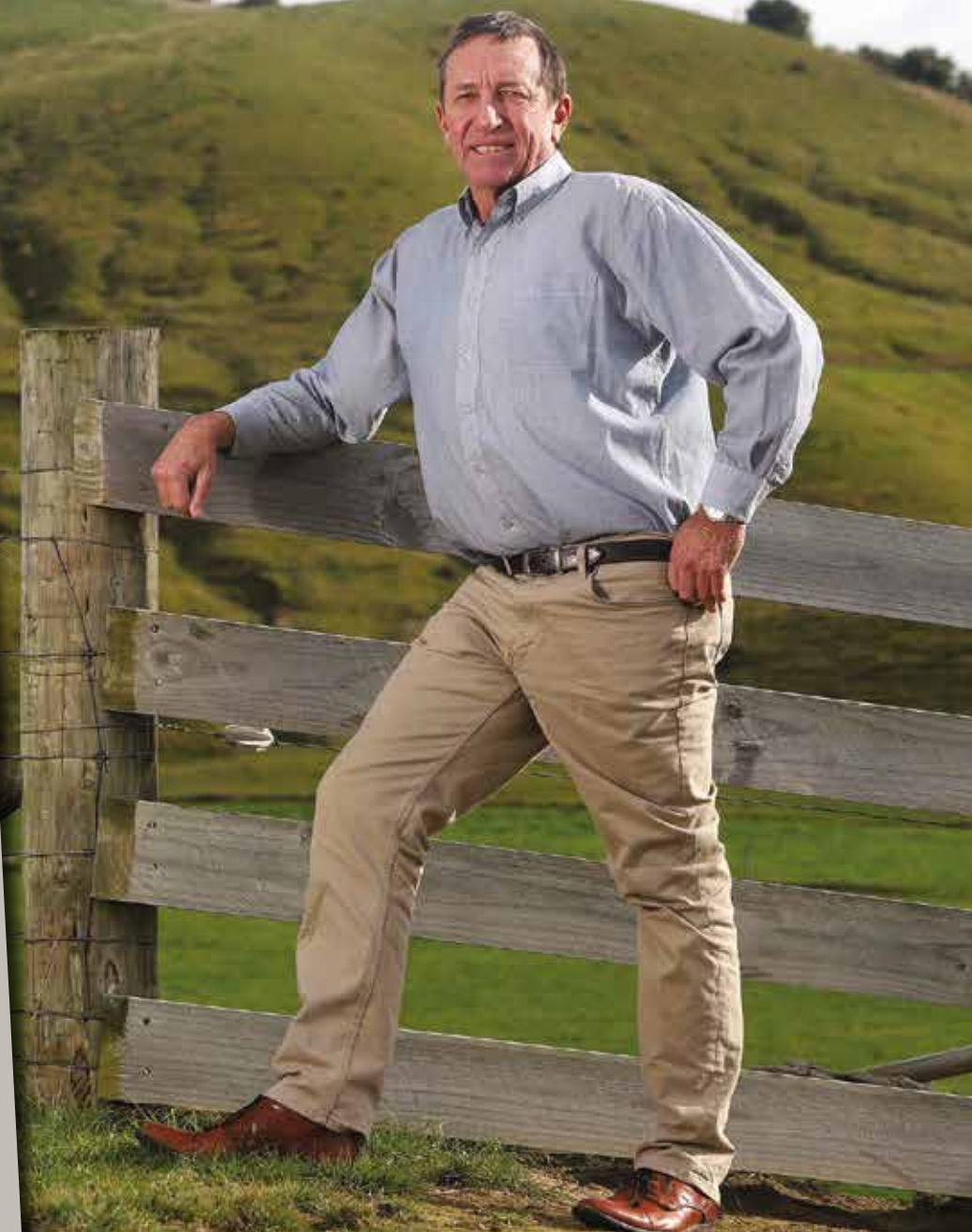
The increasing recognition being given to the importance of mental health and well-being was reinforced recently, when New Zealand farmer Doug Avery spoke at packed venues across Scotland about his own depression and suggested ways that farmers can become more resilient.

QMS VIDEO ▶ YouTube f



QMS produced a short video of Lothians monitor farmer Peter Eccles speaking with Doug Avery as part of his tour of Scotland.

The video captures a little of Doug's amazing story and insight into mental health in farming. Visit QMS's MooTube channel on YouTube or Facebook page to see the video in full.



Last autumn, Doug and his wife Wendy spent three weeks touring Scotland and travelled from Kelso to Orkney, with Doug speaking to large crowds and putting across his message that it's okay to say "I'm not okay." He was impressed by the Scottish landscape, but even more impressed by people's desire to share their inner thoughts.

He said: "In New Zealand since people have realised it is okay to talk about depression, the floodgates have opened and mental health services have been swamped. I believe the Scots are the closest to Kiwis in attitude, but slightly more reserved. My talks have been about providing people with the tools to build resilience, so they have the resources to cope when inevitably things go wrong, and I hope it has been helpful."

Doug found himself in a bad place following eight years of drought on his farm, during which time he worked ever harder for less reward until he could not go on. His story about this time of his life and how he turned his life around is fascinating, but everyone is different, and what Doug did on his tour was encourage people to reposition themselves in life and suggest ways they could do this.

He encouraged people to embrace change, to be disruptive and not "normal." He challenged, "Change your settings! My farm and life were lined up against a wall and were always going to hit it; the drought was just a trigger. How are your settings?"

Doug stated that Scottish farmers are no different from those in New Zealand, where they believe working hard will get them there; however, he advised farmers to take a step back and "work smart". He said he was horrified to meet farmers here who have not had a holiday for several years.

He continued: "Everyone has a circle of concerns in their head, and inside that there is a small circle of influence. It is important that people let go of their circle of concerns and concentrate their energy on the circle of influence."



"There is winning and learning; failing or losing is only when nothing has been learned. It is the periods of adversity where the great learning can occur."

"Consider what can be done to make the business strong and do not worry about the things you cannot influence – such as Brexit and the weather."

He encouraged delegates to embrace change as an opportunity and to try to find the good when bad things happen, but he also challenged people to continue to evolve their business even when things are going well.

He also believes there is no such thing as failure, and therefore nothing to be afraid of. He said: "There is winning and learning; failing or losing is only when nothing has been learned. It is the periods of adversity where the great learning can occur."

A good team of people is critical to building resilience, according to Doug. He likened it to geese flying in a V formation, which creates over 70% more flying distance, and warned: "Don't fly at the front all the time: let one of your team take over when you need to; rest up and re-evaluate."

Doug explained that this team can consist of family members and friends, as well as business and emotional mentors. Doug recognises that he has a great team around him now, who can take the pressure off from time to time, and he is

delighted that already he has left people in Scotland thinking about how they can form their own V.

He advocated finding a champion for mental health here in Scotland and pointed out the benefits to mental well-being in New Zealand when former All Blacks star Sir John Kirwan spoke of his battle with depression.

Doug also mentioned that communication is an important tool in building resilience, and in Scotland he commended QMS's efforts in bringing people together through the Monitor Farms, Better Grazing meetings and other groups. He said that this has helped connect people and encouraged them to share information, both economics-related and emotional.

He concluded: "Building a resilient state of mind leads to a resilient family, community, region and eventually country."+



Nina Clancy, Chief Executive of RSABI, urges farmers to contact the charity for support if they were struggling.

She said: "The feedback from the tour has been phenomenal. I would like to thank Doug for highlighting the importance of farmers' health and well-being for all the family, and for the business too."

"I hope that people will not continue to ignore signs that things are not going so well and that they will seek the support they need. Over 80 working farmers have been in touch since April this year, and we know there are a lot more who don't come forward."

A farmer whom RSABI has recently supported said: "Without the variety and spread of help and support I have received from the RSABI, the outcome of my life and those around me would probably have been sadly a lot different now."





Focus on Sustainable Scotch Lamb Production

Eagled-eyed viewers may have recognised Peeblesshire farmer Hamish Dykes, and his huntaway dog Doug, in the Scotch Lamb TV advert that aired across Scotland last autumn as part of last year's Scotch Lamb promotional campaign.

QMS VIDEO ▶ YouTube f



Visit QMS's MooTube channel on YouTube to see the "Scotch Lamb, Naturally" TV advert that ran throughout October as part of the very successful Scotch Lamb promotional campaign.

No stranger to publicity, Hamish and his family hosted BBC's Lambing Live programme on their South Slipperfield Farm, West Linton, in 2014, and QMS's own LambCam project in 2015, but a lot has changed on the farm since then.

The 400-hectare farm, which rises to 1,500 feet above sea level at the top of Mendick Hill, is now stocked with over 1,000 ewes and just 14 Hereford cross heifers running with a Shorthorn bull.

Hamish said: "Ten years ago we reduced the cattle from over 200 head of Simmental and Simmental crosses to under 100, but despite trying hard to make the herd more efficient, we just couldn't make it truly profitable on this farm, so we made the decision to sell the cows and increase ewe numbers."

Hamish, who farms with the assistance of his wife Susie, and in partnership with parents John and Kate, added: "The cattle sheds were built in the 70s and 80s and needed major repairs or replaced, which helped with the decision. The small herd we have now will live outside for 52 weeks a year."

The sheep flock is also undergoing a transformation – from a stratified flock of Blackface, Scotch Mule and Texel crosses to a closed, circular flock of Lleyn, Romney and Texel.

The decision to change was made as a family in order to make the farm as profitable and sustainable as it could be. Hamish explained: "We are clear where we want to go with the ewe flock. In the old system, each breed needed slightly different management."

Main image: (l-r) Susie, Murdo, Rosie and Hamish Dykes.

"We decided this farm did not need a stratified flock and went about changing it by phasing out the Blackface and Mules and using a Lleyn tup on the Texel cross ewes. The progeny go to a Romney sire, and the progeny of that back to a Texel."

"Now we can graze the ewes in bigger mobs, which utilises the grass better; we separate them into smaller groups only at tupping and lambing. All three breeds are serving a similar purpose, but each brings something different to the table and by crossing, we are keeping up the hybrid vigour."

The plan is that the percentage of lambs weaned across the whole flock will be around 170%, and that will be achieved by lambing outdoors at the end of April, cutting down labour and feeding costs.

Hamish said: "We know that a later lambing/low input system might reduce the lambing percentage that we previously achieved with the Mules, but this should be countered by replacing the hill breed with a more prolific alternative – resulting in a better overall percentage."

Since the shepherd moved on in summer 2018, Hamish has been solely responsible for the sheep and he is really enjoying working with them again, while his dogs – including advert star Doug – are absolutely loving it!

He said: "I thoroughly enjoy working with the flock and can really see the progress we are making. Scotch Lamb is such a great, natural product and I feel privileged to be in a position to put good, wholesome food on people's plates."

Hamish has also become more focussed on the maternal traits of his flock, to make it more cost effective and efficient. Any ewe which gives trouble will be culled, with the aim of getting back to a more natural, grass-fed, outdoor lambing system. Hamish said: "I believe we now have the right breeds to achieve this."

Recorded rams are chosen for their maternal traits, and each ram is capable of tupping upwards of 70 to 80 ewes a year and will last around five years, which is another cost benefit.

Lambs are finished and sold deadweight to Woodhead brothers, but interestingly Hamish said that the business targets have changed. He explained: "I am no longer hell-bent on chasing E grades! I have decided that the most important performance indicators are the cost of production and the kg of meat produced."

"It is essential to produce lambs within specification, but the key driver for me now is maximising production of cost-efficient U's and R's."

Lambing later also means that the grass growth coincides with demand, and the Dykes now aim to finish 70 to 80 per cent of lambs off grass and eight hectares of plantain. This is the first year that Hamish has grazed plantain and it was very successful, supporting 500 lambs on a rotational basis throughout the summer and autumn. The remainder of the lambs are currently finished on ten hectares of kale and are on target to be sold before Christmas.

While busy with the various changes to his farming system and despite the fact he no longer has any staff at South Slipperfield, Hamish is always switched on to the educational and PR side of farming, which is why he agreed to take part in Lambing Live and the recent Scotch Lamb TV advert.

He said: "There is no other industry where the public has so much access to the workplace. We, as an industry, are facing challenging times, and it is imperative that the public appreciates and understands what farming is all about and are on our side." +

"Scotch Lamb is such a great, natural product and I feel privileged to be in a position to put good, wholesome food on people's plates."



Scottish Pig Industry Unites to Eradicate Endemic Disease

Representatives from the Scottish pig industry - including pig producers, vets, pharmaceutical companies, pig specialists and industry bodies - are working together to try to develop a strategy to eliminate a debilitating and costly disease in the Scottish pig herd.

Porcine Reproductive and Respiratory Syndrome (PRRS) is a global problem. It was first seen in pigs in Scotland in 1992 and since then, PRRS has become the single most important endemic disease of pigs across the country.

The PRRS virus infects sows and growing pigs, leading to reproductive failure - characterised by abortions, weak and stillborn piglets and infertility - as well as respiratory problems and increased mortality in young animals. The virus also has an immuno-suppressive effect, which means that animals infected with the PRRS virus are susceptible to repeated infections, often resulting in increased antibiotic use.

The loss of production seen as a result of PRRS has a significant economic impact. The disease is estimated to cost the UK pig industry around £80 per sow, £3.50 per finished pig, or typically £40,000 for a 500-sow herd per year.

When this is multiplied by the number of affected herds, this cost is calculated to be around £3 million each year to the UK pig industry.

PRRS only affects pigs and poses no risk to human health. The virus that causes PRRS can be transmitted in boar semen, through the air, from pig to pig, and via contact with things like contaminated boots, overalls and vehicles. One of the key elements of controlling the disease is to prevent the risk of infection or re-infection in pig herds which are free of PRRS or have invested in disease elimination.

Pig vet Grace Webster, chair of the QMS Scottish working group established in 2017 to try to combat the disease, is convinced that developing a strategy to eliminate the virus from the Scottish pig sector would be a major benefit to the industry.

She said: "Eliminating the PRRS virus in Scotland would undoubtedly improve pig health and welfare by reducing disease and mortality in Scottish pigs."

"It would also lead to increased sustainability of the Scottish pig industry through improved production efficiency by reducing mortality, increasing piglets born alive and the number of litters per sow per year."



Inset image:
Pig vet Grace Webster.

"Eliminating the PRRS virus in Scotland would undoubtedly improve pig health and welfare by reducing disease and mortality in Scottish pigs."

She added that another advantage of eliminating PRRS would be a reduction in antibiotic use: "As pigs with PRRS are affected by secondary infections, eliminating the virus would help reduce antimicrobial use in pigs and could also reduce abattoir condemnations due to chronic health issues such as pleurisy."

The first stage of the eradication programme was to determine how many pigs in Scotland are, or have been, exposed to PRRS virus. Over the last 18 months, blood and oral fluid samples have been collected from pig units across Scotland and tested for the presence of antibodies to the virus. Much of this work was carried out by Allan Ward, QMS Pig Specialist, at abattoirs across Scotland, and the remainder were collected by private vets on units not slaughtering pigs in Scotland.

Results show that 40% of pig units in Scotland tested positive for the virus, which, encouragingly, is 15% lower than in 2012/2013. Using this data, the epidemiology team at SAC Inverness have mapped the disease, showing each individual site, by unit type, size and PRRS status.

Phase Two of testing will begin soon and will involve characterising the units that have already tested positive via a more in-depth blood survey. This will identify whether the exposure has simply been to the vaccine strain of the virus or to a wild type strain. The strain of the PRRS viruses found on each positive unit will also be sequenced to establish which farms share the same strain. This will help inform improvements in biosecurity.

to establish clusters of units that have the potential to eradicate PRRS."

Eradication of PRRS is further complicated by the fact that the virus has the ability to evolve. The USA and China have already recorded the presence of more virulent genotypes of the virus which cannot be controlled by the current PRRS vaccines, and there are farms in England experiencing high losses associated with PRRS on units that had vaccinated against the disease.

"The next key steps towards control and elimination," said Dr Webster, "need to be done in a co-ordinated manner within a region, to prevent neighbours re-infecting each other, and the mapping process has allowed identification of regions where positive units are clustered together."

"For example, the Moray Coast region has been identified as the preferred starting point for trying to eliminate PRRS, as there are very few positive units in this area."

She added: "Where there is a greater density of pigs, such as in Aberdeenshire, the first step will be to move towards control and to reduce the shedding of the virus in the area before starting

Grace Webster stressed the urgency of trying to eradicate the virus in Scotland. She said: "Viral isolates from Scottish farms that have had their DNA sequenced are already seeing a diversity from region to region, so eliminating the virus quickly will hopefully protect the Scottish herd against the development of highly pathogenic strains."

Stuart Ashworth, QMS Director of Economics Services, commented: "With an impending Brexit, the need to secure existing and develop new markets is becoming more important."

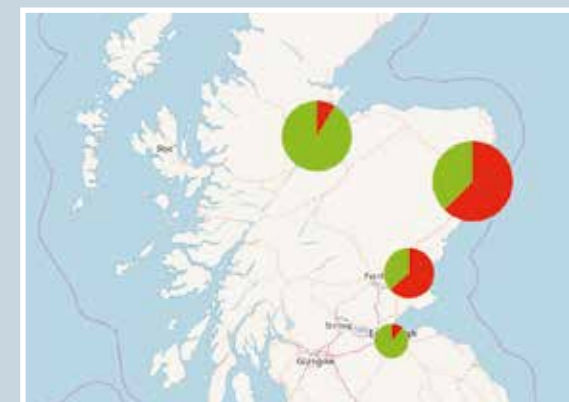
"To export to many countries there is a need for the pork to come from producers deemed free from clinical or laboratory evidence of PRRS. Clearly being able to determine national freedom from the disease will make it easier to comply with this requirement, boosting export opportunities and increasing demand for pork from Scotland."

It is anticipated that the PRRS eradication project will take three to five years to complete, and its success will depend on co-operation from producers, vets, hauliers, feed companies and all allied industries in the Scottish pig sector. Regular meetings for these stakeholders will be arranged after the initial diagnosis work is complete, to share information and provide updates on the progress towards agreed goals.

A project manager will be recruited to facilitate the co-ordination of this project, and a grant has been secured from the Rural Innovation Support Service (RISS) to help develop a project plan. ➡

For further information about this project please contact
Allan Ward,
QMS Pig Specialist,
on 0131 510 7920.

Regional distribution of PRRS positive and negative units in Scotland



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