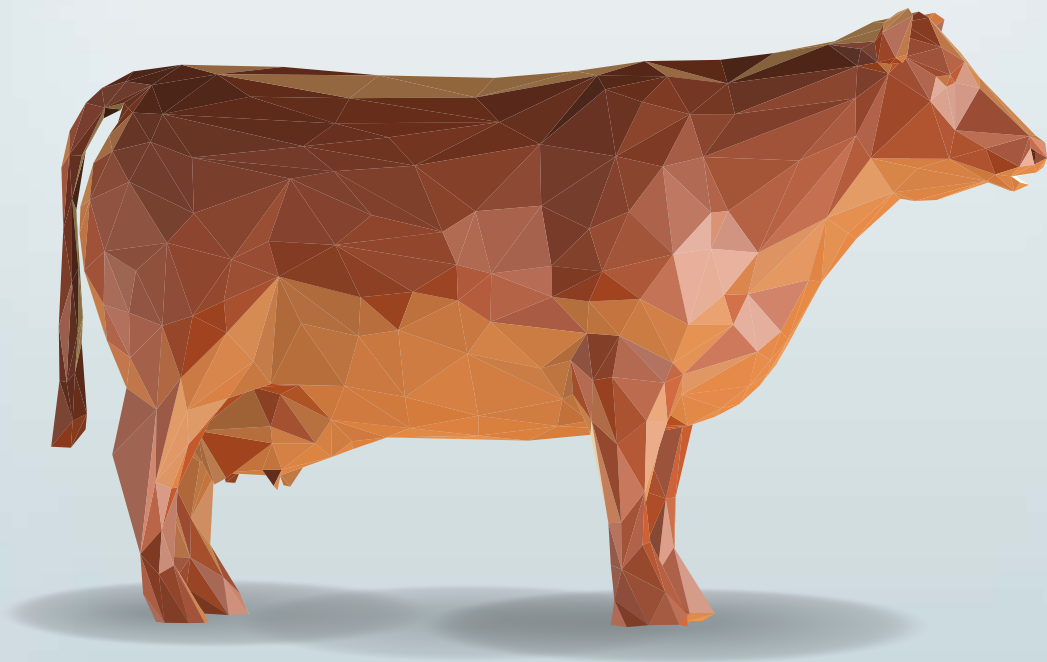


the cut

QMS QUALITY FROM FIELD TO FORK



SYNTHETIC FANTASTIC?

The weird science making
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WE'RE DELIVERING FOR THE LEVY PAYER



Despite another lockdown, dismal weather and Veganuary combining to give us all a tough start to last year, sales of red meat soared and trust in the Scotch, Scottish and Specially Selected brands was high.

Our marketing team's challenge was how to maintain this strong consumer allegiance to our brands. The answer, we believed, lay in aligning our brands with the values and beliefs of a younger target audience, 18-38-year-olds, through the launch of "Make it with Field Cred".

Now, for some of our levy payers, the question may be: "What does field cred actually mean?" Well, to our target market, it means credibility, sustainability, local, high animal welfare and a trust in the Scotch brands.

It's possible that if, like me, you are over 40, you might not have seen our successful, highly targeted digital marketing and communications campaign. I'd only just got used to Instagram when we saw the rise of TikTok, yet another digital platform transforming brands and gaining loyalty. This was where we saw further opportunity to promote the brands and maximise the marketing spend – your levy – to deliver a stronger return on investment.

On another front, the end of 2021 saw Tesco reduce its range of Scotch, something we picked up through our retail audits. We instantly contacted Tesco to see what the issue was and how quickly it could be rectified.

And 2022 began with cattle prices lower than south of the border. Again, we have been asked: "what is QMS doing to rectify the problem?" We don't have control over the price, that's a supply

“

Consumer insight remains the key to success; this enables us to evolve our marketing strategy

and demand issue, but we are striving to maintain consumer demand, working with retailers and processors on joint promotional campaigns and, as with 2021, safeguarding consumer sentiment and perception towards our brands. The end of January saw another successful Veganuary for the red meat sector, with sales rising by two percent.

The heart-breaking events in Ukraine will have ramifications across the food supply chain, which we must brace ourselves for. Disruption of business operations and trade flows, higher commodity and energy prices and a deteriorating economic outlook will all hit the sector and consumers hard.

Consumer insight will remain the key to weathering the storm, and our team's role to promote the brands and work with you to future-proof the Scottish red meat industry, will be vital.

Putting the consumer at the heart of what we do, from field to plate, has never been so important and this is what will help to keep red meat on the weekly shopping list.

In our next edition, we will assess the impact and what the future holds. 🍖

Lesley Cameron,
Director of Marketing
and Communications
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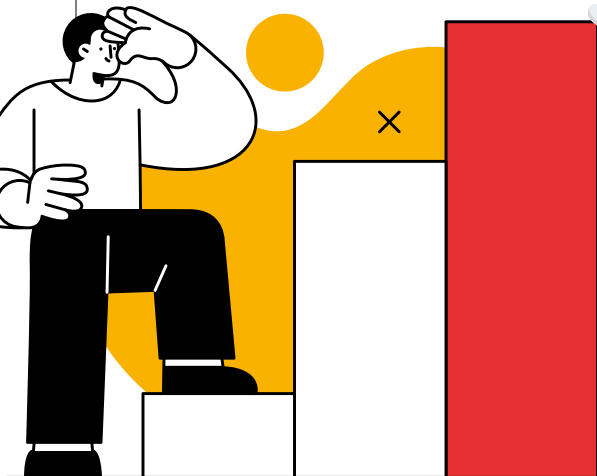
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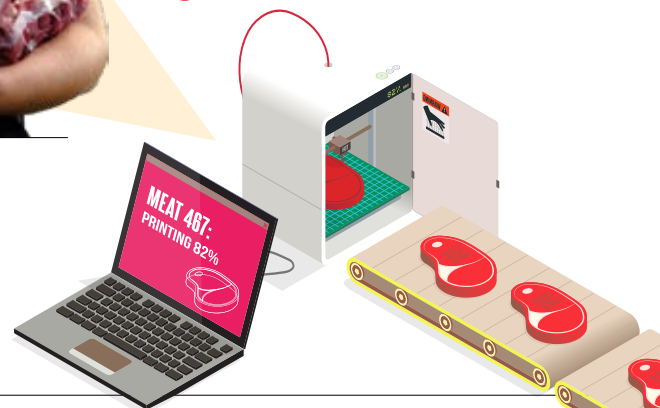
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I'M PROUD OF OUR PAST & EXCITED FOR OUR FUTURE



Welcome to this latest issue of *The Cut* as we look forward to a new era for the organisation under the leadership of our newly appointed Chief Executive, Sarah Millar.

There are exciting times ahead under Sarah's stewardship and I am enthused by the prospect of working closely with her as we continue to drive QMS forward.

However, our future would not be so bright were it not for the extraordinary hard work of our departing chief executive, Alan Clarke, who has created a superb platform from which to build.

Over the past four years, Alan and I have travelled around Scotland, the UK and occasionally further afield, promoting the Scotch brands, and working to increase the visibility and reputation of our high-quality red meat.

Alan has been a sincere and passionate ambassador for the Scottish red meat industry and has worked tirelessly to advance our sector. He has made a massive contribution to the continuing development of QMS.

He should be rightly proud of all he has achieved. We wish him all the best for his future and hope he

can find more time to relax and enjoy life at a slightly slower pace.

A vital part of the QMS team for the past four years, Sarah takes up her post on April 11.

Sarah has been and born and bred into the Scottish farming industry, and has worked across various sectors in both Scotland and England.

She has a deep understanding of all things red meat and I'm very much looking forward

to getting out and about with her over the coming months to meet as many people in our industry as possible and to hear their issues, challenges and the activities they feel QMS should be prioritising.

Please look out for us at shows, auction marts and meetings over the next few months and let us know your thoughts about QMS, the red meat sector and the future. ☺

“
Sarah has a deep understanding of all things red meat and I'm looking forward to getting out and about with her over the coming months

Kate Rowell,
Chair of Quality Meat Scotland

EXIT

Two years on from Brexit, how are the new arrangements working out?

STRATEGY

It's difficult to pinpoint exactly when things change. Often transitions happen in such small, incremental steps that the tipping point can go past unnoticed. Not so in the case of Brexit.

The UK's current course can be traced directly to a windy day in February 2016 when David Cameron announced the date for the UK's referendum on its EU membership. It signalled an unprecedented passage of division and debate culminating in a theoretical severance in 2020, followed by an actual split on January 1, 2021. It wasn't civil and it wasn't pretty.

But would this decision deliver a rich bounty of options or would turning our backs on our closest trading partners leave the UK weaker as a result? According to the Office of Budget Responsibility (OBR), the immediate impact has been a decline in the UK's trade with the EU. Since the transition period ended, the UK has reduced trade with the EU by 15.8 per cent as of August 2021. Indeed, during an interview with the BBC, the OBR's chairman, Richard Hughes, admitted things could get even

worse. "In the long term," he said plainly, "Brexit will have a bigger impact than the pandemic."

A year on from the most public of break-ups, the ramifications of the decision to leave are beginning to tell, but what are the repercussions for agriculture and transport and, more importantly, what lies ahead?

Trading post *Free trade agreements*

According to the UK Government, trade agreements are designed to "make trading easier" by "reducing the restrictions on imports and exports". It seems straightforward, but this goal can be jeopardised by worm-hole negotiations and outright politics.

In the immediate aftermath of Brexit, the UK Government's position was to carry over arrangements with the EU to "ensure continuity for UK business". Its priority then was to launch negotiations with the US, Australia, and New Zealand, with an agreement in principle reached with Australia in June.

Jim Fairlie, MSP for Perthshire South and Kinross-shire, and a keen advocate of Scottish agriculture, warns that we are at a critical stage

and that without the protection of the EU, "the UK Government will decimate not only our farming industry but also our fishing industry. That's exactly where we're going. [The UK Government] signed a free trade agreement in a short timescale and got a bad deal," he says referring to the agreement with Australia. "That bad deal sets the template for every other deal with every other big, agri-producing country around the world."

In its assessment of the agreement, the Australian Government indicated one of its top objectives was to improve "market access for Australian agricultural and industrial products". The UK Government has also agreed a broad framework with New Zealand which some anticipate will lead to a 40 per cent rise in meat imports from the Antipodean country.

"The downsides far outweigh any potential benefit the UK Government keeps telling us we're going to have," says Fairlie. "From the Scottish farming communities' point of view, I can see no benefit. It's fanciful to think New Zealand is going to import Scottish or British lamb. It's never going to happen. Where is the protection for Scotland's agricultural

WORDS
MARK ALEXANDER



community? Where is the protection for our food and drink industry? Restaurants are opening two or three days a week because they can't get staff. How do we get those businesses back up and running?"

However Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party MSP Rachael Hamilton says: "We know the real threat to Scottish farmers is the SNP's assault on the countryside through the cuts to the Agricultural Transformation Fund and lack of future farm policy. We have seen £20m of cuts to farm budgets, no sign of what future payments will look like and civil servants looking at plans to cull 300,000 cattle to meet emissions. This is before we even get onto the divisive independence referendum they seek.

"Our biggest and most important market is the rest of the UK. QMS's Red Meat Profile report highlighted that 71% of Scotch beef and 64% of Scotch lamb sales are in the rest of the UK. Independence would spell disaster for our sheep industry and the frictionless nature of our internal market. Keeping Scotland out of our most important single market would be catastrophic."

End of the road

Ongoing disruptions

A year down the line, the ramifications of Brexit are still being assessed. The Road Haulage Association (RHA) reported that the immediate impact was the loss of 15,000 foreign drivers. When combined with the 60,000 driver shortfall identified ahead of the split and the drop-off in newly qualified drivers due to COVID,

warnings of logistical pressures and food shortages soon followed.

Attempts to rectify the situation by extending cabotage rules – the legal remit of foreign drivers in the UK – have been questioned by Martin Reid, director of Scotland & NI at the RHA. "It might go some way to increasing movements around Christmas, but it's going to punish the UK workforce," he says plainly.

The current system allows foreign hauliers to perform two domestic movements within the UK within a week. The proposal seeks to extend this to a fortnight and permit unlimited movements. "They're allowing European companies to come in and undercut UK companies," Martin explains.

While there have been more positive changes around training options for drivers, more concerning is Martin's evaluation of what happens next.

"Goods are moving, but they're not moving at the same volumes as they use to [before Brexit]," he says. "Changes that were due to come in, have been kicked down the road which has been welcomed in one sense because it gives everybody more time to get used to them. In another, we're just storing up problems. For example, there are no checks for incoming goods to the UK. We have all the checks and costs for exporting goods to Europe and elsewhere, while those coming into the UK don't have any. It's still a very uneven playing field."

He continues: "I think the problems we face on the labour side will be with us for a couple of years, but in terms of import and export, we've yet to see the full effects."



Borderline dispute

> *The Northern Ireland Protocol*

Exiting Europe has implications for every part of the UK, not least Northern Ireland which enjoys a land border with the EU. To avoid checks along that boundary, a protocol was agreed that has caused disquiet on both sides.

For those at the sharp end, the disruption caused by the protocol has been acute. Neil Wilson, executive director of the Institute of Auctioneers and Appraisers in Scotland (IAAS) explains, the new rules have resulted in additional administrative burdens that have deterred Northern Irish farmers from making their annual pilgrimage to the Scottish marts.

“The protocol hasn’t stopped farmers coming over to Scotland to sell bulls, but it has meant that if they don’t sell their bulls, the animals will have to stay in Scotland for six months.” Previously, veterinary inspections and show licences ensured animals could be moved relatively freely. The new rules have, not surprisingly,

curbed interest with some estimates suggesting the number of bulls transported from Northern Ireland to Scotland has fallen by 90 per cent.

“It’s definitely affecting Northern Ireland in terms of their access to gene pools and breeding, but what’s harder to assess is the impact on Scottish farmers,” admits Wilson, who says two of Scotland’s leading sheep markets have independently informed him the depleted Northern Irish contingent has curtailed recent sales prices by £15-20 per head.

“We’re not just talking about the sheep Northern Irish buyers purchase,” he says. “Because they’re competing for livestock generally, they push up average prices. A lack of buyers at the ringside means lower competition for stock.”

If correct, Scottish farmers could be losing millions in revenue while farmers in Northern Ireland will find it difficult to replenish their stock – a key consideration given the country’s limited gene pool. Not surprisingly, a “technical solution” to livestock trading is being sought by a number of organisations including the National Farmers’ Union (NFU), The Ulster Farmers’ Union (UFU), the National Sheep Association (NSA) and the IAAS as well as veterinary chiefs and associated English bodies.

“A single date didn’t change the health status of animals in Northern Ireland, the UK or Europe. So why have we got this bizarre situation where livestock going to Northern Ireland is treated as if it’s coming from a country they’ve never dealt with before?” asks Wilson. “The harsh reality is in the farming industry, nothing has changed. Nobody has changed the way the animals are being farmed, no one has changed their health status. No disease has appeared in the UK or Northern Ireland just because of Brexit.”

Wilson is calling for common sense to prevail and to recognise that the former system had its merits. “There must be a more straightforward, practical and efficient route to move animals between parts of the UK,” he says.

Policy holder

CAP

The UK’s departure from the EU effectively shredded the rule book governing the relationship between agriculture and society. The EU’s incumbent Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), which was designed to support farmers and improve agricultural practices, will be superseded in Scotland by a new framework currently being considered by the Agricultural Reform Implementation Oversight Board (ARIOB). In the meantime, the Scottish Government has committed to maintaining alignment with Europe on CAP and other regulatory areas.

It is nevertheless a monumental undertaking not lost on co-chair and 63rd president of the National Farmers’ Union Scotland (NFUS) Martin Kennedy. “I didn’t take on the co-chair lightly. It took a lot of negotiation before I agreed, but the announcement at our conference from the cabinet secretary showed... how we can develop an agricultural policy fit for Scotland, not just one size fits all.”

The announcement launching £51 million of funding through a National Testing Programme focusing on transitioning to a system of sustainable agriculture that will reduce greenhouse gas emissions and enhance biodiversity, is the board’s first foray into shaping Scotland’s agricultural future. With input from farmers groups on areas such as carbon and biodiversity audits, animal welfare and soil analysis, Kennedy says the scheme

UK prime minister, Boris Johnson with president of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen



Pic: Sutterstock



shows the direction of travel and sets the yardstick for moving forward.

“These are the things you need to baseline from. Once you have a baseline, that informs the decisions you need to make to meet the challenges in front of us,” he explains. “The only way we’re going to meet these challenges is if it’s farmer-led.”

Kennedy has asserted he would walk away from the process if progress wasn’t forthcoming and, by contrast, also admits he’s been accused of being too upbeat about the future of Scottish farming. So, which is it; bullish or buoyant?

“If we didn’t get the traction we’re beginning to get, I would have said I’m not interested in this and walked away,” he admits. “But I think we’re making progress, and the reason for that is we’ve got an industry that wants to drive forward. We’re very pleased that cabinet secretary Mairi Gougeon is supportive of the industry and doesn’t want to see the Scottish Government being the block to the industry going forward.”

In a rare moment of careful optimism, Kennedy has picked out the merest flicker of light at the end of a dark and, at times, troubling tunnel. “We need to get started on

this journey,” he says. Where this journey leads, only time will tell.

Food for thought

As difficult as it is to pinpoint the moment of change, marking a conclusion presents its own challenges. Brexit is, after all, embedded in the UK’s DNA. Love it or hate it, the decision to leave and the inflections of that vote will be forever with us.

James Withers is chief executive of Scotland Food & Drink which represents a broad and eclectic range of businesses with a combined annual turnover of £14 billion. His assessment of Brexit’s impact is stark.

“A combination of Covid and Brexit has set the industry back probably three years in terms of size,” he says. “[However], unpicking Covid from Brexit is fairly straightforward because our export sales to non-EU countries have risen compared to where they were in 2019, whereas they’ve fallen significantly with the EU.”

He says exporting to the EU has become more costly, complex and risky with only the largest businesses able to adapt. “Some of the biggest companies are having to absorb the cost, make less margin and find a

Since the transition period ended, the UK has reduced trade with the EU by 15.8 per cent as of August 2021

way to work around the bureaucracy. Many small companies, however, have stopped exports altogether. It’s become a bureaucratic nightmare they can’t afford to navigate.”

Looking ahead, he says options are still available that could make Brexit more workable, such as agreeing a veterinary deal that could remove some of the bureaucracy around export health certificates. “It’s the kind of thing that other countries have,” he argues. “Switzerland has it, even New Zealand has an easier export route into the EU than we do going 30 miles over the English Channel.”

But attempts to progress such ideas have been met with limited interest. “We’ve tried,” he admits. “We’ve had three meetings in the diary with [former Brexit minister] Lord Frost, and every one was cancelled at short notice.”

His longer-term predictions cause equal unease. “I have hope and fear. My hope is this illogical way of trading with our biggest partner cannot be sustainable in the long run. So eventually, we’ll get closer to the single market, because what we’re doing at the moment is ludicrous. My fear is that before we get to that brighter prospect, we have the real prospect of a trade war, which would be a disaster.”

Whether a potential spat is triggered by Jersey fishing licenses or by issues arising from the Northern Ireland protocol, Withers predicts a deterioration in UK/EU relations before the faintest glimmer of light reveals itself at the far end of the gloomy Brexit tunnel.

“My fear is the UK Government doesn’t mind a fight with France and Europe. But trade wars are not victimless. They will cost jobs and businesses. My immediate fear is things are going to get worse before logic returns to our political life and things start to get better.”

The global pandemic and an unexpected war in Ukraine have brought about huge uncertainties in markets around the world, and the ramifications are bound to be severe and long-lasting. While initial thoughts are undoubtedly with those suffering the effects first-hand, skyrocketing feed, energy and living prices could threaten livelihoods closer to home.

Trends kick-started or accelerated by the Covid pandemic can offer new opportunities such as increased consumer demand for local and sustainable foods, corporate interest in natural capital markets, and an increased desire to work from home or live in the countryside.

Before committing to any new enterprise though, there are, of course, many things to consider and weigh up, says Michael Mack, a rural business consultant and specialist in diversification.

“Consider whether you, or your team, has the correct skills and attitude for this business,” says Mack. “Most farm diversification projects require different skills to farming, such as marketing, customer service, supply chain logistics and an understanding of new legislation. If you have little experience in the sector you’re exploring, think about how you will build these new skill sets.

“Think about who the customer will be and find out about them. Not everyone thinks and acts like you – take time to research how the target customer thinks, makes decisions and communicates,” advises Mack.

It’s also key to identify your USP, he adds. “Customers are bombarded with so many messages from people trying to sell products that you will need to fight to keep your business in their mind, so what will make your business stand out?”

Lastly, resources – whether financial or time – must be weighed up, as well as the impact on the rest of the farming business. “You may need to adjust farming practice to manage your diversification – can the farm cope with less of your time?” asks Mack.

The Cut examines five key growth areas and gets expert insight and advice on maximizing on-farm income streams and opportunities...

FUTURE- PROOFING YOUR BUSINESS

How tapping into alternative income streams could help keep unpredictable price increases manageable



1. DEVELOP HOUSING FOR THOSE RELOCATING TO THE COUNTRYSIDE

17%

house price rise in Scotland in the year to August 2021, the highest of any UK region (ONS 2021)

Lockdown has prompted many people to rethink city living and relocate to the countryside in search of green space. As a result, demand for rented accommodation in rural locations has skyrocketed.

224%

demand increase for rental properties in rural areas compared to pre-pandemic (Rightmove 2021)

Six steps to success

Stephen Whiteford (below), mixed farmer and associate director of rural at Strutt & Parker, Inverness, says, “Now is a great time for farm businesses to consider converting traditional buildings no longer fit for modern agricultural practices, or old derelict cottages and farmhouses. Long-term letting or holiday lets could offer a supplementary income or raise capital for investment in the main farming enterprise.” His steps to success are:

1. Consider tax implications when weighing up whether to create a long-term let or holiday let – both have advantages but should be considered within the context of the specific business structure and finances.
2. Consider what your Local Planning Authority is likely to support. For example, local people being priced out of the housing market by second homeowners or higher-paying renters are well documented in some areas, so consider the housing needs of your community or area.
3. To address the planning issue,



legislation laid before Scottish Parliament is looking to bring in a licensing structure for all types of holiday let – a proposal that has been challenged stringently by those in the sector. Under the legislation, all local authorities will be required to establish a short-term lets licensing scheme by October 2022. Existing hosts and operators will have until 1 April 2023 to apply for a licence for each property that they operate as a short-term let. All short-term lets in Scotland will have to be licensed by 1 July 2024.

4. Consider what resources the business has and what external help or advice is required. It's important not to stretch resources and lose focus of your core business
5. Fully evaluate location, availability and the required services, infrastructure and overall costs.
6. Seek the right professional advice before committing to a project – legal and planning issues as well as finance and budgeting all need to be carefully considered, as well as who will do the project managing.



2.

CREATE A NICHE OFFERING FOR CONSUMERS KEEN TO SHOP CLOSER TO HOME

While the Scotch brand opens doors on a national and international level, producers can leverage its benefits locally too. The pandemic led many people to discover the incredible food they have on their doorsteps, generating renewed appreciation for local produce and farmers. By offering local families direct to door services, Scotch producers can provide great produce with high environmental and animal welfare standards and minimal social impact.

Harry and Helen Brown of Auchmaliddie Mains joined the QMS Brands Licensing Scheme in 2020 with a view to selling direct to consumers, and asked QMS for help.

We partnered them with a member of the Scotch Butchers Club who could assist with secondary processing, packing and labelling. The Browns then began selling direct to consumers from the farm and farmers' markets, and their brand has gone from strength to strength.

QMS supplied all the marketing collateral, complete with Scotch Beef PGI logos, which has given consumers assurance the products are underpinned by QMS' whole of life and whole of production supply chain quality assurance schemes.

£

Women, higher-income shoppers, and Gen Z are more likely to purchase products marketed as sustainable (McKinsey 2021)

62%

say they are more conscious about where their meat comes from following the first lockdown (Scotch Lamb PGI)



X4

Growth rate for food products clearly labelled as sustainable, compared to the market average (McKinsey 2021)



Top 5 branding tips

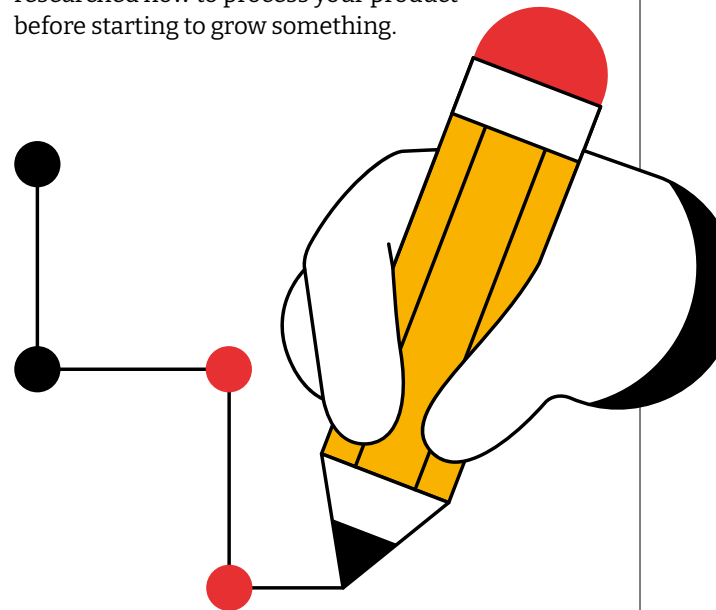
Sascha Grierson (right), farm butcher owner and SAC food and drink consultant, Perthshire, says the time for local food is now and there is significant interest in the provenance of all food and drink products, and the public want local, traceable and unique products.

- 1.** Consider first whether you are happy to engage with customers. Are you willing to listen to their needs and wants, and do your best to help?
- 2.** Don't wait for things to be perfect – get going and opportunities will come to you. Try all potential routes to market. Other businesses will be doing something similar – don't be downhearted, instead, use it to learn, or potentially collaborate. Expect it to be hard work. It won't happen without daily and weekly commitment, but it will be rewarding. You will also make mistakes – that's all right, the trick is to learn.
- 3.** Be prepared to listen to everyone who is interested, as it will help build your network. Engage with customers and listen to their feedback – they will have a direct influence on your farming, for the good, so be open to it. Don't assume everyone feels the same way about local food and drink as you do, there will be times when you will feel like no one is listening. That's all right too, stay with it.
- 4.** Do a simple budget to understand how much starting and working capital you will need. Over-estimate the labour required, as you will need it. You get to set your price, so be confident and have a target. Remember, you are the expert in your product. Set up a system of monitoring your margins from the outset. Allow your business time to grow, but be tough on it, as you will need to make



it pay. Be careful of listening to everyone. Apply a filter and decide on the scale of your ambition. Aim for the sweet spot which optimises profit rather than chasing turnover.

- 5.** Successful farm-based food and drink brands are authentic, have high standards with environmental credibility, tell the family story, monitor financial progress and are the ones that stick it out – it takes about five years to gain real traction. Consider environmental sustainability within your product offer, as customers will ask about it and you will need to be transparent and knowledgeable. Before launching, engage with your own product. Eat it, taste it, understand what it is you are selling and why it's unique. Build your story. Ensure you have researched how to process your product before starting to grow something.





say Scotland is the leading destination for holidaymakers in the countryside or villages (VisitScotland 2021)

31%

3. DEVELOP A RURAL GETAWAY FOR HOLIDAYMAKERS

International travel may be back on the agenda, but the pandemic has encouraged more of us to explore and appreciate what's on our doorsteps, and urban dwellers to realise just how much they need regular breaks in nature. Increased interest in the countryside and food provenance also opens the opportunity to combine experiences and accommodation.

estimated value of agritourism to Scottish farms (Go Rural Scotland)

£100M

Top 5 agritourism tips

Caroline Millar (below), owner of The Hideaway Experience and agritourism consultant at Cas Millar and the Scottish Food Tourism Board, Angus, says:

1. Be aware that agritourism is not easier than farming, it's as much work, but different. To get return on investment and drive profits you need to commit time to running the enterprise properly, which includes being responsive to enquiries. Getting the service, quality of experience, and cleanliness wrong will mean your business receives poor reviews online. Don't underestimate the importance and value of five-star customer service – people are paying you to make them feel good, rested, revived and entertained.

You need passion to spend time and look after visitors, so you must enjoy meeting people, communicating with them and giving them your time. You will need to be responsive and available 24/7 in case guests need you, such as a power outage, or change a lightbulb. Skills that are essential include marketing and communication and being able to form a commercial pricing strategy. If you don't have these skills yourself, learn or get freelance support.

You will also need operational skills (such as planning for changeovers between guests), and general maintenance. You might need to undertake specific courses on health and safety, environmental health, social media etc.

2. Consider whether your accommodation is the type of agritourism you want to be developing? Are there other types of agritourism, such as farm tours, experiences, a café or restaurant, festivals, events, cookery school, adventure tourism or workcations (when customers can 'be a farmer for the day')?

3. Does your area need more rural holiday accommodation? Your area might have a low supply, but there might not be strong demand

for holidays in your area. Contact your local council economic development department and local or national tourism marketing office for advice and data. How will your offering be different and stand out? Who will be your customers? Where will they come from? What market segment will you go for – families, large groups, single people, or couples? Do not try to be all things to all people.

4. Successful rural accommodation enterprises understand what market segment they are in and deliver to that market, whether it's focused on families, couples, or adventurers. Keep marketing costs low by growing repeat business as a result of first-class experience, have a distinctive brand and values, and offer more than accommodation. Do your market research. What are the consumer trends, what are people demanding – both from agritourism and accommodation. People increasingly want accommodation plus a farm or a food and drink experience, and the market is moving in line with demand by providing, for example, farm tours for guests, wildlife and nature tours or trails, food and drink supplied, or farm picnics. Accommodation with no host interaction is in decline, so keep this mind – it's all about the experience.

5. Consider the pros of having an off-grid or rural accommodation enterprise. These include year-round income without having to work off-farm, full-time employment for a partner or a generation that can't be supported by the farm business otherwise, so enabling a younger or older generation to remain on-farm, being able to set prices rather than be at the mercy of the commodity market, and having people around the farm enjoying the space creates a buzz which reduces isolation for farmers.



4. TAP INTO THE OUTDOORS WELLNESS TREND

More people have become aware of the benefits of exercising in green spaces for general wellbeing during the pandemic. Working out at an indoor gym isn't the same and now doesn't feel as safe for many people. Throwing tractor tyres around a farmyard, or doing yoga in the woods, is a whole new experience, though.

Top 10 wellness trend tips

Arron Collins-Thomas (right), founder of RUSTIQ, a farm-based fitness community and outdoor gym, and Tim Bowles (below right), founder of Campwell, an off-grid farm retreat near Bath, which hosts RUSTIQ, offer advice...

Tim says:

1. Consider all weathers and how it will impact on your activity, including traffic, access, shelter, prevailing winds, water flows and drainage. Get to know your land and the most suitable places for your enterprise. For example, free-draining, higher land might be better for vehicles and buildings and will be drier underfoot.
2. Have a master plan for your land, infrastructure and resources. Working with professional architects, consultants and designers can help you to consider longer-term set-ups so you can progressively work towards your goal.
3. Start small and organically develop new enterprises, unless you have extensive experience or expertise in certain areas. Going big too soon can result in significant stress and unforeseen costs, with more issues further down the line – you may end up putting your infrastructure in the wrong places.



If it's a full-time fitness space, it's all about community. Bringing like-minded people together and having fun is what keeps people coming back



39.4%

of gym members
switched to running
and other outdoor
activities in 2021
(RunRepeat 2021)



4. Speak to others in the industry and visit their set-ups. If you pay to go to their class, stay at their venue or eat at their café and they will be more open to sharing their insights and learnings.

5. Get your branding and marketing right. Spend money and take time on this, share your story, your unique selling points and get to know your customers really well. Do your research, check out the competition, and consider what feels right for your own interpretation of the industry.

Arron says:

1. It's important that your instructors are qualified for what you are teaching and have the correct insurance. The set-up and layout of where the activities take place is a big consideration as you need to be careful of the safety of machinery and operations on a working farm. If you are doing anything with water, make sure you have the correct experience and insurance for that. Just as important as qualifications is to get instructors that are up for it in any weather. If it's hammering with rain and your coach is under an umbrella with no enthusiasm, this will affect the energy of the class. Get active, get outside, and have fun.

2. Make use of nature and utilise the activities you have all around you as a good place to start without too much investment – something people can't do at home or in their usual lives, such as wild running and walking groups, or wild swimming and paddleboarding, or even sheep herding. It can be a relatively cheap set-up. Start small and

build as your community grows. Use bits of farm equipment to create a rural workout space or assault course, such as hay bales, tractor tyres, and logs. People will come to you for this simple approach rather than the large gym full of equipment.

3. Weather will always play a part in the activities that you do, but embrace the elements and the great outdoors – most people will prefer to be outside in the rain and come to you for that specific reason. You can also utilise barns for indoor activities.

4. Setting up any business is hard, so if you are looking to diversify into wellness and you don't know anything about it, get support. Don't be afraid to ask people for advice and potentially partner up with someone already established.

5. Make sure there is a market for it. Unless you are doing something spectacular, you need to make sure it is easy for people to access. A farm that's more than a 15-minute drive from a town or decent-sized village will struggle to attract enough local people. It can be a bit seasonal. Our barn is unheated, so we battle against the cosy gym spaces in winter. This time of year, it is harder to get the consistency from clients as those cold dark mornings put some people off. If it's a full-time fitness space, it's all about community. Bringing like-minded people together and having fun is what keeps people coming back. They get their social fix at the same time as their fitness fix, so put on social events and work with other businesses, as well as charities.



5. DON'T WANT TO DIVERSIFY?

CONSIDER SHARE FARMING AND JOINT VENTURES

Starting a new diversification isn't for everyone. Share farming agreements, joint ventures, and non-family partnerships may offer alternative opportunities to either expand a farm business, spread risk, focus on something else, reduce costs, or gradually retire – and more people are thinking about them.

“Whether a joint venture, partnership or share farming agreement, it's critical to find the right party to work with,” says Clive Phillips (right), a sheep farmer and head of Rural Business at Brodies Solicitors, Aberdeen. His advice is to team up with someone you trust and who aligns with your vision and be really clear about what you want out of the collaboration, how much involvement you want, who is responsible for which costs and risks, and what the end goals of both parties are. “Foster good communication and regular meetings with each other to keep things on track,” he adds. What are the pros and cons?

Share farming

Share farming effectively means two businesses working together and dividing up the tasks, and usually, it involves setting up a new business vehicle that both parties have a stake in. It's not very common in the UK yet, and there is no specific legislation for it, but it can be a useful model for livestock farmers. The two businesses share the gross revenue, and each has their own cost base. This allows one business to own the livestock (an

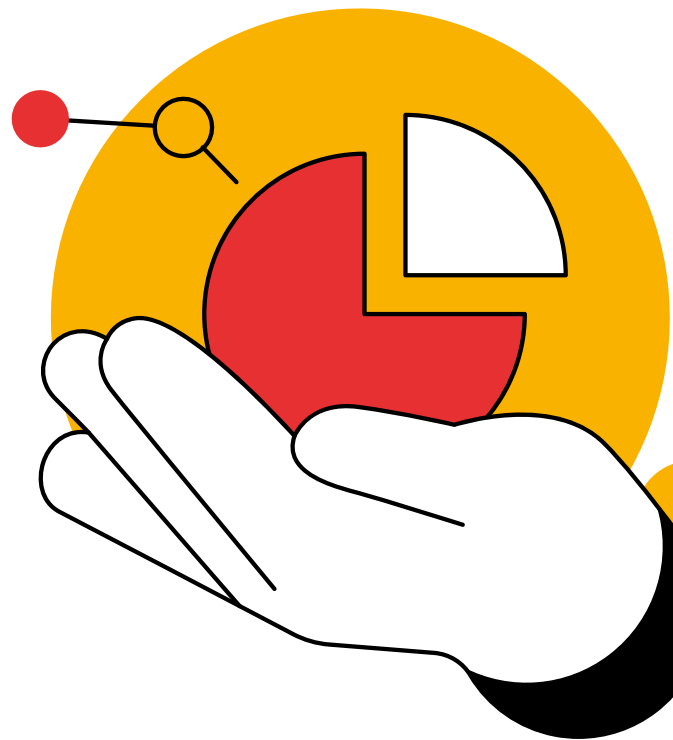
established farmer) and enter into a share farming agreement with someone to provide the labour and management in exchange for sharing gross revenue. It can even be used to gradually pass that ownership to another (such as a new entrant.) This benefits a farmer wanting to gradually retire or exit, and either a new entrant who doesn't have the capital to start their own herd or another farmer who wants to gradually expand.

However, not all livestock farmers will want to transfer ownership of a long-standing herd and its hard-worked-for genetics. In this case, ownership would not transfer, but gross revenue would be shared, with both parties being responsible for their own specific costs and, therefore, their own profits.

Non-family partnerships

This is one type of joint venture which could be used between neighbouring farmers, or someone wanting to retire and a new entrant. It differs from farming family partnerships in the sense that the parties are not connected parties. Essentially, it is two or more farmers coming together to create one new business for a particular enterprise, with shared costs and profits.

One benefit is that it allows the movement of capital and profits very easily if the partners wish, by adjusting their profit and capital shares within the partnership. It can achieve what share farming does but with more certainty because partnership law and practice is much more widely developed and used in the UK than share farming, so it can be easier to set up and operate.





Developing a new five-year strategy was top of Alan's to-do list when he took on the role with QMS in 2017. Its aim would be to support, develop, promote, and protect the Scottish red meat industry. Now, as he prepares to hand the reins on to Sarah Millar, *The Cut* sat down for a review of his tenure as Chief Executive, and his hopes for the future.

"My concerns when I joined QMS," recalls Alan, "were, number one, if anything goes wrong in the industry, we get the blame, rightly or wrongly. And secondly, we didn't 'stick to the knitting'. We can't be pulled in all different directions to do things. If we're asked to do something, we now ask does it support, develop, promote, or protect the industry? If the answer's 'yes', we can include it. If the answer's 'no', someone else can take that on board."

While being "no farmer", Alan had experience in levy organisations, retail and training, and the business acumen to drive QMS forward. His retail, people management, and membership background held him in good stead, but QMS was still a challenge. "Coming into the agricultural and red meat industry was the biggest apprenticeship of my life. I learned a new language, some of the words I'm even allowed to use in my own house! I've had several challenges and hopefully there have been some areas where I've been able to make a difference."

Improvements in engagement have taken place under Alan's watch.

"We aimed to improve any challenges in communication between parts of the industry by establishing the Scottish Red Meat Resilience group which has worked collaboratively in producing position papers on key issues impacting on the sector."

Communication was key. Here are his top ten achievements...

Alan Clarke

TEN STEPS TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

QMS's outgoing Chief Executive has weathered COVID and Brexit storms to deliver a collaborative voice for the industry, increased focus on research and education, and new routes to market for the Scotch brands

1

Negotiating levy repatriation

When asked about his biggest successes, Alan says: "Levy repatriation." When animals are born and raised in Scotland but are processed in England, the farmer's part of the levy was collected by the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board (AHDB). A long-term solution was sought by QMS, AHDB, Meat Promotion Wales (HCC), the Scottish Government, Welsh Government and Defra. "Initially £1.5 million of levy money was ringfenced to be used by levy payers in England, Scotland, and Wales," says Alan. "Our chair, Kate Rowell, and I negotiated with AHDB that it would rise to £3 million in the last year of the fund, a much more significant amount of money."

The three levy boards then worked collaboratively on inward and outward missions, industry development and research work, trade shows, and marketing.

A major effort by the three levy boards, Scottish and Welsh Governments and DEFRA culminated in an amendment to the Agriculture Act 2020, which introduced a formal mechanism enabling levy bodies to reallocate levies collected in one part of



Alan with Kate Rowell

the UK to other parts of the UK, as of April 2021. So going forward QMS will receive, on average, an additional £1.3M levy annually. That's a 25% increase on the existing £4 million levy and can be used for the benefit of members in Scotland, with more than 70% going on marketing.

"With Tim Rycroft, the new Chief Executive of AHDB, joining our recent board meeting," adds Alan, "we're looking at how we can continue to collaborate on defending the industry, whether it's the anti-red meat brigade, the rise of veganism or the disruption of exports, and what research and development we can get behind."



3 Focusing on education

There have been wins in terms of research and education under Alan's watch. A programme looking into the practical implications of introducing DNA traceability into the supply chain for all cattle in Scotland has just ended. Focused on how to identify the genomic markers that offer a great eating experience, it explored how that information is shared back to farmers. The grazing programmes which morphed into sustainability groups were successful too, and Farming Foodsteps, a series of online resources for schools, was developed.

"Adult education is being focused on too," says Alan. "We're building on a strong relationship with the craft butchers in Scotland, one of the biggest learning providers of apprenticeships for butchers. These are resources we can further develop."

2 Making COP26 matter

The eyes of the world were on Scotland last year, and Alan and his team were at the heart of the action.

"Working collaboratively with NFUS and SAC Consulting we had around 100 politicians from Scotland out on farm, so they'd be able to talk confidently to their constituents about what's happening on farm. We'll build on that success going forward and engage not just with Holyrood, but Westminster and local authorities too."

While Alan says: "If we lost every animal in Scotland tomorrow, we would still have a climate crisis", he was also keen to give farmers the tools to help them contribute to the Scottish Government's ambitious targets on net zero with the monitor

farm programme and training schemes encouraging sustainable farming practices, measuring where each farm is at and putting in a plan to reduce emissions.

Global recognition for the Scotch brands will facilitate growth, too. Having represented them around the world, Alan reflects that the further he went from Scotland, the higher the brands are held in esteem. "I've stood in Japan as part of a British delegation with 150 buyers and they shake your hand and say, 'This British is good, but we want Scotch'. As a producer in world terms, we are tiny – a blip on the map a fraction of the size of the big world suppliers – but we have a reputation they would die for. That's something we need to continue to build on."



Kate and Alan visiting NFUS Orkney Chair Steven Sandison's farm with Liberal Democrats leader Sir Ed Davey, pre-COP26



Above: Instagram content from Scottish food blogger @christybx

4 Surviving COVID

When COVID hit in March 2020, Scotland's wealth of produce really came into its own, but not before a worrying period had elapsed, with red meat disappearing from supermarket shelves, causing concern about how the supply chain could react. Alan and five other chief executives on the Scotland Food and Drink Partnership board met each day for almost a year to battle daily dilemmas affecting the sector – what he calls a sustained period of firefighting.

“The seismic shift we've had in the economy threw up so many challenges,” says Alan. Food services closed overnight, and he cites butchers as the success story of COVID, with delivery, online ordering and customers' increasing focus on the provenance of food driving new routes to market.

“In the first weeks, one provider pulled up at the Royal Bank of Scotland's head office and opened the back of the van to sell direct to customers because it had no restaurants to take their meat to,” he recalls.

A new marketing programme, Make It, was launched. “We wanted consumers to make sure that our brands were at the forefront of their minds,” says Alan, “whether they were stockpiling or supporting their local butcher.”

6 Resisting the rise of veganism

“The number of vegans and vegetarians across the UK has remained reasonably steady, but they are very noisy. We are much more at risk from flexitarians, the silent people who want to have a healthy, balanced diet, who are unconsciously reducing the amount of meat that they eat, and it's making sure that we're targeting them and encouraging them to buy the best they can afford. That's where the Scotch brands really have an opportunity. When people want to eat the best it's very easy – go and look for the label.”

7 Advocating for farmers

Alan has encouraged the supply chain including retailers, processors and farmers to negotiate equitable contracts which ensure farmers and the whole supply chain can benefit. He is keen to encourage farmers to continue to work together so they can have more control over the supply chain.

“Now the price for beef is about £4.21 for the farmer on average, based on the R4L grading. It was about £3.70-£3.80 a year ago and closer to £3.50 two years ago, although production costs are increasing significantly. However, retail prices have changed negligibly in the last two years, and that's the biggest challenge the industry faces.”

5 Savvy marketing

When Alan arrived, 80% of QMS's marketing spend was on maintaining existing customers, but now 20-25% is spent on maintaining loyal customers, so the vast majority now goes on attracting new ones.

Lockdown provided a great opportunity. Young people unable to eat in restaurants still wanted to eat high quality food at home, photograph it and put it on social media. “That gave us a really good opportunity to offer recipe inspiration to target those young people,” says Alan.

The new board has now confirmed the long-term plan is to maintain that older demographic that is loyal to the brands, while making sure the 18 to 39-year-olds are getting the same experiences.



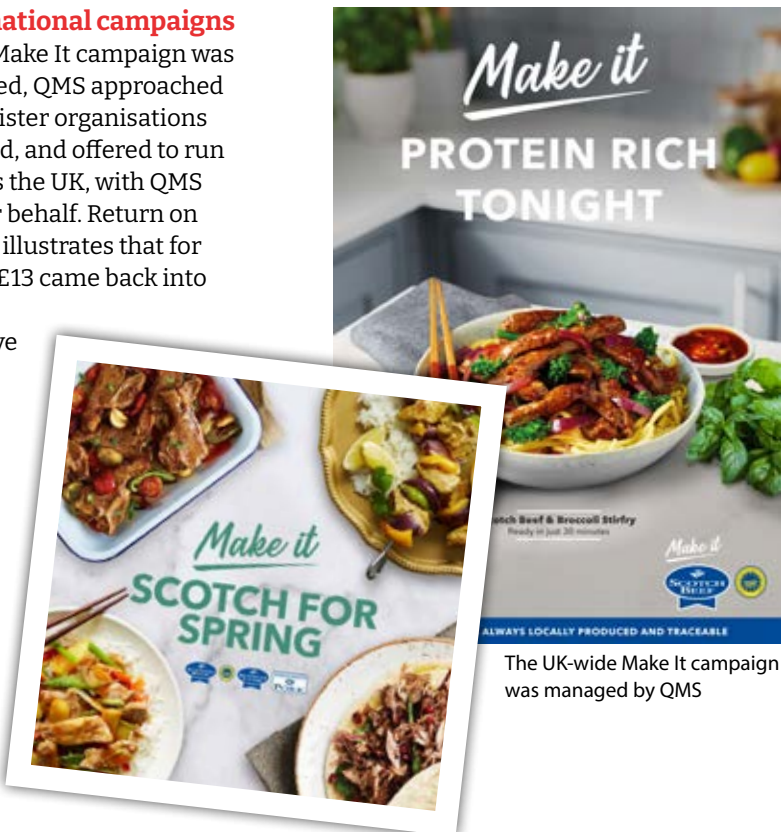
Left: Kate Rowell and Alan welcomed Nicola Sturgeon and Fergus Ewing as key speakers at the QMS business breakfasts during 2019's Royal Highland Show Edinburgh



Members of the Scottish Parliament enjoyed a Scotch Lamb stew as part of QMS's activity for the Make It Scotch Lamb for St Andrew's Day campaign

9 Encouraging collaboration
 The Scottish Red Meat Resilience Group was formed in 2019 to give the elected heads of stakeholder organisations across the Scottish red meat sector a forum for discussion. The NFUS, Scottish Association of Meat Wholesalers, the National Sheep Association of Scotland, Scottish Beef Association, the Institute of Auctioneers and Appraisers Scotland, Scottish Craft Butchers, Pig Industry Leadership Group and the Scottish Association of Young Farmers Clubs are all represented. "We acknowledged that, as an industry, we needed to be able to communicate better," Alan says. "We identified three initial areas to work on collaboratively: public procurement, sustainability, and education, then developed a common action plan which included the creation of position papers that we are all committed to delivering. We're building trust in each other and ensuring there is an equitable profit for each component in the supply chain, and that's tough."

8 Creating national campaigns
 When the Make It campaign was being created, QMS approached AHDB and HCC, its sister organisations in Wales and England, and offered to run the campaign across the UK, with QMS managing it on their behalf. Return on investment analysis illustrates that for every pound put in, £13 came back into Scotland's red meat industry – impressive given a £3 return is normal. "We were very pleased with that," says Alan, "because it was keeping our brands at the forefront of consumers' minds while all this chaos was going on in the background."



The UK-wide Make It campaign was managed by QMS

10 Establishing new programmes
 During Alan's final months he has high hopes a new monitor farm programme will begin as it has just been approved by the Scottish Government. "We've developed a programme with the support of AHDB and the *Irish Farmers Journal*," says Alan, "to make a more business-focused initiative which combines the best of the Farm Profit Partnership programme with the best of the Monitor Farm Scotland programme and introduces sustainable farm production practices." The aim is to ensure access to data that improves decisions participants can interpret within their own enterprise. The opportunity to gain professional qualifications will be a key factor in the new programme, with support for monitor farmers to become better business leaders.

TURNING THE SPOTLIGHT ON HEALTH & EDUCATION

How the QMS Health & Education team teaches about Farming Foodsteps and so much more...



Farming Foodsteps

The team continues to add teaching resources to QMS's interactive education resource which allows pupils to explore every stage of the red meat journey.

Farming Circle of Life

This new resource illustrates how quality assured livestock farms, not only produce nutrient-rich red meat, but also help to protect natural ecosystems.

Educating the Educators

Dedicated resources focusing on food, STEM, health and careers help to tackle misinformation and provide teachers with a balanced view of food production.



It may just be a team of two, but Jennifer Robertson and Alix Richie from the QMS Health & Education team have pulled together an impressive toolbox of resources to ensure that informed food choices are high on the education menu across Scotland and beyond.

Working closely with teachers, partners and the wider industry, they endeavour to ensure that schools have access to resources covering everything from sustainable farming to cooking and from animal welfare to healthy diets.

Across this feature, you will get a snapshot of what's available and how the team strive to ensure that the next generation has good access to all the facts – from farm to fork.



Mission Sustain

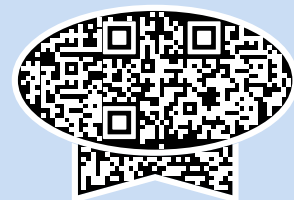
This interactive resource allows players to stand in the shoes (or wellies) of a Scottish livestock farmer and make important decisions on the farm's future.

Meat Voucher Schemes

Both the School Meat Voucher Scheme and the Community Cooking Fund initiatives are designed to teach people how to cook nutritious meals using quality red meat.

Educating Consumers

The development of The Tasty Little Guide – packed with informative facts and tasty recipes – and videos such as The Farming Circle of Life ensure it's not just school pupils, but consumers too that are being educated that red meat can be enjoyed as part of a healthy and sustainable diet.



SCAN. DISCOVER.



Sustainable practices and tools can help reach new audiences –
The Cut meets three farmers with consumer kerb appeal

THE NEW VITAL SPA

Scottish farmers have a great story to tell. Local food chains have become more important during the pandemic and have given farmers a unique opportunity to engage more with their customers. At the same time, many consumers are increasingly looking for meat that is ethically and sustainably produced. So, how can farmers make the most of this and tell their green stories better, or reach out in a greener way? *The Cut* meets three farmers making the most of their opportunities...

CASE STUDY

“Welfare is a huge concern for people”

Claire Pollock of Ardross Farm says farm tours and a 100 per cent forage-based diet help create consumer confidence

WORDS
 TIM POWER

When the Pollock family decided to open a farm shop at Ardross Farm, Fife, it was a venture into the unknown, as no one in the family had any experience of retailing. However, from a single box freezer and a kitchen table selling cuts of their beef from a converted cart shed, the business grew steadily as customers not only returned because of the quality of their produce but also because when they asked the family if they could get other cuts of meat or products like vegetables they were more than happy to oblige.

Today, the farm shop is a thriving business, selling a wide range of fresh produce, prepared food and drinks and the close

relationship established with their local customers has been further strengthened during the pandemic as the Ardross Farm Shop remained a place of plenty when other retailer's shelves were bare.

The 300-acre farm, which has a herd of 125 Stabiliser cattle and 120 sheep, is run by Claire Pollock, who gave up a career in accountancy in 2013 to become the fourth generation of her family to farm at Ardross.

She said the quality of their meat is down to the great pasture on the farm and to the selective breeding regime they operate to develop the best animals for their farming system. “All our cattle and sheep are grazed on a 100 per cent forage-based diet, which has given



RK

us Pasture for Life status where we feed the animals on grass during the summer and silage during the winter.

“We have found the Stabilisers are the best breed for our farm as the large majority can overwinter outside on forage crops and grass without destroying the pasture because we are lucky in having sandy soil that drains easily. We also breed them carefully so that we get the characteristics we want, such as temperament, easy calving, and the ability to fatten on grass by 24-30 months. We calve three times during the year, and it really suits our system of small-scale family farming and for supplying the shop with meat. The success of the shop has really taken off and I

need a constant supply of meat for our customers.”

When Claire’s parents announced that they were going to open a farm shop back in 2004, there was some trepidation as no one else was doing this in the local area.

Claire said: “We used to sell our livestock to market once a year but when we opened the shop, we had to rethink everything we did. We had to change the way we managed the livestock for a constant supply of meat, and even planting and harvesting vegetables for the shop. For example, my father was also a fairly big broccoli grower and had acres of the vegetable, but for the shop, we did not need acres of vegetables at harvest time, we

The Pollock family’s relationship with their local customers has been strengthened through the pandemic

needed 30 heads of broccoli ready every day and that’s the same for the cattle, so it was not an easy switch.”

Not everything that is grown on the farm is destined for the shop as the Pollocks still grow cereals, such as spring and winter barley, spring and winter oilseed rape, winter wheat and some spring beans, as well as cast cows that go to market.

“Looking back on the experience, we were such innocents and did not know anything about retail; we were just farmers, but I think that worked to our advantage as we took one step at a time and used our profits to fund expansion. At the beginning, we just grew as, and when, we could afford it but when people asked us if we could get other products that’s how we really expanded our retail offering. I think that was very important: we were not putting stuff in the shop that we thought



We used to sell our livestock to market once a year but when we opened the shop, we had to rethink everything we did”



customers would want, we were getting products that they said they wanted. All these years on, we do feel we know a little bit more about retailing but we are still learning.”

The shop has also expanded to cater for the Pollock family's own interests, such as honey from the 10 hives they tend, a wide selection of seasonal vegetables that are grown on the farm as well as a range of home-made products, from jams and pickles to pies and pastries that have been developed in Claire's mother's farmhouse kitchen. The shop supports other farms and small-scale producers selling pâté, yoghurt, wine and gin and, such has been the expansion in this part of the business, that the farm shop now employs between 20-25 local people.

However, it is the quality of the meat that continues to draw the customers back and this interaction with people is one of the aspects of operating the farm shop that the family loves.

Claire said: “What my dad really appreciated was the feedback from customers about his produce. It takes two to three years to produce a quality animal and if you send it to market all you get is a cheque, but by selling to the public you get to hear directly how good it is, and we love hearing the reactions from our customers; it's very rewarding.”

However, they sometimes have some demanding customers who can come in with some unusual requests if they are looking to replicate a meal that celebrity chefs have made on TV.



Claire said: “If a TV chef has used an unusual cut of meat in one of their recipes, we often get our regulars requesting the same piece a couple of days later, and we are happy to oblige. The other day we had a request for suet – the hard fat around the kidneys – that we were able to get for them.”

The farm's produce has also attracted the attention of celebrity chef Gordon Ramsay who, during his *Road Trip* TV series with Gino D'Acampo and Fred Sirieix, visited Ardress Farm and declared it “the best in the country”.

In addition to interesting cuts of meat, customers are also interested in animal welfare, how the animals are raised on the farm and initiatives like Pasture for Life.

Claire said: “One of the reasons for opening the shop was that myself and my sister Nikki, who has children, were really concerned

Claire is the fourth generation of her family to farm at Ardress

about the food we were eating and wanted to sell the freshest and best quality food possible. For example, all the vegetables sold in the shop are harvested that morning from our fields.

“Welfare is also a huge concern for people, and it is important to promote and demonstrate that you have high welfare standards on the farm, which, in general, Scottish Beef does but we as farmers need to better convey that to consumers. Our philosophy is that we are open and transparent about what we do on the farm and are happy to show people how we operate and how we look after our animals. In fact, we have tours around the farm that people can go on to understand more about farming.”

“

It takes two to three years to produce a quality animal and if you send it to market all you get is a cheque, but by selling to the public you get to hear directly how good it is”



Claire believes it's not just the welfare of the cattle that's important but also the people working on the farm and their connection to the local community. "We've got people here who have worked with our family for a very long time, such as Jim Roberson, who started working with us when my dad was 14, and his son Scott is now our foreman, and even his son Mark has joined us. I think that kind of connection with those people and our customers is really important so people know who is looking after our livestock and can follow their work through our social media."

Covid also helped the farm connect closer with the local community as it was able to still provide fresh seasonal produce when other retailers suffered from stretched supply lines; the Pollock family's supply lines are literally on their own doorstep.

Claire said: "When Covid hit, we didn't know how it was going to affect us at all. We even debated right at the beginning whether perhaps we should close the shop for a small time. However, after several panicked phone calls from our loyal customers wondering how and where they were going to get food from, we decided that we had to stay open. It was, at this point, that we worried that we were going to be too quiet to make it worthwhile staying open, so decided really to push our nationwide deliveries and deliveries in the local area.

"We were completely wrong about being too quiet and in the end decided we had approached the whole situation completely wrong. We were sending our produce to London, Bristol, Edinburgh and many other places but local people in our community were missing out. At this point, we decided to stop deliveries that weren't in our own area, and we did these deliveries

“
We have tours around the farm so people can understand more”

seven days a week to ensure no one was without food.

"To the staff, the shop seemed hugely busy; we were naive at realising how much work a customer does for us when they come into shop, pick their own products and take them to the till.

Our figures during the pandemic seemed to stay fairly even but we had the added cost of delivery drivers, petrol and additional staff. However, we, thanks to our amazing team and fantastic local support, managed to stay open and working throughout the pandemic, so we really do need to appreciate how lucky we have been."

Claire would encourage farmers to look at diversification, but only when they have something special to offer: "You really need to see what other people are doing in your local area. When we started all those years ago, no one had farm shops as it was quite unusual, so we were lucky that there was a gap in the market. But so many farmers around us have also diversified into really cool things such as the 'cheese farm', a farm making their own cheese and another farm that specialises in ice cream, and we are happy to promote them by stocking their products in the shop. Our aim is to be the link between local producers and local people.




All the vegetables sold in the farm shop have been harvested the same morning

"So, the strategy is to find a gap in the market and make sure your product is slightly different from anyone else's. I think that there is space for everyone if everyone does something slightly different or aims for a different market, it is just finding it that's the hard part.

"And always question what you are doing. I trained as an accountant, so I had very little detailed knowledge about farming when I joined the family business, but I learnt quickly just by always questioning why we did things in a particular way. If there was a perfectly good reason then we continued, but if it wasn't clear then we would look at it in more detail.

"Luckily, my father was open-minded enough to allow me to do that and it helped us to think about doing things slightly differently.

"There are still things in my system of farming that I don't think I do particularly well right now, but I want to get better at it, and that's what is important about farming – to keep on looking at what you are doing and be open-minded about where progress can be made." 



CASE STUDY

“We worked flat out to deliver to our local customers”

How grass, wool and brassicas helped Michael Shannon meet demands with his farm shop and online butcher business

Michael Shannon sees himself as much as a grass farmer as a cattle farmer, and that is what he believes is behind the success of his Damn Delicious farm shop and online butcher business; his customers love the taste of cattle that are free to roam outside all year round and graze only on fresh natural foods.

His belief in the importance of high-quality pasture for meat production comes from his former experience as a seed specialist, and it was during a visit to New Zealand to look at cattle-farming practices that convinced him to change career.

Michael explained: “They were using deep-rooting brassicas to graze in situ, and as pioneer crops to break down pasture with a view to reseeding it in the next season. I saw this as an economical way to over-winter cattle and to also improve the quality of the pasture, so I decided to go into cattle farming full time.”

Michael has been raising Aberdeen Angus with some Shorthorns and Luing, together with Texel sheep, at Thankerton Camp Farm near Biggar, since 1996 and has always regarded the quality of the grass as the main

driver behind both the high-quality of his product and as a unique way to promote the sustainability of his farming methods to customers.

He runs the farm on a seven-year grass rotation system. The pasture that will be reseeded in the following year is treated with Roundup early in the preceding summer and then later cut for silage. He aims to provide 180 wrapped bales along the edges of the field and then plants a range of brassicas, such as Maris Kestrel kale, swede, and swift hybrid brassica, with minimal tilling. Once they have grown in late autumn, cattle are moved onto the field but confined to a single strip of land each day by an electric fence where they can graze the brassicas and feed from the individual silage bales through a moveable ring feeder. The next day they are moved on to another strip of land so that over the winter they feed across the whole field without impacting the soil structure.

After the winter, the pasture, whose soil structure has been improved by the deep rooting

“

There were six of us working from dawn to dusk to help meet the demand”

Damn Delicious experienced a massive surge of business during lockdown

brassicas and manure from the cattle, is seeded with grass, clover, and cereals; the latter planted as a nurse crop for the grass. As a result, Damn Delicious can claim that their meat is 100 per cent grass-fed.

The quality of the grass also determines the cattle count on the farm, as Michael explains: “Our level of livestock follows the grass curve. We run around 200 cattle through the winter and then buy in one-year-old store cattle in the spring as the grass starts to develop, building up to a maximum level of 270-300 animals in early July when grass growth is at its peak and our cattle have put on enough weight.

“It’s probably the reverse of most farms who let their animals feed during the summer then get really technical about what they can feed and fatten them on in the run-up to winter. I’m focused on the quality of the pasture, and I want them fattened on the grass; winter for us is just about a maintenance diet.”





“
All our deliveries are made
in wool-lined cardboard
containers that are
compostable rather than
just recyclable”

was unable to buy the property he decided to move the operation back to the farm where it continues to flourish. He now employs three butchers, who also make the sausages, pies, and pastries.

The online business also developed, with a courier network able to deliver fresh meat to anywhere in the UK overnight, and it was this part of the business that came into its own when the Covid lockdowns struck.

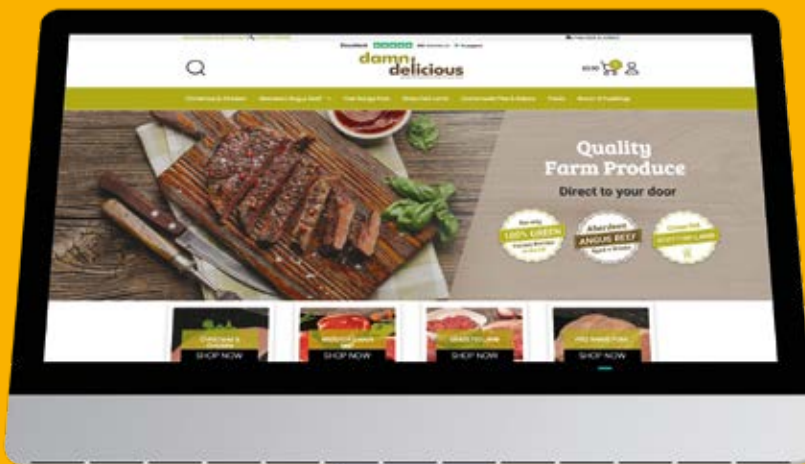
Michael said: “Covid hit us like a freight train, but we were in a better place than most to cope with the onslaught that happened when supermarkets started to run out of products. When the lockdown happened, we worked flat out to deliver to our local customers by van and courier to further afield.

The butcher's courier network is able to deliver fresh meat to anywhere in the UK overnight

Once he was satisfied with the quality of the pasture, Michael looked at how he could add value to his product and decided to set up Damn Delicious as an online business – the name inspired by what people told him about the taste of his product – with the website designed by Edinburgh designers Marketspan.

He said: “We launched the website on St Patrick’s Day in 2007, but I don’t think the world was ready for the online marketing of meat, so it never really took off. However, an opportunity came along in 2009 to buy an existing butcher’s shop in Lanark High Street and we decided to go full time into the business.”

It traded well but when the lease came up in 2014 and he



There were six of us, including my two teenage daughters, working from dawn to dusk to help meet the demand. I think it really showed people how fragile the food supply industry is in this country and realise that local butchers like us have always been here as part of the community and that we are willing to go the extra mile for our customers. I think they started to appreciate us a bit more.

“We had a massive surge of business during lockdown and won lots of new customers and our sales have remained above pre-Covid levels. Our customers appreciate the great quality of our products and the sustainable way we run the farm with animal welfare at the forefront. We’ve enhanced this sustainable ethos by no longer using single-use plastic containers, as all our deliveries are made in wool-lined cardboard containers which are compostable rather than just recyclable.”

Michael’s advice for farmers thinking about diversification is not to spend money until you know exactly what you want to do, and then commit yourself. He says: “It takes a lot of hard work, but you have to make sure you talk to your customers to find out what they want and don’t be afraid to adapt and change. I started by getting a butcher to cut the meat and package it for me to test the waters and now that’s what I do for other farmers, so it’s important to seek help and advice and test the market before you take the plunge.”

The McGowans admit they are a pair of ‘anoraks’ when it comes to the genetics of their grass-fed sheep and cattle, but this keen interest in improving the functional characteristics of their livestock has helped their business thrive over the past 20 years.

Such is the demand for their animals from other livestock breeders that they hold their own ‘Working Genes’ auctions at the 500ha Incheoch farm they work near Blairgowrie, Perthshire. Here they raise around 1,000 Lleyn and Texel breeding ewes and rams, 220 suckler cows – mainly Luining and Simmental cattle with some Aberdeen Angus – plus a number of Luining bulls.

When the McGowans were planning their 13th Working Genes auction last year it looked like the Covid lockdown would scupper their plans, but the bidding went ahead thanks to a new online auction system developed by a cattle farmer in New Zealand.

“In the end, our sale was only marginally affected by Covid because we got around the problem of not having anyone on-farm by using Yourbid, developed by an Angus breeder we knew in New Zealand,” said Neil.

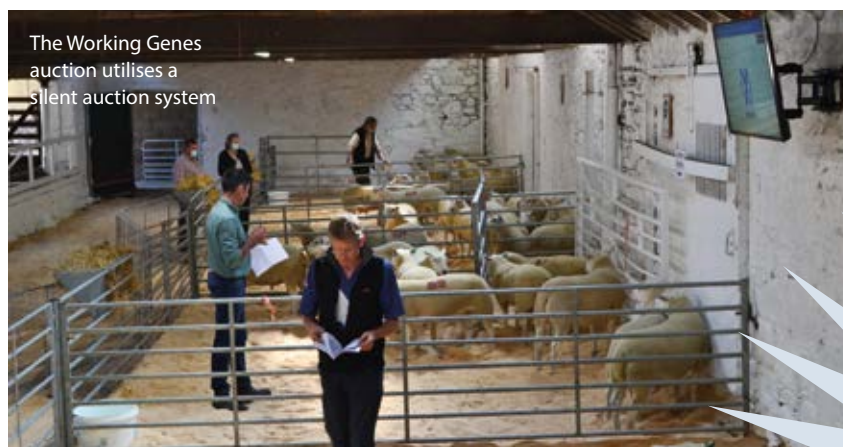
“My father had actually worked for his grandfather back in the 1960s and we were one of the first to use the system in the UK. This year, we decided to use Yourbid again as people told us they liked using the system.”

Yourbid is a ‘silent auction’ system where people can bid for lots on mobile phones. Details and videos of the stock are put on the catalogue section of the website for people to view what is on offer beforehand,

CASE STUDY

“Our customers have the confidence to bid remotely on our stock”

Neil and Debbie McGowan have adopted an online auction system to market direct to fellow breeders



rather than turning up on the day with limited time to assess what they want to bid for. It also allows people to bid on stock in the order of their preference, rather than the traditional catalogue order at an auction where it is possible to miss out on a bid after it has been completed.

Neil says: “We were very impressed with the system. The bidding closure took less time than an auction, and people found the ability to go back to bid again on a previous lot a great bonus if their favoured lot went out of reach. The point of the Working Genes sale is to give everyone first pick of our stock. We have values in mind, and so long as the price level is in range of that, it’s up to our customers to sort out who gets what.”

In 2020, they sold all 104 rams, and 18 bulls and 2021’s sale was also a success with all 98 rams and six Simmental bulls sold, with half the bids made in person at the farm and the other half online.

Neil said, “It’s great that our customers have the confidence to bid remotely on our stock from the information and videos we post on the Yourbid website, but there’s

“

We are a small family farm so we need stock suited to our own way of farming and that means we’re trying to constantly look at the strengths and weaknesses in our own herds and flocks”



nothing like being here on the farm, enjoying the social side of the auction and seeing the animals with your own eyes."

The McGowans take pride in their stockmanship and are rigorous in the selection of the animals in order to breed the best functional characteristics that fit with the needs of their farming system: for sheep, its maternal ability (particularly at lambing time), ewe efficiency and ease of lambing; and for cattle it's fertility, easy-calving,



good temperament and structural soundness.

Neil adds: "We really try to understand what's going on in the breeding situation, particularly in the female lines of our flock and herd. This is partly on the basis of getting good commercial returns – getting the genetics right – but also partly because it's just a bit of an obsession that we have.

"We are a small family farm so we need stock suited to our own way of farming and that means we're trying to constantly look at the

strengths and weaknesses in our own herds and flocks and finding ways to improve that, whether we can improve that from within our own stock or find it elsewhere."

The McGowans are looking to bring cattle genes in from Canada, as well as looking at herds in other parts of the world to help with the maternal lines of their sheep breeds. They are also involved in a study group with the Performance Recorded Lleyn Breeders to share genes to breed for parasitic worm resistance; Neil has taken more than 1,300 individual stool samples from lambs under a worm challenge to develop Faecal Egg Count Estimated Breeding Values for Lleyn and Texels. He has also organised annual CT scans of 15 Texel ram lambs for the past 10 years to help enhance selection for carcase quality.

This progressive approach and dedication to providing superior breeding livestock has won the McGowans the *Farmers Weekly* 2021 Sheep Farmer of the Year award and Best Farm Business at the RHASS and Scottish Countryside Alliance-supported Rural Awards.

Neil added: "We've been successful because of our rigorous breeding system and the direction that we're trying to take the herd and the flock.

"We're finding that many other farmers want to take their livestock in a similar direction and that's why they come to the Working Genes farm sales. The sales help us to build this close relationship we have with our repeat customers because if they buy an animal that does not perform well for them, then they won't be coming up the farm road the next year; it certainly helps to keep us focused!" 🐏

Neil and Debbie McGowan take great pride in their stockmanship

With the emotional wellbeing of animals high on the agenda for consumers, Waitrose is setting the early pace by trialling an app designed to help link animal welfare with emotional wellbeing.

The ground-breaking app, the first of its kind, records how animals express their emotions through behaviour such as being relaxed, tense, playful or anxious. As part of the pilot scheme, the app will be used by trained welfare assessors visiting 1,800 farms.

The benefit is three-fold. The first centres around the animal, as James Bailey, executive director at Waitrose, says: "It's critical that we recognise farm animals as sentient creatures capable of experiencing a range of emotions and positive experiences." Acknowledging animals leads to the second win – a new and more confident era of farm animal welfare. The third, of course, is around yield. Overall, UK meat labelled as higher welfare is almost twice as expensive per kilo than regular products (Kantar, w/e 16 May 2021).

Moving on App

Breaking new ground just at the right time has resulted in the app, which is still in development, benefitting from a two-year exclusivity deal with Waitrose as well as being featured on BBC1's *Countryfile*. Not surprisingly, interest has been piqued.

"There's a lot of interest from across the world," says Professor Françoise Wemelsfelder, senior researcher, Animal and Veterinary Sciences at Scotland's Rural College (SRUC), where the app was developed. "But what we really want to do is help improve animal

PUTTING SCOTLAND ON THE APP

Apps are simplifying farming, but **Mark Alexander** discovers the latest, focused on animal health, embodies the transition to a more transparent approach for the livestock sector

CASE STUDY

Qualitative Behavioural Assessment (aka the wellbeing app)

Created by Scotland's Rural College for Waitrose

welfare and support the Scottish Government's purpose of having high animal welfare standards."

She continues: "It's one of the first, if not *the* first [project] to roll out a system for monitoring emotional wellbeing in this way. It is certainly one of the first projects to have a sentient-based approach to welfare. And yes, I'm sure Waitrose is hoping that it will appeal to its customer base, which I'm sure it will."

Emotive issue

The app works by observing animals and assigning scores to associated assessment terms created for each species. The terms

have a corresponding sliding scale from negative to positive which allows assessors to record the state of the animal. The data is submitted and assimilated with results from other farms with this wider pool providing a benchmark from which to assess quality of life.

The Waitrose trial focuses on six supply chains: dairy cows, veal calves, pigs, laying hens, chickens, and ducks, but the applications could go much further, especially when the trial concludes in October 2022.

"In essence, it then becomes possible for other agricultural livestock businesses to use the app. Now, the exclusivity arrangement



only relates to agricultural businesses, so a zoo could start using the app,” Wemelsfelder explains. “The reason that isn’t happening is we’re not ready. The app isn’t ready. Organisations couldn’t really start using the app now, but they will after October when we hope to have a licensing website ready.”

Professional tool

From animal charities and global brands to farming co-operatives and even pet owners, the relevance of the app is clear. “Global platforms and large brands have shown interest,” says Wemelsfelder. “It doesn’t mean they’ll jump in immediately because, at the moment, it’s still a unique tool for emotional wellbeing, but they know that’s where things are going.”

The timeliness of the app might tempt some to capitalise on the stigma attached to industrialised farming. Likewise, the lure of working with big brands or the mass-market dividend of providing the public with a way of engaging with their pets could be enticing, but Wemelsfelder insists this is first and foremost a professional tool to assist animal welfare.

“I also get a lot of interest from smaller charities and animal

What Waitrose says:

James Bailey, executive director at Waitrose, said: “In some countries, farm animals continue to be looked upon as food production systems that need to be managed. This is wrong and for the UK to continue its position as a leader in farming standards, it’s critical that we recognise farm animals as sentient creatures capable of experiencing a range of emotions and positive experiences. By acknowledging this, working hard to understand what those positive emotional expressions are and how they can be unlocked, we can lead the industry into a new and more confident era of farm animal welfare.”

protection organisations,” she continues. “So, we will have a range of licensing options depending on the number of users an organisation has and the number of projects it wants to create. We don’t want to make it an expensive, exclusive tool.”

Best behaviour

The app is based on a methodology Wemelsfelder calls Qualitative Behavioural Assessment (QBA). In layman’s terms, it’s a proven method for assessing animal wellbeing through observing body language. Wemelsfelder calls it “common sense”, but it’s taken 20 years to perfect and relied on input and support from SRUC’s Orchard Innovation, the digital consultancy Medayo and quantitative know-how of Biomathematics and Statistics Scotland (BioSS).

Despite the complexities, a huge leap of faith isn’t required to acknowledge the potential uses of the app in agriculture, with livestock practitioners being the obvious beneficiaries. Even in its current form, the app has a dedicated layer for individual farmers who form part of a wider collective but want to be more proactive.

“Individual farmers who find they may have some problems can start changing things and experimenting by doing more frequent assessments, maybe weekly or

monthly,” says Wemelsfelder. “They don’t have to wait until their next inspection. They can start on their own, although this currently only works if they are part of a Waitrose pool or something similar.”

Next steps

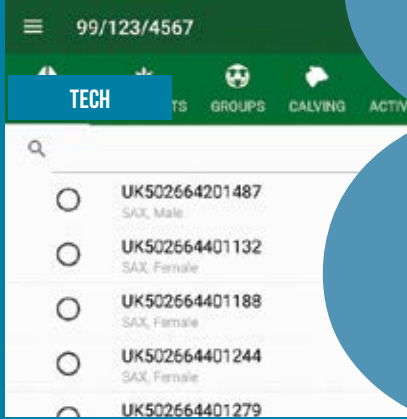
The Waitrose trial has been instrumental in progressing QBA into an intuitive tool. The next step will be to develop the functionality of the app to coincide with the launch of the licensing website next year. Beyond that, extending the reach of the app to individuals seems likely.

“For benchmarking, you need a pool of users within which to analyse data,” says Wemelsfelder. “The next stage of development will be to develop a ready-to-go version with a template of fixed terms. [In the future] if an individual wants to use it, we will have background data sets they can download against which they can measure themselves.”

For Wemelsfelder, the QBA app is the sharp end of a career dedicated to animal welfare. For the rest of us, it represents the colliding worlds of technology innovation and sentient acknowledgement which are shifting norms at breakneck speed. Considering what’s at stake, perhaps it’s time to get on board.

“We’ve had this chance with Waitrose to explore, develop and stabilise what we’re doing because you can do 20 years of research, but it still doesn’t prepare you for the reality of rolling it out on a farm,” Wemelsfelder concludes. “So, we have until next year and then after that, it’s going to get exciting. I really hope people will be creative. It’s about this new approach and finding out if people want to take it up and develop it.”





POCKET PALS

These apps, all developed in Scotland, are revolutionising on-farm practices

01 Sheep & Suckler Cow Animal Health Planning System (SAHPS)

Best for: Cattle and sheep farmers
What is it? Funded by The Scottish Government and created by SRUC, this allows farmers to record data on their phones anywhere on the farm. Data is then automatically collated into the SAHPS health plan once access to WiFi is restored. The app creates the e-medicine book, integrates with BCMS, doesn't require an internet connection and can also be a useful standalone tool.
Key features: Health and production data is easily accessed 24/7 by both farmer and vet, updated and reviewed by both parties to create a live and dynamic health plan; provides benchmarking and can highlight farm priorities; can be used to plan and track farm health activities throughout the year.
Cost: Free for SAHPS members, farmers, and vets in Scotland.
Get it at: www.sahps.co.uk

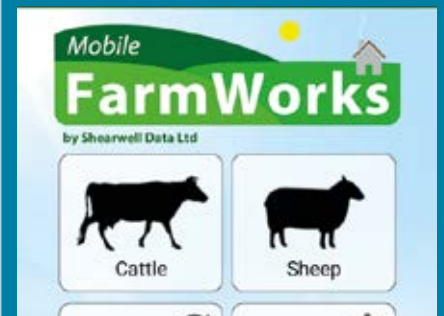


02 iLivestock

Best for: Cattle and sheep farmers
What is it? Made in Rosyth, this app is used by more than 5,000 farmers around the world. It simplifies farm compliance and record-keeping, Key features: Works online or offline and with multiple EID readers, weight indicators and load bars to allow data capture to fit seamlessly into farming routines.
Cost: Free
Get it at: apps.apple.com or play.google.com

03 FarmWorks

Best for: Cattle and sheep farmers
What is it? SRUC-backed app which



allows statutory and management information to be recorded and synchronised with the Livestock Record Program. Includes full management recording capability to include veterinary records, weights and body condition score, breeding and financial inputs. Can also help prepare reports for Scottish Suckler Beef Support Scheme claims. The Sheep package mirrors the cattle section. The programme allows recordings of births, deaths, and veterinary information.
Key features: Can produce a range of statutory, management and performance reports; compatible with EID handheld readers and mobile app.
Cost: £30. A range of packages cost from £350 +VAT.
Get it at: play.google.com

04 The FAS Companion

Best for: Cattle and sheep farmers
What is it? Designed by Scotland's Farm Advisory Service to give farmers easy access to information and quick calculations.
Key features: Access to technical notes; lime equivalent and forage budget calculators; unit and measure converters; diary which captures photos and geo-location
Cost: Free **Get it at:** apps.apple.com or play.google.com



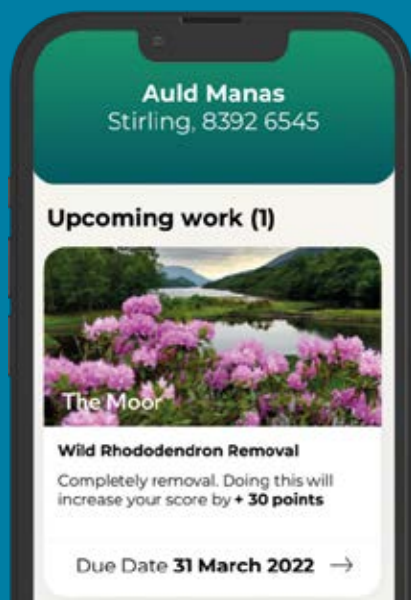
05 Natural Capital DIGITAL (Iceni)

Best for: All land managers
What is it? An established NatureScot-led project called Piloting an Outcomes-Based Approach in Scotland is working with 70 farmers and crofters in five clusters across Scotland to engage with a range of farm types (Skye, Argyll, Strathspey, East Lothian and Dumfriesshire) to test innovative approaches to delivering environmental outcomes on farms and crofts in Scotland. It is being run by Scottish Natural Heritage for four years to 2023 and is testing a results-based approach to agricultural payments that will help shape the new agricultural support system being developed by the Scottish Government for the post-2024 period. The project is also developing a farmer-friendly app to enable farmers to better manage natural environments.

Key features: Aims to empower farmers to respond to the dual crises of climate change and biodiversity loss; offers actionable data and advice; ensures actions are aligned to wider environmental monitoring; see results from assessments and how land is changing over time.

Cost: TBC

Get it at: Still in development – see www.iceni.earth



06 Soil Erosion Scotland

Best for: All land managers
What is it? Developed by the James Hutton Institute, this aims to provide farmers, land managers and the public with a quick, easy way to learn about soil erosion in Scotland and contribute their own records and images to improve current understanding.

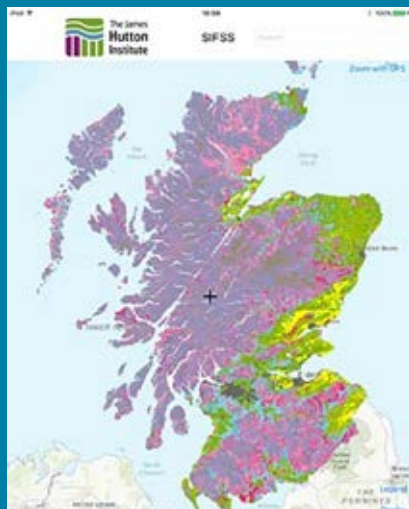


Key features: Helps users understand and identify different types of soil erosion; user-generated records and images can be added to a shared map of sites; by answering a few questions in the app,

users can help improve the understanding of where, when, and why erosion occurs and help find ways to reduce its harmful effects.

Cost: Free

Get it at: apps.apple.com or play.google.com



07 Soil Indicators for Scottish Soils (SIFSS)

Best for: All land managers

What is it? A tool developed by the James Hutton Institute to find out what soil type is in your area.

Key features: SIFSS accesses the Soil Survey of Scotland and users can explore the characteristics of around 600 different Scottish soils, discover the differences in characteristics of cultivated and uncultivated soils, and examine a range of key indicators of soil quality including pH, soil carbon, N, P, K etc.

Cost: Free

Get it at: apps.apple.com

08 Smart Farmer

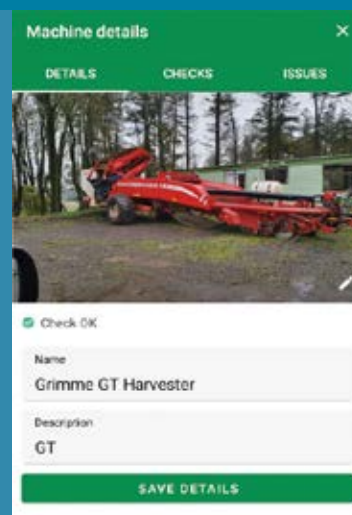
Best for: Farm machinery owners
What is it? One farm manager's practical solution to the industry requirement to carry out pre-start checks on farm machinery, designed by Scottish farmer Marc Skivington.

Launched in 2020, it won the Gold Award for Agri-Tech Innovator of the Year.

Key features: Pre-start checks; risk assessments and training; information is stored on cloud-based software; improves safety.

What does it cost? Free with a free seven-day trial after which a yearly subscription costs £495 + VAT.

Get it at: apps.apple.com or play.google.com



Q&A MAIRI GOUGEON

As Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Islands, Mairi Gougeon has a huge portfolio, but how is she championing the red meat sector?



Can you give us an overview of your remit in terms of the red meat sector?

In my role as Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Islands in Scotland, I am responsible for everything from agriculture to animal welfare to all aspects of food and drink policy, including the supply chain. This means that I am in charge of overseeing every element of the red meat sector from farm to fork.

This involves working to support farmers and crofters to produce more of our own food needs sustainably and to farm and croft with nature. We have a strong track record of supporting Scotland's red meat industry. We campaigned for years for repatriation of the red meat levy, which was eventually implemented through the UK Government's Agricultural Act. That will generate about an additional £1.5 million in levy monies annually to promote our red meat sector.

Our vision for the future of rural Scotland is a positive one. We see our land managers and world-class producers thriving while backing our world-leading climate change agenda and our response to the biodiversity crisis. We know there are farmers and crofters who are already doing some fantastic work to help reach these goals. And while the pandemic means I've not been able to get out onto farms as much as I would like, I have visited a range of beef, sheep, and pig farms around the country, and have seen this first-hand. Our farmers and crofters do a great job, particularly to care for their animals and maintain high quality and the highest standards of animal welfare, as well as to care for the countryside and environment that they spend their lives with. In the future, my aim is for us to continue to work together to reach our climate and environmental targets.



KEY FACTS

Brechin-born Mairi Gougeon has served as Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Islands since May 2021. She has been the Member of the Scottish Parliament for Angus North and Mearns since 2016 and was appointed Minister for Rural Affairs and the Natural Environment in 2018, and Minister for Public Health and Sport in 2020. She also sat on the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee in 2016-2017.

What are your ambitions for the Good Food Nation Bill?

We have been working across government to deliver an extensive programme of measures to deliver on our ambition to be a Good Food Nation, where everyone takes pride and pleasure in, and benefits from, the food they produce, buy, cook, serve and eat each day. This Bill underpins these actions and practical measures in law and will help people from every walk of life to eat well by ensuring they

have access to good quality, locally sourced and produced food.

The Good Food Nation Bill places a duty on Scottish Ministers and certain public authorities to come up with plans that set out what the Scottish Government, local authorities and other public bodies are doing to give effect to people having a right to adequate food.

Partnership is key to delivering our Good Food Nation ambitions, particularly between national and local government.



➤ This bill provides an overarching framework for clear, consistent, and coherent future Scottish food policy.

What achievement are you particularly proud of in your tenure so far?

It's always hard to pick out just one thing, but I think turning ambition and recommendations into action to start the work of cutting emissions is key. I am so appreciative of the work of all the Farmer-Led Groups, for the time and energy they gave to their task and the diligence and thoughtfulness behind their conclusions and recommendations. I know some people want us to go further and faster, but I am determined to take farmers and crofters with us, and we now have a National Test Programme with initial measures that we will be encouraging people, especially in livestock, to take up. That starts this spring.

What are the biggest challenges for the Scottish red meat sector in a post-CAP, post-Brexit, post-pandemic era?

There are two key challenges. Trade is the first – we have [lost] barrier-free trade with our biggest and closest regional market, as well as now having to address the threat of the commitments negotiated by UK Ministers in trade deals with countries like, for example, Australia and New Zealand. We are acutely aware of the challenging trading environment currently confronting the meat sector in Scotland – which has not been helped by the UK Government's approach to trade deals. The UK Government's inept Brexit deal has meant Scottish exporters being

forced to cope with a mountain of complex, time-consuming and costly customs arrangements, often with a lack of clear guidance and support. Critical issues also remain around the Northern Ireland Protocol affecting the red meat trade with Northern Ireland.

I, along with my fellow Ministers, have raised our concerns with the UK Government and have consistently said that imports of agri-food must be produced to equivalent standards of production to those that domestic industry are required to meet. Where there are domestic sensitivities, such as in the red meat sector, there must be fair and sustainable tariff-rate quotas to control imports.

The second issue is a shortage of workers. How the UK Government has treated this issue is appalling – by contrast, the Scottish Government wants people from the EU to stay here, and to want to come to Scotland to live and work. That hasn't changed and we will keep doing what we can to get that message across and try and make it easier for people to choose to live in Scotland. We are acutely aware of the situation with regard to staff shortages due to both COVID and Brexit and have written to the UK Government pushing for changes in the UK migration policy.

Powers over immigration are reserved and without those powers, we are limited in what we can do. That said, we will do what we

can within the powers available to us. We are currently exploring three proposed models for a rural migration pilot scheme that will help us tackle population challenges in our rural communities. We will work with local businesses and local government to develop these proposals.

We also want to give more young people more opportunities to get 'green skills' as well as to work within the wide-ranging food and drink sector. For the long term, we've set up a land-based education review to consider what more we might need to do to enable young people to study relevant subjects and get the qualifications they need to work on the land. The group will produce a final recommendations report by the end of 2022.

But we are also working to try and do more to address issues in particular industries. For example, it's great that Quality Meat Scotland (QMS) is working with Skills Development Scotland on a project to encourage young people into careers in the butchery sector, with the aim of future-proofing the red meat industry by ensuring there is a pipeline of forthcoming employees with the right mix of skills and knowledge.

What did you learn from your many on-farm visits – did any red meat sector producers particularly stand out to you?

On every visit, I learn something new and different. Everyone stands out for different reasons! But I think one of the recurrent observations I have is just how much Scotland's farmers and crofters care for their animals, for their land, for the environment they rely on and how connected



We want to give young people opportunities to get 'green skills' as well as to work within the wide-ranging food and drink sector



they are to the land. I'm keen for us to do more to try and get that across – that is what contributes to the premium our quality assurance for beef, lamb and pork offers. And the more we get that across to consumers, through campaigns like QMS's 'Make It with Field Cred', the more we are able to persuade people to buy Scottish meat.

How will the food and drink industry's Net Zero Commitment support Scotland's food and drink businesses (red meat sector) on the net zero journey with planning and practical interventions to cater for their

Above from top clockwise: Helping launch the Rural Employers' Toolkit; with California Department of Food and Agriculture Secretary, Karen Ross at COP26; at the launch of the 12th Scottish Food and Drink Fortnight

specific challenges and needs?

Food and drink is one of the most important sectors in our economy and has an important role to play in helping us reach our climate change targets.

The sector is clearly aware of this and during COP26, the Scotland Food & Drink Partnership Net Zero Task Force, which includes QMS, launched a collective commitment to reach net-zero across the sector. This commitment set out a clear and ambitious route to meeting their targets.

The strategy includes a number of practical interventions including targeted support and learning events that will support the

businesses to work together to reach these goals.

We want the sector to have a sustainable future and would encourage them to make sure their businesses make use of the support that will be available to them to help them align with the aims of Net Zero Commitment.

What are your ambitions for the Agriculture Reform Implementation Oversight Board (ARIOB)?

I established the ARIOB in August to contribute to the Scottish Government's work to implement policy reform, incorporating the relevant





➤ recommendations of the farmer-led groups to cut emissions across agriculture, support the production of sustainable, high-quality food, and design a new support system and approach.

We have already announced the National Test Programme last October, this was the priority for the ARIOB. It will begin this spring, and over the next three years, the Scottish Government will invest up to £51 million in supporting farmers and crofters to start our journey towards becoming global leaders in sustainable and regenerative agriculture. It is based on and informed by the work and recommendations of the Farmer-Led Groups, particularly to ensure we are beginning to tackle the most

Above from top clockwise: At a COP26 event at the Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park; attending the Scottish Agritourism Conference; launching the Regional Food Tourism Ambassador programme; a virtual meeting with RSABI members

urgent needs and creating a base upon which to build a whole-farm low-carbon approach.

The Programme establishes a twin-track approach:

- In the first track, every farm in Scotland will be supported and encouraged to undertake baseline measures over the next few years that will start with a Carbon Audit or Nutrient Management Plan, including soil testing, for their individual farm business. Further options, such as Biodiversity assessments and Animal Health and Welfare plans are likely to be added to the programme as it develops.
- The second track will work with a focused group of farmers and crofters from across Scottish agriculture to design and test

how we will measure and reward sustainable farming practice in the future.

How important is it that the Board, co-chaired by you and Martin Kennedy, is gender-balanced?

I was determined to achieve this when we set up the board. It's incredibly important that ARIOB Members were appointed to provide the necessary breadth of expertise and knowledge across farming, geographical and environmental sectors to take this work forward. We want to give everyone an equal voice to help us drive forward a positive and sustainable future for Scottish agriculture. Ensuring that we are hearing from men and women,



The Food and Drink Academy is a unique training programme that helps Scottish food and drink businesses sell themselves, build their brands and sell more products in grocery and foodservice markets

of farmers from different sectors, different tenures and a range of experiences and ages is key to giving us the rounded view we need to shape future policy.

There are 50 actions/outline areas of focus for the Scotland Food & Drink Partnership Recovery plan – which are progressing well, and which need more work?

We know that there have been so many challenges caused by both COVID-19 and Brexit. We committed £10 million funding over 2020-2022 towards the food and drink sector's Recovery Plan, to support the 50 actions that will help businesses across Scotland with these challenges.

There has been great progress with a number of actions in the recovery plan that will be of benefit to the red meat sector. For example, a graduate placement in Scotmid is supporting Scottish suppliers to increase their listings and visibility across the Scotmid network. On top of this, a further two graduates have been recruited that were placed in Brakes and Morrisons and are going through an induction process.

The Food and Drink Academy is another of the main activities arising from the recovery plan and is a unique, market-focused and commercially orientated training programme that helps Scottish food and drink businesses (including seafood companies) – at every stage of their growth journey – sell themselves, build their brands and sell more products in grocery and foodservice markets. Marrying that with the Knowledge Bank – a transformational programme for the industry that will access data, research and intelligence from domestic and international markets and, for the first time, analyse, disseminate and support businesses to turn this insight into action for the benefit of Food and Drink businesses the Recovery Plan is making a real difference to our Food and Drink businesses as they navigate these challenging times.

There have also been a number of bespoke events delivered throughout the UK to showcase the red meat and other sectors to buyers and influencers.

It's also about a refocus on the environment and operating in an ever more sustainable way and in March 2021, Scotland Food & Drink and Zero Waste Scotland launched a climate change support and diagnostic tool kit, developed to help businesses take practical steps to reduce emissions, save costs and improve resilience.

A lot of work has been undertaken over the past year and the Scotland Food & Drink Partnership will be doing more this year to help communicate the progress that has been made with some of the Recovery Plan actions.

Reader question: What is the timeline for establishing a local slaughter service for Highlands and Islands?

We fully recognise the importance local slaughter provision can play in the red meat sector, with relatively good coverage for all areas in Scotland. However, we recognise that there will be some occasion where local need is not immediately served.

There are several reasons why this may be the case which will be based around limited throughput, costs, commercial pull of bigger processors and, on occasion, lack of local interest.

For abattoirs in Scotland to thrive, throughput is vital to ensure that plants are fit for purpose and have a viable future. Unfortunately, this is not the case with low local demand making long-term viability an ongoing issue.

This is why we commissioned a feasibility study to determine whether mobile abattoirs would be a viable option in Scotland. It was published last year and provides details of what would be required to operate mobile abattoirs in Scotland, including the regulatory framework, and offers a cost-benefit analysis of possible operational models. However, the report also highlights the difficulty in achieving a sustained economic return from a mobile abattoir in Scotland.

Any next steps would be for a commercial operator who wishes to take this forward. The Scottish Government, in conjunction with Food Standards Scotland, would, of course, be willing to discuss in more detail with any organisation who are considering operating either a new stationary, abattoir or indeed a mobile abattoir in Scotland.

We hope to open a further round of the Food Processing, Marketing and Cooperation grant scheme early in 2022 which will fund both capital and non-capital projects. Subject to specific eligibility rules, abattoirs will be able to apply for funding.



THE HARD CELL?

In 1931, Winston Churchill boldly predicted: “We shall escape the absurdity of growing a whole chicken in order to eat a breast or a wing by growing these parts separately.” In a year when Albert Einstein published his Theory of Relativity, Pluto had just been discovered and Amy Johnson flew from the UK to Oz, anything seemed possible.

Fast forward almost a century and competing labs in Singapore, Japan, Israel, the UK, and the US are racing to create red meat, fat, and sinew in a factory rather than a field. Now, one single animal cell can produce an unlimited amount of meat but how close is it to being on our shelves?

More than 70 companies around the world are currently focused on developing cultivated meat services or end products, with start-ups focused on everything from beef, chicken,

lamb, and pork, to shrimp, fish, foie gras and kangaroo.

Private investment in this sector has reached record highs and the figures are eye-watering. £265 million was injected into the market last year alone – a six-fold increase on 2019 – and it’s predicted that the sector will be worth £255 billion by 2028. That may seem skinny in comparison to the value of existing red meat consumption, which analysts predict will tip the scales at £1.5 trillion and retain 83 per cent of the market by then, but its rise and all of the hype around it could still affect the red meat sector’s income and influence. So, while the slaughter-free steak that makes it to a plate may seem a long way off, it’s essential that we keep a weathered eye on progress and resist any binary claims that cultured is ‘clean’ and traditional is ‘dirty’.

THE SPRINT TO THE SHELVES

For the past decade the world of cultivated meat has been hotting up, with companies not only working on the end product itself, but also on supporting technologies such as the proteins needed for cell growth, scaffolding for the cells to grow on, bioinks to build 3D structures such as steaks with, and the

4 STEPS TO STEAK

In vitro, clean, synthetic, or cultured, lab-grown meat is created in the same way...

1. Starter cells are extracted and isolated by taking a biopsy from an animal, generally without harming it.

2. The starter cells are grown in a bioreactor to produce a large quantity of biomass. When fed a growth medium of nutrients and proteins, the cells proliferate, doubling in number every few days.

3. Once there is a large enough quantity of proliferating cells, they are induced to differentiate into the mature cells that make up meat, e.g., adult muscle cells.

4. The resulting cell-based biomass can be turned into unstructured patties, used to create bio inks which can be fed into a bioprinter to produce muscles and fat, or used to culture three-dimensional meat.



With food futurists investing vast amounts of time, energy, and cash in cellular agriculture, should livestock farmers be worried?

COUNTDOWN TO CULTURED MEAT



1930

British politician Frederick Edwin Smith writes 'The World in 2030': "beefsteak... will be grown in suitable media in the laboratory. It will no longer be necessary to go to the extravagant length of rearing a bullock in order to eat its steak."

2013

Prof. Mark Post served up a cultivated meat hamburger in London (right), the event paid for by Google founder Sergey Brin.

2015

Scientific entrepreneurs, including Post and Minnesota cardiologist Uma Valeti, form cultivated meat companies.

2016

World's first cultured beef meatball created.

2018

Dr Madsen Pirie, president of UK Government think tank, The Adam Smith Institute, says switching to lab-grown meat could change the world.



2020

First cultured meat product sold at a restaurant in Singapore.

Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu (left) becomes the first head of state to taste cultivated meat.

First substantial public-sector research and development funding begins in the United States and the European Union.

March 2021

Researchers create a small sample of cultured meat that mimics real muscle rather than just mince.



September 2021

Mosa Meat announces investment from Hollywood star Leonardo DiCaprio (left), and New Age Meats raises \$25 million in Series A funding, a crucial milestone that will allow the US company to begin production by 2022.

2028

The global cultured meat market size is expected to reach US\$352.4 million.

2040

Cultivated meat market share predicted to be 35% by 2040 (source: AT Kearney, global consultancy).

35%
million
US\$352.4

> bioreactors to grow cells in. The race is on to win investment and market share in each area, and deliver the sirloin, bacon, chops, and chicken to retail... all without the need for a full animal to be grown.

The main players are peppered around the world. San Francisco-based Eat Just, founded in 2011, is now worth more than £2 billion. Its GOOD Meat division became the world's first company to sell meat made from animal cells and the company plans to open a large-scale cultivated meat plant in Qatar in a couple of years, giving it access to Europe and the Middle East. However, investment may have peaked as, generally, the share prices of cellular agriculture business seem to have plateaued or are in decline.

Netherlands-based Mosa Meat, a spin-off from Maastricht University, created the very first lab-grown burger back in 2013. Their aim is to bring 'the world's kindest beef burger' to consumers and hamburgers and meatballs made

from cultured Limburg meat are expected to be on shelves from 2023. Leonardo DiCaprio just signed up as an investor and advisor.

In December 2021, Israeli-based MeaTech brought 'whole cut' products a step closer to the consumer, making headlines for producing the world's largest lab-grown steak. Their process, using bovine stem cells in bio-inks in a 3D

“
In December 2021, MeaTech brought 'whole cut' products a step closer to the consumer”

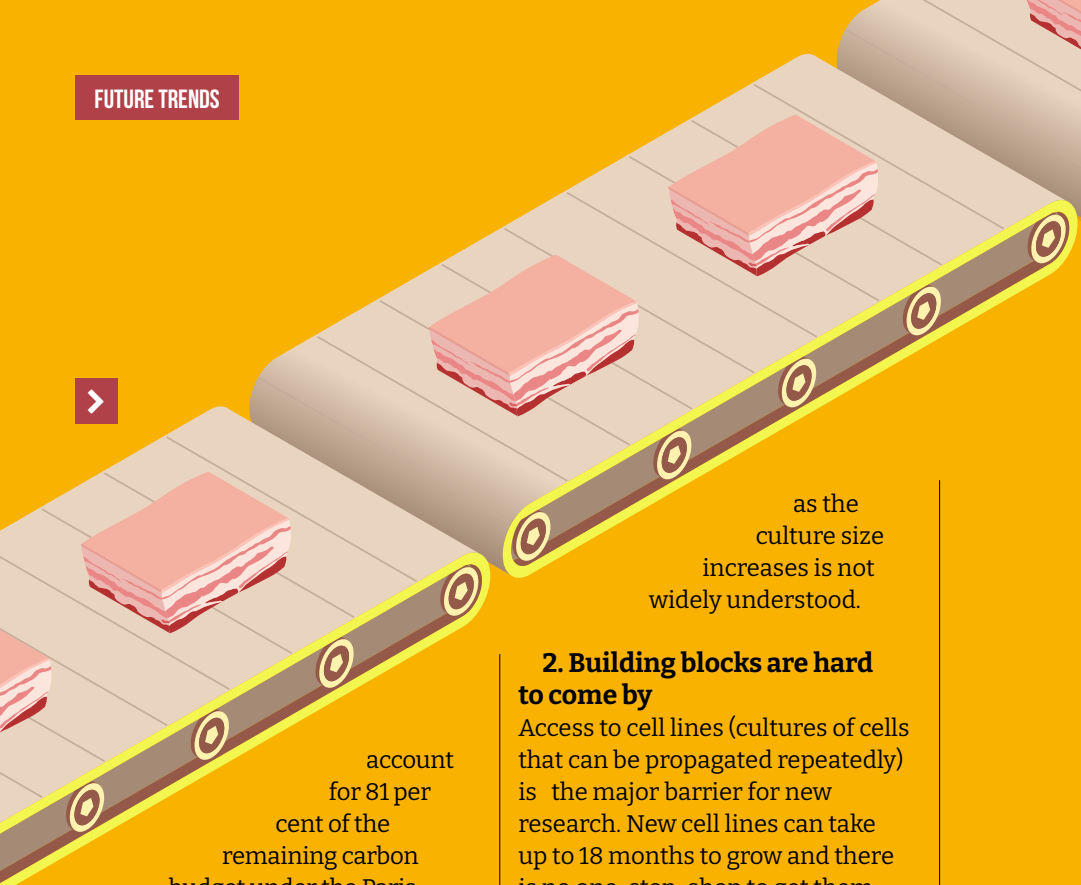
printer to create a 110g steak, is now widespread say insiders. However, scaling up the production and driving down the cost of manufacture means that selling these printed meats for the same cost as traditional meat is a way off.

THE WORLD VIEW

Right now, meat is king. Globally, 30 per cent of the calories consumed by humans come from meat products grown using 77 per cent of habitable land on Earth. By the middle of this century, the United Nations predicts there will be 9.7 billion people on our planet and, as the socioeconomic status of residents in developing countries continues to increase, the global demand for meat will double. It's a predictable path as America, one of the world's richest countries, consumed a record 102kg of red meat and poultry per head in 2020.

However, the UN has warned of a "code red for humanity" if environmentally destructive practices such as razing forests continues apace, and animal agriculture is projected to





account for 81 per cent of the remaining carbon budget under the Paris Agreement by 2050 if current rates of production continue. The UK Committee on Climate Change has called for a 20 per cent reduction in consumption of beef, lamb, and dairy by then, and while no recommendations around production arose from COP26, meat was in sharp focus again.

The collective response? A simplistic three-word slogan: Eat Less Meat.

All of this gives wings to the anti-meat lobby, however, the path to the plate is a complicated one for the cultivated meat producers, and the industry must jump five significant hurdles before the red meat sector needs to really worry about consumers putting cultivated meat in their baskets.

1. More research is needed

Different types of stem cells taken from muscles or specific organs can create other products – cells from mammary glands for milk production, or cells from livers for foie gras – but how cells and change

as the culture size increases is not widely understood.

2. Building blocks are hard to come by

Access to cell lines (cultures of cells that can be propagated repeatedly) is the major barrier for new research. New cell lines can take up to 18 months to grow and there is no one-stop-shop to get them from. Instead, private companies are keeping their discoveries to themselves, or, like Cell Farm Food Tech, which provides a high-quality starter material from “champion” Argentine Hereford and Angus beef, sharing their creations for profit. The fear is that this is slowing down innovation.

BELOW
CC-BY_Higher Steaks_Bacon and pancakes_2_credit Higher Steaks and Tailored Brands

3. The process is not completely slaughter-free

Many companies still rely on foetal bovine serum (FBS), a protein-rich and nutritious mixture that cells grow in, is generally derived from animal slaughter and that is incompatible with scaled-up production. However, in January MosaMeats announced they had achieved muscle differentiation without the use of FBS and are now sharing their findings across the industry.

4. Regulation will need to change

Singapore was the first country to approve a cultivated meat product for sale, but many other countries are working on developing their own standards and a variety of regulatory hurdles are still to be overcome. In England and Wales, fat with no meat is not classed as meat, so will a veggie burger with cultivated chicken fat need to be labelled as containing meat?





Fat: where it's at

With a third of consumers of veggie burgers and plant-based meat substitutes being not vegetarian, but flexitarian, advances in fat production may prove to be a more readily achievable threat to the red meat sector. Fat imparts flavour to plant-based foods and delivers the signature aromas and textures of conventional meat

Chicken and duck fat is now

being grown at increasing scale. In 2021, Mosa Meat said its fat medium now costs 1.52 per cent of what it did two years ago, while MeaTech's Belgian subsidiary, Peace of Meat, cultivated just over 700 grams of pure chicken fat biomass in a single production run, in what is believed to be the first biomass 3D printing demo of its kind.

5. The cost is huge

The world's first cultured burger, developed at Maastricht University in 2013, reportedly cost more than £217,000 to produce. In 2019, Eat JUST's chicken nuggets cost about £36 – each.

6. It ain't meat!

Lab cultured meat just isn't as appealing as grass-fed livestock.

NO MEAT ON THE BONES?

Upscaling production will be self-limiting, say detractors. "For 10 percent of the world's meat supply to be cultured meat by 2030, 4,000 factories will be needed, more than one mega-facility would need to be built per day," wrote Neil Dullaghan, of US think tank Rethink Priorities. His article, 'Cultured meat: A comparison of techno-economic analyses highlights that while Eat Just's operation in Singapore

produces hundreds of pounds of meat per year in a 1,200-litre reactor, to make the company's goal of creating 10 million pounds, or 4,500 tonnes, feasible, owner Tetrack said production will need to take place in 100-cubic meter bioreactors. These would hold 100,000 litres and could easily be 20 feet high, and Tetrack says he will need 15 of them.

He also points out that "a sequence of as-yet-unforeseen breakthroughs will still be necessary". Cells will have to be trained to behave in novel ways, safe




Almost a century later, not everything is quite as simple as Winston Churchill hoped"

new nutrient supply chains will need to be built and germs "will have to more or less behave". Critics also argue that, if powered by fossil fuels, huge processing plants could have a greater environmental impact than traditional meat.

Just as the red meat sector is working to ensure the highest standards, best product and most unforgettable taste reaches consumers' plates, this developing industry is worth watching with interest. We can marvel at its techniques and ingenuity, and sometimes scratch our heads at its attempt to take on Mother Nature.

In March 2021, a team at the University of Tokyo took bovine muscle cells and grew them in the form of muscle sheets which are stacked on top of each other to make thicker muscle tissue with 3D structures. The result? After four whole weeks they had managed to create only a 1cm cube of steak.

So what of Churchill's prediction of a brave new world of meat production when all seemed possible? It seems he was right, but it's not that close to being on our shelves. Almost a century later it is not quite as simple as he hoped. 

FURTHER READING

The Good Food Institute's report on cultivated meat
<https://gfi.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/COR-SOTIR-Cultivated-Meat-2021-0429.pdf>

Having positive conversations around COP26
https://www.qmscotland.co.uk/sites/default/files/cop26_toolkit_2.pdf

'Cultured meat: A comparison of techno-economic analyses' by Neil Dullaghan, Rethink Priorities
<https://rethinkpriorities.org/publications/cultured-meat-a-comparison-of-techno-economic-analyses>

À CUT ABOVE

Meet the young butchers at the sharp end of QMS' recruitment drive

WORDS
TIM POWER

“I get a buzz from putting my heart into my work, progressing up the ranks and my ultimate goal is to have my own shop and café.” It's great to hear the enthusiasm of young people starting out on their careers but many people outside the meat sector would be surprised to learn that Cameron Chisholm is an apprentice butcher with Hugh Black & Sons, and is thrilled with the prospects for his new chosen career.

At present, there are more than 750 vacancies in the butchery sector that have not been filled, mainly because young people are not entering the profession. That is why a new marketing campaign, developed and funded by Quality Meat Scotland (QMS) and Skills

Development Scotland, is tapping into the passion, experience and insights of young butchers like Cameron, to help promote the benefits and opportunities in butchery careers, either on the high street or within processing or catering sectors.

QMS research shows that the average age of a butcher in Scotland is 60 years old. Therefore, the industry needs to ensure there is a flow of young trainees coming down the pipeline to future-proof the red meat sector, amid a serious shortfall of skilled positions.

The 'Take a Real Look at Butchery' campaign was launched in early November during Scottish Careers Week to shine a spotlight on butchery as a chance for young

people to learn a craft and pick up skills that range from traditional to those using cutting-edge technologies. The campaign points out that a traditional butcher is a far more future-proof career option than most and a skilled butcher will always be in demand.

Around 25 per cent of current vacancies are apprenticeship opportunities in the retail, processing and catering sector and the campaign underlines the crucial business skills that the career provides, from the selection of products and product development to learning about the supply chain, recipe development, pricing, profitability and customer service.

The campaign has two target audiences: firstly, to raise



HUGH BLACK
Quality Butcher
Est. 1907

> awareness about potential careers among 14 to 18-year-olds at school and college, school leavers and people looking to change careers; and, secondly, to engage with parents, guardians, teachers, career influencers and employers who can help guide the next steps for young people. The campaign also provides advice and resources for employers to access government support to take on apprentices.

To inspire young people to consider a career in butchery and to find out more about the opportunities it provides, the campaign includes short videos of three young butchers who talk about their work, experiences and the benefits of a career in butchery.

In addition to a wide range of social media activity during November, the campaign is also supported by a new careers website – www.butcherycareers.co.uk – where potential candidates can learn about training opportunities, read and watch the real stories of young butchers' careers and explore job postings. It also provides information on apprentice funding for employers.

While there was a surge in the popularity of high street butchers during the Covid-19 lockdowns, QMS research

60

average age of a butcher
in Scotland

More than 750

vacancies are available
across the butchery sector

Ariane Bennett,
D.H. Robertson



highlighted a number of barriers to entering the profession faced by young people, including the perception that the butchery sector is old fashioned, low skilled and predominantly a male-orientated industry.

Women represent 14 per cent of current apprentices in the retail butchery sector, so the campaign will work to remove outdated perceptions and showcase the diverse and accessible range of technical and business skills to be learned through the trade.

Ariane Bennett, a butcher with D. H. Robertson in Arbroath, is one of the female butchers featured in the campaign videos and she talks about her pride in her work.

She says: "My apprenticeship has not only helped develop my skills but increased my confidence too – being the only female butcher in the shop has not held me back! Being able to produce good food for the local community is something I take a huge amount of pride in."

Commenting on the new campaign, Gordon Newlands, brand development manager at QMS, says: "Butchery is one of the oldest crafts in the world with genuine heritage and traditions, but

25%

of vacancies are apprenticeship opportunities within the retail, processing and catering sector

14% of butchery apprentices are female (retail sector)

“

Being able to produce good food for the local community is something I take a huge amount of pride in”

we want to show that it can also provide an exciting, pioneering and highly skilled career for young people today. At a time when we are all conscious of skilled labour shortages, butchery presents a huge array of excellent career opportunities. This is a trade where innovation meets tradition to create an industry full of character and camaraderie that will play a critical role in our social and economic future.

“During the various lockdowns over the past 18 months, many of



Sean Cassidy,
Dunbia Highland
Meats

us have rediscovered the joys of visiting our local butcher to get high-quality meats. This project builds on this renewed interest to showcase the range of skills, knowledge and behaviours that can lead to rewarding careers in the butchery industry, not only in the UK but across the world.”

Gerry McBride, strategic relations manager at Skills Development Scotland, adds:



Ryan Briggs,
Briggsy's Butchers

“We strongly believe that butchery represents a field that is more than just a job, it is an innovative and evolving craft that can unlock a range of exciting careers.

“A modern apprenticeship in this field is a chance for young people to be trained by industry experts, gain a nationally recognised qualification and earn a real wage while they learn. Apprenticeships

also offer a unique opportunity for employers, enabling them to recruit from a fresh pipeline of young talent. There are dozens of roles to suit everyone – from processing and catering butchery to the retail butchers we see on high streets across the country – all of which provide opportunities for stimulating successful and long-term careers.” @

Beef and Sheep Farming Careers project

Quality Meat Scotland has also developed a campaign to promote apprenticeships to young people in the beef and sheep farming sector through a partnership with NFU Scotland (NFUS) and Borders College.

The Beef and Sheep Farming Careers project, which was launched in December 2021 will help to raise awareness of what is involved to both the apprentice and the employer and showcase the many benefits an apprenticeship can bring. Planned activity includes a series of case studies showcasing

personal experiences from both apprentices and employers, shareable infographics, links to existing resources to support employers and social media promotions.

This project will address many of the recommendations raised in the NFUS ‘Education and Skills in Farming and Crofting Report’ and will help ensure there is a pipeline of future employees coming through who have the relevant skills and knowledge required to farm in a dynamic, developing industry.

POO POWER

...not to be sniffed at

A pioneering project that turns cow manure into clean fuel could be introduced in Scotland

A European farming cooperative pioneering the use of cow manure to create biogas for powering vehicles and agricultural machinery is exploring the possibility of introducing the technology to its network of farms in the UK, which stretches from Scotland down to Cornwall.

Arla Foods is a Danish multinational and the largest producer of dairy products in Scandinavia. In Sweden, 81 of its farms are delivering manure to plants that produce biogas, dubbed 'poo power' by the company and used for running both milk trucks and city buses.

As well as the biogas being a



WORDS
WILL PEAKIN

source of income for Arla's farmer-owners, the biomass that remains after the cow manure is digested can be used as a fertiliser that is nutrient-rich and has less odour.

"The biogas initiative in Sweden demonstrates the potential of our farmer-owners in Arla's transition to becoming carbon net-zero in 2050," says Kristian Østerling Eriknauer, vice-president of corporate responsibility at Arla.

"We have a huge opportunity to develop the market for biogas as the cow manure from the Arla farmers in Sweden alone corresponds to 54 million litres of diesel."

At the beginning of the year, Arla completed a trial of its process at farms in Buckinghamshire. Manure from 500 cows – around 190 tonnes of slurry each week – was used to create 27,000 kilograms of biogas to power specially-adapted Arla tankers transporting milk between dairy processing sites.

Together, the trucks covered around 56,000 miles and helped reduce the company's carbon impact by 80 tonnes – equivalent to 23 car journeys around the world.

"The trial was a really interesting one for us," says Felicity Callaghan, head of public relations for Arla in the UK. "We see lots of potential. However, scaling the process up needs careful consideration given the infrastructure required."

She adds: "We are currently assessing whether this is possible for us to do, or whether further trials would be necessary."

To further publicise its efforts, last autumn Arla announced the creation of rechargeable AA 'Cow Batteries'.

Arla's network of farms has a reputation for adopting cutting-edge technology. At Meinside Farm, near Lockerbie, David Hyslop, along with his two sons David and Martin, farm around 360 Holstein cows and 300 female young stock.

In a bid to reduce the herds' calving index and attain a higher pregnancy rate, they installed a heat detection and behavioural monitoring system, developed by Edinburgh-based technology company IceRobotics, on their herd – with significantly improved results. In 2017, Meinside also installed two biogas engine systems with a combined generation capacity of 88KW, putting the farm in pole position to adopt the manure-to-biogas process.

Arla is banking on the relative close proximity of many of their

“

The cow manure from the Arla farmers in Sweden alone corresponds to 54 million litres of diesel

member dairy farms to a growing network of UK-based anaerobic waste digesters, as well as public and private partnerships.

“The opportunity to scale up is definitely there,” says Graham Wilkinson, senior director of agriculture at Arla Foods UK, in an interview with *The Daily Churn**.

“We’ve got farms from Scotland all the way down to Cornwall.”

The issue of sustainability is an increasing focus for the agricultural sector in Scotland, particularly in the run-up to COP26.

Last year, plans were revealed for a £45 million commercial hydrogen production plant at Lesmahagow, to harness solar and wind power and produce ‘green hydrogen’. It is being developed by Scottish energy firm Hy2Go.

The plant will use the same process – electrolysis of water to produce oxygen and hydrogen gas – as a device whose inventor plans to introduce on farms across Scotland. Water Fuel Engineering’s HydroGen system can be installed on conventional diesel or petrol vehicles.

The size of a small suitcase, it contains a reservoir of water and an electrolyser that splits the water into hydrogen and oxygen by passing an electrical current through the tank.

It does not produce hydrogen gas for the purpose of powering a vehicle; instead, it produces small quantities of oxyhydrogen, the unique properties of which, says the company, create a richer mix within an engine, reducing fuel consumption and harmful emissions as well as extending the engine’s life.

David Barron, of Nether Aden, in Aberdeenshire, was one of a small number of farmers who have

“

It’s a brilliant thing. My two biggest bills are fuel and fertiliser and hydrogen addresses both

worked with SAC Consulting, part of Scotland’s Rural College (SRUC), to identify ways to reduce his farm’s carbon footprint.

What started as a cursory interest in adapting practices on the 203-hectare 130-cow suckler beef and arable farm, resulted in David retrofitting two tractors and his farm Jeep with a hydrogen electrolyser, saving him 20 per cent on his fuel costs.

The first HydroGen system was fitted as part of the Farming for a Better Climate project, coordinated by SAC Consulting in partnership with the Scottish Government. The aim was to define practical ways that farmers could make changes to adapt to a changing climate.

“It’s a brilliant thing,” says David. “My two biggest bills are fuel and fertiliser, and hydrogen addresses

both of them. I was just trying to make my bottom line better – farming in an environmentally friendly way. I’m using a third less fertiliser and a third less diesel.

“It takes a lot to change and takes a lot of confidence to change your system. I was given free rein and bounced ideas off my manager, we grew in confidence. The converters are now £1,000 a unit and have won awards at the Royal Highland Show.”

David discusses the system further in *The QMS Podcast***

Angel Nunez, spokesperson for Water Fuel Engineering, tells *The Cut*: “We have between 10 and 20 farms in Scotland looking to install the system.

“We’ve been held back but with restrictions lifted, we aim to be on-site across the country and carrying out installations.”

Mr. Nunez also welcomes the announcement by JCB, the equipment manufacturer, that it is investing £100m in hydrogen-powered engines. “[It] demonstrates the strong belief that hydrogen is the fuel of the future,” he says.

The developments came in the wake of the establishment of the Arable Climate Change Group, a farmer-led group to provide advice and proposals to cut emissions and tackle climate change. 🌱



*www.darigold.com/uk-dairy-cooperative-is-using-manure-to-power-their-milk-trucks/
**podcasts.apple.com/il/podcast/season-7-episode-3-reducing-emissions-david-barron/id1509674339?i=1000540476214



Sustainability and welfare standards are a top priority when it comes to QMS Quality Assurance Schemes

Making sure that Quality Meat Scotland (QMS) is addressing the need for quality assurance schemes, there is a very stringent review cycle of each of the Quality Assurance Scheme Standards. A full review will take place every two years, which starts with the organisation conducting a thorough benchmarking process, comparing its Standards with those of its UK competitors as well as other assurance scheme standards across the world.

While the QMS scheme standards are reviewed and updated on a two-year basis to ensure continuous improvements are made to remain up to date with legislative and technical changes, a wider benchmarking project considers how the QMS Standards compare in areas such as husbandry procedures, antibiotic use and sustainability with schemes as far afield as Australia and New Zealand.

Kathryn Kerr, Head of Brands Integrity, says: "Within the Standards, although the members

are doing more, if it isn't written down, it can't be measured. This international benchmarking allows us to measure where the QMS Standards sit in comparison to others on hot topic areas such as sustainability and welfare improvements. We look at the results we receive and consider how we can improve, with quick wins and longer-term changes while remaining relevant and practical. We submit these

recommendations to our Standard-setting committees to help us continually improve the schemes."

One particular area of development for QMS is to keep ahead of any forthcoming sustainable agricultural legislation from the Scottish Government by recommending that farmers take steps to measure their carbon footprint. Reducing a farm's carbon footprint is a long-term process but there can be some easier improvements to make to energy efficiency, animal performance and manure storage and handling. There is also a new environmental section proposed in the Standards. "This is a big, developing area for us," explains Kathryn.

QMS has completed its benchmarking process for the Cattle and Sheep Assurance Scheme Standards, with the Pig Assurance Scheme Standards benchmarking to follow early next year. The Cattle and Sheep Assurance Scheme is an essential element in the QMS 'whole chain' consumer assurance programme. The longest established scheme of its kind in the world,



COUNTRIES BENCHMARKED



it celebrated its 30th anniversary in 2020 and has more than 9,500 scheme members. Since 1996, the Scotch Beef and Scotch Lamb brands have held the coveted European Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) status which legally protects the brand names from imitation by meat from outwith Scotland or from products claiming 'Scotch' status.

To carry the Scottish red meat industry's three premium brands, Scotch Beef PGI, Scotch Lamb PGI and Specially Selected Pork, livestock must have been born, reared and processed in Scotland and spent their entire life on QMS-assured holdings.

Whole chain assurance underpins the integrity of these premium brands and provides reassurance to consumers of provenance, highest standards of production, animal welfare and wellbeing, to deliver a quality eating experience. Kathryn explains: "Whole life assurance is our unique selling point (USP).

This whole of life brand eligibility is delivered by a suite of assurance schemes: Cattle & Sheep, Pigs, Feeds, Haulage, Auction Market and Collection Centres and Processor. Whole chain assurance underpins the integrity of the premium Scotch PGI and Specially Selected Pork brands and provides reassurance to consumers of provenance, highest standards of production, animal welfare and wellbeing, to deliver a quality eating experience.

Manufactured feeds must be sourced from QMS-approved feeds suppliers, animals must be transported by QMS-approved livestock hauliers, sold through QMS-approved auction markets and processed by QMS-approved processors. Whole chain assurance ensures that animals have the best possible quality of life on-farm and throughout the live supply chain, resulting in the highest quality product reaching the consumer's plate.



PROCESSOR STANDARDS REVISED

QMS has revised its Processor Assurance Scheme Standards with changes including new requirements on CCTV installation, updates on the traceability section and staff hygiene, clothing and PPE which came into effect on 1 January 2022.

The Standards, which have also been amended to be more user-friendly with easy-to-read content clearly explaining each Standard and its importance, are an important part of the Scottish red meat industry's Quality Assurance Scheme – the longest established scheme of its kind in the world.

Kathryn said: "The Processor Assurance Scheme is an essential element of QMS whole chain assurance which underpins the integrity of the Scotch Beef, Scotch Lamb and Specially Selected brands.

"In a recent survey, 92 per cent of shoppers agree that Scotch labels mean the meat is produced according to higher standards of animal welfare. With reassurance about the way animals are looked after becoming ever more important to consumers, confidence in these Standards is essential to underpin the integrity of our premium Scotch brands."

Before any changes are incorporated into the Standards that reinforce Scotland's Quality Assurance Scheme, they are rigorously discussed and agreed upon by the committees which oversee the annual review process. Membership of the Standards committee includes representatives from relevant areas across the industry.

"The Standard Setting Body considered all feedback received during the review process and we have remained focused on ensuring the Standards are practical and relevant for scheme members, to underpin the Scotch brands and reinforce consumer trust. To continue to add value for assurance scheme members across the supply chain, QMS is in the process of developing Quality Assurance Scheme workshops and webinars."

Antimicrobial usage figures can be a good news message for Scotland's farmers – we just need to gather them first

RESISTANCE FIGHTERS



Public health has come a long way from 1928 when Dr Alexander Fleming returned from a holiday to find mould growing on a Petri dish of *Staphylococcus* bacteria and the journey to discovered penicillin and antibiotics began. Now operations such as caesarean sections and hip replacements are routine, but new concerns are arising as antimicrobial resistance (AMR) is now one of the top ten health threats facing the world today, according to the World Health Organization (WHO).

In July 2020, WHO reported: “New resistance mechanisms are emerging and spreading globally, threatening our ability to treat common infectious diseases. A growing list of infections – such as pneumonia, tuberculosis, blood poisoning, gonorrhoea, and foodborne diseases – are becoming harder, and sometimes impossible, to treat as antibiotics become less effective. Without urgent action, we are heading for a post-antibiotic era, in which common infections and minor injuries can once again kill.”

With a problem like that coming

over the hill, there is a need to act and demonstrate that action is essential, and steps have already been taken here in Scotland. A ‘One Health’ approach to tackling AMR has been adopted, acknowledging that the health of humans, animals and the environment are interconnected. Now monitoring antimicrobial resistance in bacteria from animals is a vital component of understanding and mitigating risk of AMR across the entire ecosystem.

The creation of The Scottish One Health Antimicrobial Use and Antimicrobial Resistance (SONAAR) programme, part of ARHAI Scotland (Antimicrobial Resistance and Healthcare Associated Infection) demonstrated serious commitment to antimicrobial stewardship. Its 2020 report and the Veterinary Antimicrobial Resistance and Sales

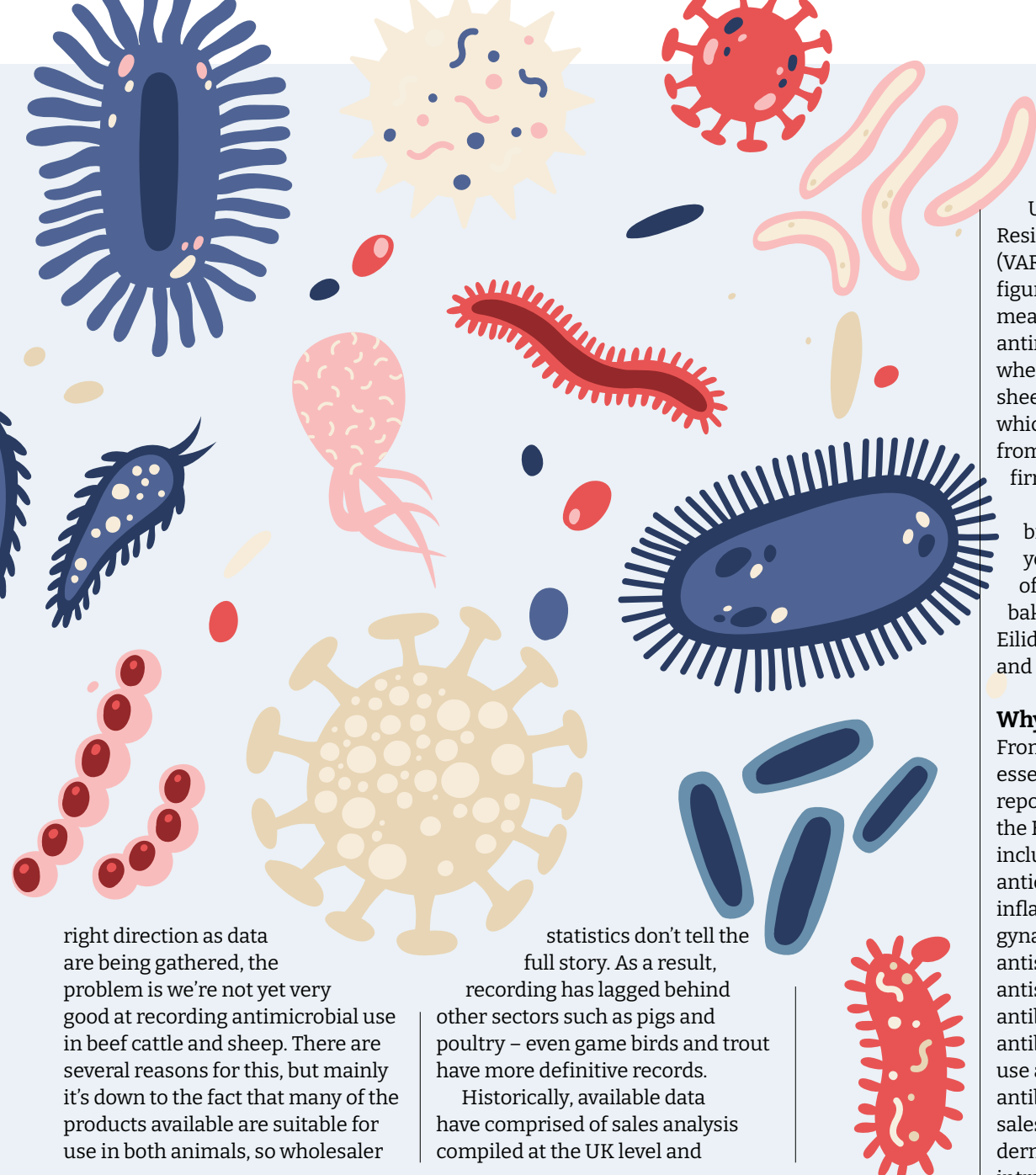
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With a problem like that coming over the hill, there is a need to act and demonstrate that action is essential

Surveillance (VARSS) Report of 2020 continue to provide intelligence and evidence for action to inform the development of local and national interventions and initiatives to tackle AMR.

Wholesalers’ data are gathered, and a number of Scotland’s veterinary practices contribute to the Small Animal Veterinary Surveillance Network (SAVSNET), while the Scotland’s Healthy Animals website, which was developed in 2015, aims to optimise disease avoidance and antimicrobial stewardship in veterinary practice, improve education and training, and provide better access to and use of surveillance data in animal sectors. By taking these steps, access to these vital medicines can be preserved for the future, to protect both human and animal health.

While these are great steps in the



right direction as data are being gathered, the problem is we're not yet very good at recording antimicrobial use in beef cattle and sheep. There are several reasons for this, but mainly it's down to the fact that many of the products available are suitable for use in both animals, so wholesaler

statistics don't tell the full story. As a result, recording has lagged behind other sectors such as pigs and poultry – even game birds and trout have more definitive records. Historically, available data have comprised of sales analysis compiled at the UK level and

published in the annual UK-Veterinary Antimicrobial Resistance and Sales Surveillance (VARSS) Report. However, those figures only reflect sales and don't measure how much or why an antimicrobial treatment is used and whether it's used on beef cattle or sheep. Instead, it's a crude measure which is cross referenced with data from manufacturers and makes firm numbers difficult to establish. "It's like recording how much bread was sold in Scotland in a year and having to take account of each farm shop, local artisan bakery and supermarket," says Eilidh Corr, QMS's Animal Health and Welfare Specialist. "It's difficult."

Why does it matter?

From a trade perspective, it's essential. AMU statistics must be reported at a UK level to trade with the EU, where mandatory collection includes sales and use data of antidiarrheals, intestinal anti-inflammatory/anti-infective agents, gynaecological anti-infectives and antiseptics, anti-infectives and antiseptics for intrauterine use, antibacterials for systemic use, antibacterials for intramammary use and antiprotozoals with antibacterial effect. In addition, sales data must be collected for dermatological, nasal preparations, intramammary use, and ophthalmological and otological anti-infectives.

EU member states are required to collate AMU data on cattle no later than January 2024, and sheep data by January 2027, so the pressure is mounting to plug any gaps.

The value of detail at a Scotland-wide level is also essential because while the country can be quietly confident it's doing well and most vets will say that sheep and cattle aren't really high-usage sectors,

WHAT LEADS TO AMR?

Very few products kill 100% of a population of something. So, for a bacterial infection an antibiotic might kill 99% of the bugs but the 1% that survived are strong and able to resist that treatment. That's called a selection pressure. They're the 1% left alive to reproduce and if repeatedly treated with these products, the population of bugs surviving in

the face of treatment expands, resulting in a big population the treatment doesn't affect.

Bacteria can exchange genes with other bacteria that they meet, and these gene packages can contain resistance genes. So, a bug that is no threat to humans at all could be present in an animal which has built up resistance to treatment,

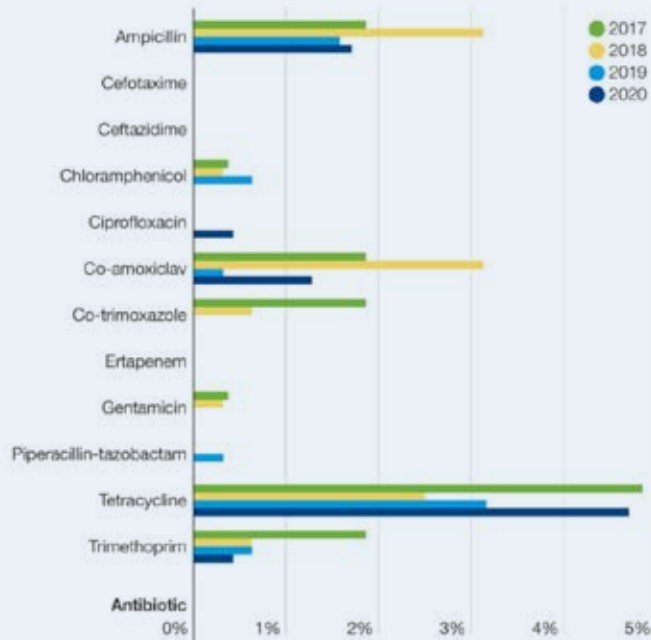
and that bug could potentially hand the resistance gene over to a bug which is infectious in humans, leading to antimicrobial resistance in that person. At present, 700,000 people die of drug-resistant infections each year*.

(*Source: Global Antibiotic Research and Development Partnership)



Figure 1 / SHEEP

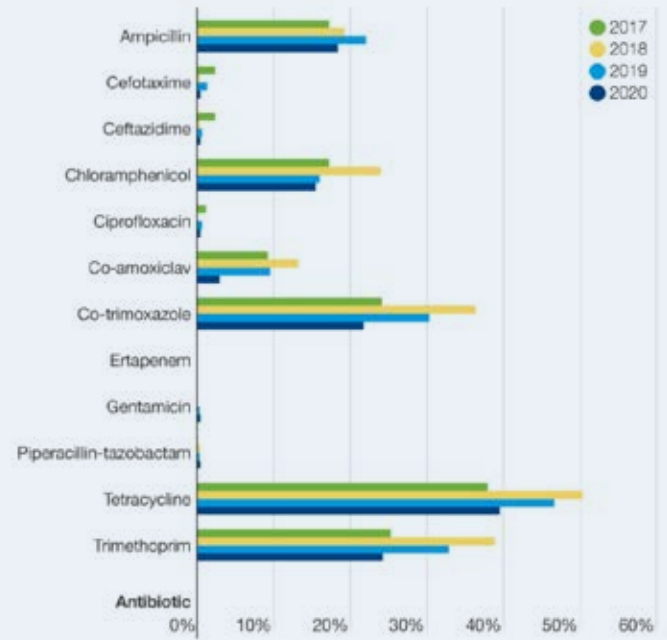
Percentage of E.coli isolates that were non-susceptible to selected antimicrobials in healthy sheep in Scotland, 2017 to 2020 by antimicrobial



[Data source: Scotland's Rural College (SRUC)]

Figure 2 / PIGS

Percentage of E.coli isolates that were non-susceptible to selected antimicrobials in healthy pigs in Scotland, 2017 to 2020 by antimicrobial



[Data source: Scotland's Rural College (SRUC)]

THE CHANGING FACE OF ANIMAL HEALTH

From 26 June 2022, zinc oxide will be banned for medicinal use in the European Union and the UK. The European Medicines Agency (EMA) stated the withdrawal is due to concerns related to potential risk to the environment and an increase of prevalence of antibiotic resistant bacteria arising from selection pressure from the use of products containing zinc oxide.

Seventy to 90% of British piglets currently receive zinc oxide in their feed to control post-weaning diarrhoea, which occurs more frequently when piglets are weaned very early. The most recent data measuring zinc oxide use, taken in 2016, showed an increase of more than 30% over five

years, bringing it to record levels. The problem is that zinc oxide doesn't biodegrade. Instead, it accumulates in the environment, where it's toxic to plants and aquatic organisms. Growing evidence suggests that zinc oxide use also increases incidences in pigs of MRSA and antibiotic-resistant E. coli.

From June 2022, it won't be marketable as a veterinary medicine, and only permitted in feed for nutritional purposes and at much lower doses. Right now, the commonly administered dosage is 100mg per kg body weight per day for 14 consecutive days (about 2500ppm zinc in feed). The new legal limit will be 150ppm in feed, a huge reduction.

we just don't have the figures to back that up. "It would be a brilliant success story for Scottish beef and sheep producers to be able to say, look, we aren't using a lot," says Eilidh. "But right now, we can't prove it."

While antimicrobial resistance is a real threat to animal and human health, progress is being made. In 2019, the VMD announced antibiotic sales for use in animals were among the lowest levels recorded in Europe, and the most recent VARSS report, released in November 2021 and showing data up to 2020, demonstrates reductions of more than 50% in the last six years. However, as most of those data have come from sectors other than beef cattle and sheep, it's not yet a good news story the red meat sector can definitively lay claim to. And, in

a world where farm practices are increasingly under the spotlight of commentators on climate, welfare and health, it would be beneficial to tell a good news story around AMR as part of evidence that these issues are being tackled effectively in Scotland.

So, what can we do right now?

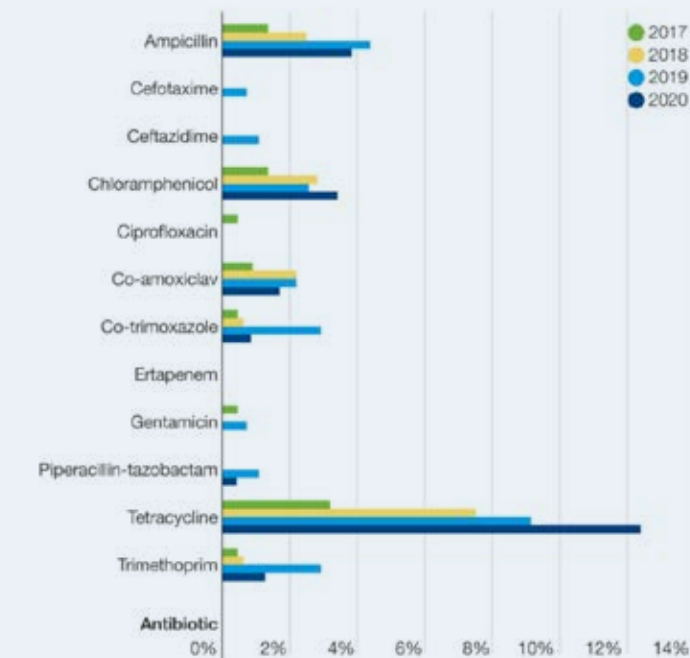
Good proactive, preventive health actions such as using vaccines and health planning in conjunction with vets can help farmers move in the right direction, with a firm focus on using these medicines as much as is necessary, but as little as possible.

QMS will be part of the solution. Members already sit down once a year to do an animal health review, with one task accounting for antibiotic use. The vet knows what they've sold in a year



Figure 3 / CATTLE

Percentage of E.coli isolates that were non-susceptible to selected antimicrobials in healthy cattle in Scotland, 2017 to 2020 by antimicrobial



[Data source: Scotland's Rural Collage (SRUC)]

and whether the destination of that product was sheep or cattle – and monitoring exactly how, why, and when antibiotics are being used provides beneficial information for individual producers, too.

“Getting this information recorded at a farm level not only gives you the most accurate source of data,” says Eilidh, “but if an individual farm can record data it has an immediate benefit to farmers as they can benchmark themselves year on year, and compare their stats to their peers, which helps inform business decisions.”

To support farmers, farm vets and other specialist consultants involved in flock or herd health planning, Scotland's Rural College (SRUC) Veterinary Services developed web-based software Scottish Animal Health Planning System (SAHPS) and an associated



THE THREAT TO HUMAN HEALTH

Since 2017, an ongoing project in collaboration with Food Standards Scotland has monitored the prevalence of resistance in E. coli cultured from cattle, sheep and pigs presenting at abattoirs in Scotland for slaughter for human consumption. The E. coli isolates were tested for susceptibility to the same antimicrobials used to test human isolates.

Ongoing monitoring and careful interpretation of the data is carried out to provide assurance that the situation is under control and improving.

USEFUL RESOURCES

Scotland's Healthy Animals website
The website was created with stakeholders in the animal health sector.
www.scotlandshhealthyanimals.scot

Scottish Animal Health Planning System (SAHPS)
Web-based software and data capture phone app.
www.sahps.co.uk

Further reading
The SONAAR report
The Scottish One Health Antimicrobial Use and Antimicrobial Resistance (SONAAR) programme, part of ARHAI Scotland (Antimicrobial Resistance and Healthcare Associated Infection), continues to provide intelligence and evidence for action to inform the development of local and national interventions and initiatives to tackle AMR. Find it at www.nss.nhs.scot

RUMA's public facing website has facts about antibiotic use and resistance. See www.farmanitobiotics.org

data capture phone app. The app, which links to SAHPS, allows farm data to be entered and shared with the vet and consultants in real time.

More work is currently underway at SRUC to refine and develop these systems, making them even more accessible, practical, and valuable to farmers.

So, we can all help to make the data sources as robust as possible. While that may take a little time, it's essential not just for the health of our animals and our businesses, but for the humans we hold dear, too.

“The bottom line is, use of antibiotics in animals is a privilege that we have as veterinary surgeons,” says Eilidh. “They are essential tools to protect animal health and welfare. But we have to demonstrate that we're using them responsibly so that we can retain our access to these vital medicines.”

CHEWING THE FAT

Clive McDonald, master butcher at the Auchengree Farm Shop & Tearoom, Ayrshire, serves up his fantasy feast

Clive joined Auchengree, overlooking the picturesque Garnock valley in North Ayrshire, just as the 175-acre working farm was expanding to open its tearoom in 2017. There, the chefs and butchers work in harmony to produce daily specials from the meat counter selection of Auchengree-reared Scotch Lamb PGI, Scotch Beef PGI, Specially Selected Pork and Wild Scottish Venison. Friday steak nights are a popular attraction.

The Beckett family preside over both the farm and shop, with three generations taking an active part in all elements of the business, from tending the herd of Shorthorn and Limousin cattle, a breeding stock of Texel-cross sheep, chickens and new arrivals to the farm, Highland cows Mollie and Myra.

The shop also provides customers with a plethora of preserves, chutneys, oils and vinegar, cakes, biscuits, and cooking sauces along with locally produced pewter jewellery, scented candles, glassware, and household goods.

"The first person on my guest list would have to be Rabbie Burns, the Bard of Ayrshire, who was solely responsible for making peasant food acceptable to everyone. I would like to find out what he was thinking with *Address to a Haggis* and talk about what his inspiration was, as I make my own nice, spicy haggis from our own Auchengree-reared sheep.

I think he would have a good chat



Robert Burns

with the late Andrew Fairlie, who was head chef at One Devonshire Gardens when he won his first Michelin star and then opened his own restaurant at the Gleneagles Hotel. It is now the only restaurant in Scotland to hold two Michelin stars. I like watching *Masterchef* and when Fairlie was on that, he was very thoughtful in his appraisals of the contestants' cooking skills.

That brings me on to my next guest, Lorna McNee, who was Fairlie's prodigy. She is now head chef at my favourite restaurant in Glasgow, Cail Bruich, which means 'to eat well'. Lorna has a Michelin star and is pushing for a second, so I am watching her progress with interest.

My fourth dinner guest would be the Flying Scot, Sir Jackie Stewart. Most people know him as a racing driver, but he was also a shooter. His grandfather was a gamekeeper. I think he is a real genuine guy, a wee lad from

Dumbarton, where I spent many years, but three times world champion racing driver.

He was also instrumental in improving the safety of motor racing. I don't watch it now, as I find it a bit tedious after Murray

Walker retired. He was much more entertaining.

I would welcome my guests in with a Makar gin from the Glasgow Distillery, as we are the only stockist in North Ayrshire. We would make a toast and have a wee tribute to Rabbie with some



haggis bon bons with peppercorn sauce. This would be followed with 'heads and tails', which are croquettes made with beef cheeks and oxtails, again from our own home-reared beef.

My beef Wellington has a twist, swapping Parma ham with my own charcuterie selection. This would be served with Ayrshire fondant potatoes and honey-glazed carrots and parsnips made with local Graeme's honey.

We would have something like strawberries with Lime Tree Larder's handmade cracked black pepper and balsamic vinegar ice cream, or a cranachan with raspberries from my own garden, which is vast and has a herbs centrepiece and five raised beds.

The conversation topics would be driven by the guests, who I am sure would be interested to hear where Rabbie's inspirations came from, and about Jackie's life experiences. We would definitely avoid talk of politics and religion, and hopefully Covid too. I am sure we would talk about food as we ate our cheese board of charcoal cheddar, Murcia al vino, which is a goat's cheese bathed in red wine and Ribblesdale blue goat's cheese with Adamson's Pittenweem oatcakes, coffee, and Chrystal's shortbread.

The guests would be offered a game of Mahjong, the Chinese tile game, to conclude the evening. It would be fun teaching them!"

Visit www.auchengreefarmshop.co.uk or @auchengreefarmshop on Facebook



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