

LIVESTOCK+

QMS Sharing best practice from Scottish livestock businesses WINTER 2017/18

+ Updates

MATCHING GRASS GROWTH
TO NUTRITIONAL NEEDS

NEW CEO TAKES A FRESH LOOK AT
THE SCOTTISH RED MEAT INDUSTRY

FOCUS ON IMPROVING CATTLE PERFORMANCE
FOR SHETLAND MONITOR FARM

FEATURES

**Lothian Farm Believes
Sharing Resources is Key**

**Paddock Grazing Helps Livestock
Farmer Increase Productivity**

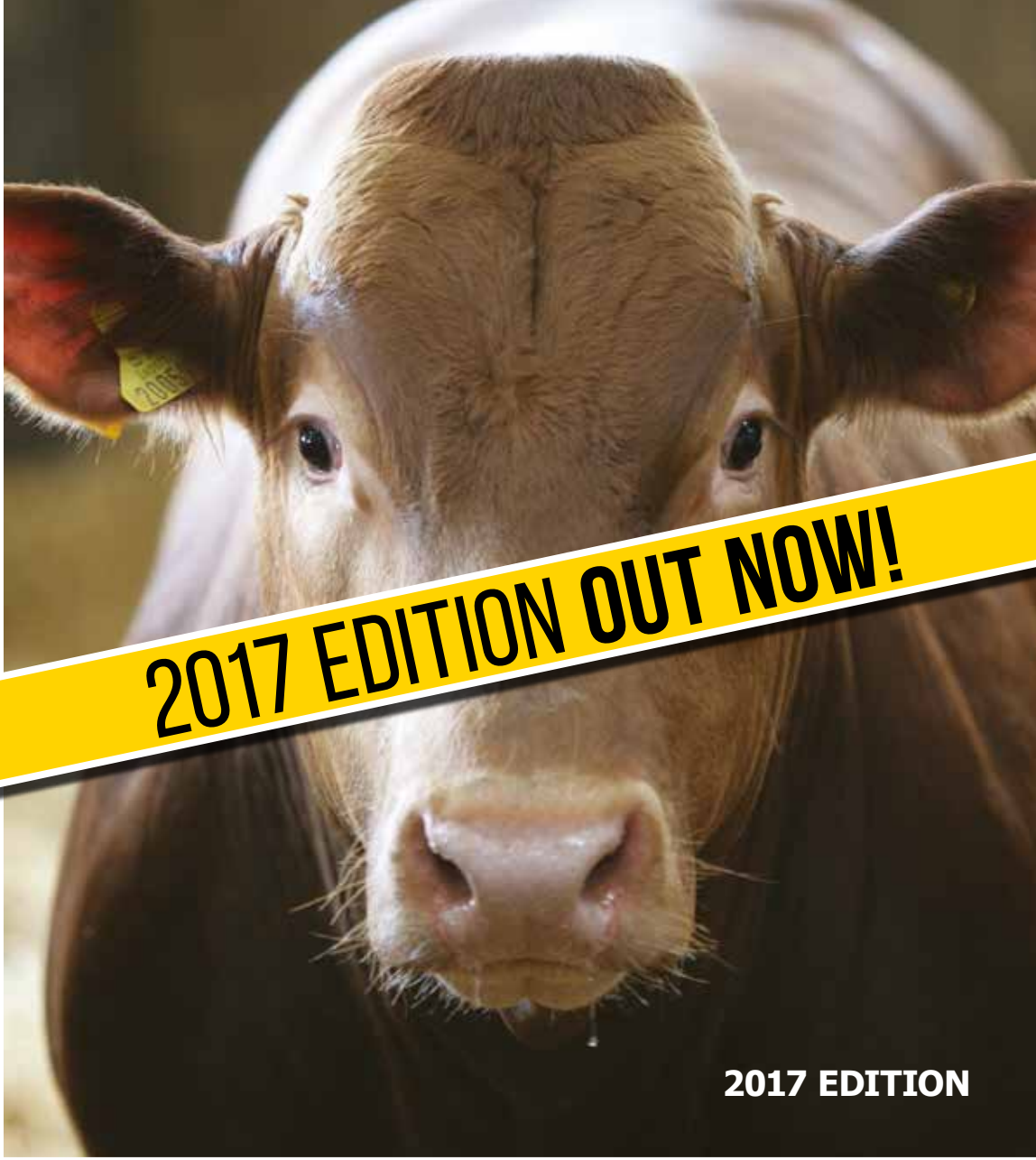
**Pig Monitor Farm Benefits
from Making Changes**



MONITOR FARM • GRAZING MANAGEMENT • INDUSTRY OUTLOOK • PIG FERTILITY



Cattle and Sheep Enterprise Profitability in Scotland



2017 EDITION OUT NOW!

2017 EDITION

To receive your copy, please email your address
to info@qmscotland.co.uk or phone **0131 472 4040**
www.qmscotland.co.uk



LIVESTOCK+

How to contact QMS:
visit www.qmscotland.co.uk
email info@qmscotland.co.uk
or call us on 0131 472 4040



For the latest, up-to-the-minute information follow us on Twitter or like our Facebook page - Quality Meat Scotland.



Sign up for our free weekly e-newsletter at www.qmscotland.co.uk



Issue 14, Winter 2017/18
Published by Quality Meat Scotland, 2017
All rights reserved.
© 2017 Quality Meat Scotland
ISSN 2057-0368

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

CONTENTS

4 News

Latest news from QMS.

8 Sharing Resources is Key for Future of Mixed Enterprises

Lothians farmer sees benefits of integrating livestock and arable businesses.

10 Taking a Fresh Look at the Scottish Red Meat Industry

QMS's new CEO takes a fresh look at the Scottish red meat industry.

WELCOME

“The prospects for Scotland's red meat sector remain positive for the year ahead, despite the prevailing uncertainty of the full implications of Brexit for our industry.

With the pound under continued pressure, the export competitiveness of our products and key brands – Scotch Beef PGI, Scotch Lamb PGI and Specially Selected Pork – is excellent. The same weak currency continues to make imports less competitive, which is also helpful for our industry.

We should expect some clarity on future trading arrangements with our EU neighbours to emerge at some point in 2018, and only then will we have a better grasp of the true shape of our future.

What we can be certain of, however, are the exceptional sustainability credentials associated with our Scotch brands, and these will become increasingly important as we seek to continue to differentiate Scottish production systems in an ever-more competitive marketplace.

Our largely grass-based production systems, which lock up carbon and produce high-quality protein for human consumption on land fit for no other food production purpose, is a fantastic message which we must all play our part in sharing.

Of particular importance in that differentiation is our whole-of-life and whole-of-chain quality assurance of which animal welfare is a key part.

This clearly sets us apart from other schemes, many of which only cover the later stages of the animal's life and often disregard the farm of birth.

So, while there are challenges, our industry has a range of very important unique selling points which set us apart and it is important we work together to take every opportunity to get that message out.

I hope that you enjoy this winter edition of our Livestock+ magazine and that this edition proves a source of ideas and inspiration as well as giving you a flavour of the range of activities the small QMS team is undertaking for the industry.

Our thanks to all of you who have helped with our activities in the past year and very best wishes to you for a happy and healthy 2018.”+

Jim McLaren,
Chairman, Quality Meat Scotland

12 Improving Cattle Performance

Shetland monitor farm introduces changes to its suckler herd management.

14 Matching Grass Growth to Nutritional Needs

Trevor Cook takes the mystery out of matching nutritional demand with grass growth.

16 Lanarkshire Farmer Sees Benefits of Improving his Grassland Management

Paddock grazing has led to increased profitability.

18 Changes at Pig Monitor Farm Result in Reduced Piglet Mortality

Aberdeen pig farm is reaping the benefits of changes in practice.

Chief Executive's Message



As an organisation our aim is to be open and transparent and during my first few months in post I have very much appreciated the opportunity to spend time with a great many people working in different parts of the Scottish red meat industry.

Coming from a non-farming background, it has been fascinating for me to get to know more about this industry and, hard though it has been to take time out of the office, it has been time very well spent.

Something which has quickly become crystal clear to me is that our levy payers are not fully aware of the range of activities QMS undertakes for the industry and I will be making it a priority in the coming months to address that.

It is vital that livestock farmers, and others working in the industry, are aware of all aspects of the work the small team at QMS undertakes - the diversity of it is exceptional.

Our health and education team, for example, are in schools all year round ensuring there is awareness of the beneficial role of red meat in a healthy diet to tackle the propaganda of the anti-red meat lobby.

Our economics services team are constantly analysing and communicating key information and data to support decision-making by those working in the industry and our marketing team have again delivered strong results with their latest Scotch Lamb campaign, which aimed to inspire people about the versatility and simplicity of cooking with Scotch Lamb PGI.

I've also been fortunate to attend some of our industry development team's events in recent weeks including a monitor farm meeting and I was very encouraged to speak with several farmers who had never attended knowledge exchange meetings such as these before.

It is also good to see a wide age range now attending these meetings and travelling home with fresh ideas, and very often enthusiasm, for the job they do.

I have very much enjoyed my first few months as chief executive and I look forward to meeting many more of you in 2018 and to QMS playing a key role as the industry equips itself for the challenges and opportunities of the post-Brexit era.✚

Alan Clarke
Chief Executive,
Quality Meat Scotland

Local Farmers Support Scotch Lamb PGI Sampling Activities

Sheep farmers joined QMS Lambassadors at supermarkets around Scotland to encourage shoppers to add Scotch Lamb to their weekly shopping lists.

QMS undertook over 120 days of Scotch Lamb in-store promotional activity in Morrisons, Aldi and Lidl as part of this year's Wham Bam Lamb campaign, which promoted Scotch Lamb PGI as a versatile ingredient ideal for busy families to enjoy as a mid-week meal.

John Fyall, chairman of the National Sheep Association in Scotland (NSA), who helped tempt customers with tasty Scotch Lamb samples in his local Aldi store in Aberdeen, thought that the sampling events were a valuable opportunity for farmers to engage with consumers about how versatile and delicious Scotch Lamb is.

He said: "We are incredibly proud of the Scotch Lamb we produce and believe it's an industry worth protecting and growing. Everyone involved in the industry needs to work together to champion Scotch Lamb, and we're keen to show shoppers how lamb can be used to showcase its true versatility and make it a staple on Scottish shopping lists".✚



John Fyall (left) of Sittyton Farm in Newmachar, in Morrisons Aberdeen.



Danny Hair (centre) from Drumbredan Farm, Stranraer at Lidl, Stranraer.



George Allan (right) of Highfield Farm, Ochiltree, at Morrisons Ayr.



For more information on Scotch Lamb PGI, recipe ideas and inspiration, please visit: www.whambamlamb.com

@ScotchKitchen
www.scotchkitchen.com

Beef and Lamb Exports from Scotland Top £80 Million

The value of exports of beef and lamb from Scotland has increased to over £80 million in the past year, according to the results of the annual exporters' survey conducted by QMS.



The results of the survey, which were revealed at Anuga - the world's largest food fair, held in Cologne in October - showed that Scotland's exports of red meat increased in value by 9% (4.3% by volume) in the year ending August 2017.

Jim McLaren, Chairman of QMS, said the figures should send a positive signal to Scottish exporters and those working in the wider red meat industry in Scotland.

"This strengthening of export demand is a very clear indication that, despite the ongoing challenges of the global economy and the uncertainty generated by the Brexit negotiation process, overseas demand for Scotch Beef PGI and Scotch Lamb PGI remains strong," Mr McLaren said.

QMS hosted ten Scottish exporters on its stand at the event in Cologne, which attracted over 155,000 trade visitors from 180 countries. As well as highlighting the Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) status of Scotch Beef and Scotch Lamb, QMS's stand also promoted the Specially Selected Pork brand to importers from around the world.

Laurent Vernet, QMS Head of Marketing, commented: "Anuga attracts all the major meat exporters in the world. The show was therefore a fantastic opportunity to reinforce and strengthen our key brands and offered exporters from Scotland the opportunity to secure valuable business on the global market."+



Jamie Delap and chef Justin Maule.

LAUNCH OF #MEAT4BEER INITIATIVE TO CELEBRATE SCOTLAND'S LARDER

A new #Meat4Beer initiative was launched recently to encourage people to celebrate St Andrew's Day by pairing Scotland's top quality beef, lamb and pork with different styles of craft beer.

In a joint event in Glasgow in November, hosted by QMS, The Brewers Association of Scotland (TBAS) and Scotland Food & Drink, acclaimed chef Justin Maule, of Wild Fig Food, and Jamie Delap, Managing Director of Fyne Ales and a board member of TBAS, were tasked to work together to develop a selection of paired dishes and craft beers - to highlight just how well beef, lamb and pork and craft beer work together.

Jamie and Justin said that working together to pair the meat dishes with the craft beers had been great fun and a real taste sensation adventure.

Carol McLaren, Head of Communications at QMS, said: "Farmers and brewers work very hard to produce top-quality beef, lamb and pork, and beer, and there could be no better way of celebrating Scotland's larder on St Andrew's Day than by celebrating all these excellent Scottish products in this way."+



West Lothian Butcher Crowned as Scotch Lamb Butcher of the Year



(l-r) David Littlewood, President of the Federation of Chefs Scotland; Graeme Sharp, QMS and George Lawson from John Lawson's Butchers.

A top Scottish butcher has been crowned the Scotch Lamb Butcher of the Year 2017 in a new initiative from the Scotch Butchers Club run by QMS.

Scotch Butchers Club member John Lawson Butchers of West Lothian scooped the top prize in the inaugural year of the competition, which was introduced to recognise the skill and innovation of butchers who take pride in stocking Scotch Lamb PGI.

The prestigious title was announced at the annual Scottish Chefs' (Federation) Conference dinner in November.

Two other Scotch Butcher Club members were also recognised for their exceptional products at the awards dinner. Duncan Fraser & Son of Inverness was presented with the Scotch Lamb Consumer Choice award for their Lamb & Mint Pie, and Crombies of Edinburgh was awarded Scotch Lamb Innovation of the year for their Pea and Lamb Twin Cutlets.✦

For more information on Scotch Lamb PGI, including recipes, videos and tips, visit www.scotchkitchen.com or follow Scotch Kitchen on Facebook or Twitter.

@ScotchKitchen
www.scotchkitchen.com

Young Farmers' Bale Art Adopts Scotch Lamb Theme



A giant teddy-bear band made from straw bales and created by Bankfoot JAC in Perthshire was selected as the overall winner in a national young farmers' bale art competition.

Over 50 entries from across Scotland were received for the Scottish Association of Young Farmers Clubs (SAYFC) competition. This year's competition was supported by Scotch Lamb PGI, as the competition coincided with the Scotch Lamb 'Wham Bam Lamb' campaign.

The young farmers also hoped to inspire people, cheered by the sight of the bale art, to donate to STV Children's Appeal via the Justgiving.com bale art page. Their collective fundraising, in addition to the proceeds of the branded t-shirts sold at the Royal Highland Show and Scotch Lamb Christmas Jumpers, resulted in £10,000 being donated to the charity, which supports children across Scotland living in poverty.

TV presenter Lorraine Kelly, who is a trustee and huge supporter of the STV Children's Appeal, judged the young farmers' finalist entries to select the overall winner.

"All the entries were fabulous and I loved judging them," said Ms Kelly. "Selecting a winner was extremely hard, but in the end, it just had to be the three teddies," she said.✦

QMS Hosts Successful Series of Assurance Workshops

QMS recently held a series of free assurance workshops for livestock farmers across Scotland. The main focus of the evening meetings, which were held in Perth, Dingwall and Moffat, was to give an update on the revised rodent control standards, but the events also gave members the opportunity to ask any other assurance related questions.

There has been increasing concern about the use of rodenticides and their residues in the environment and the UK Government set up a Rodenticide Stewardship Regime in 2015. This required all professional rodenticide users (including farmers) to attend an external training course.

However, QMS has updated the rodent control standard in its Cattle & Sheep and Pigs assurance schemes in line with the requirements of the stewardship scheme, to secure agreement that members who comply with the revised standards, can continue to purchase professional rodenticides without having to attend an external course.

More workshops are planned in the new year, details of which will appear in The Scottish Farmer and on the QMS Facebook and twitter pages.✦



Winner of the Surf and Turf Chef of the Year Announced

A top Scottish Chef has been crowned Scotch Lamb Surf & Turf Chef of the Year in a national competition run jointly by QMS's Scotch Beef Club and Seafood Scotland.

Graham Mitchell (right), of The Cock and Bull in Aberdeenshire, battled against five other chefs in the final cook-off. The talented chefs were tasked to create dishes which combine two of the top ingredients of Scotland's exceptional larder - Scotch Lamb PGI and seafood from Scotland.

Chef Mitchell impressed the panel of judges by serving a pan-seared rump of Scotch Lamb with potato tubes, pea puree, peas à la française, crisp sweetbread and langoustine tail. He was presented with the prestigious title at the annual Scottish Chefs' Conference in November where his award-winning dish was served at the conference dinner.✦



Andrea McLean Backs Scotch Lamb Campaign

TV presenter Andrea McLean recently spent the day learning more about Scotch Lamb PGI production and lent her support to a major campaign to encourage more Scots to eat lamb.

During a day of "lambassador" activities with QMS, Andrea spent time with Graham and Kathleen Lofthouse at Bankhouse Farm, winner of the 2016 AgriScot Scottish Sheep Farm of the Year award.

She then joined a group of top Scottish bloggers for a session in Edinburgh, cooking some of her favourite Scotch Lamb dishes to help raise the profile of quality assured Scotch Lamb and highlight QMS's "Wham Bam Lamb" campaign. The 2017 high-profile campaign, which ran for ten weeks between August and October, targeted almost four million consumers and 92% of Scottish families.

Research from IGD found that 70% of the target shoppers agreed that Scotch Lamb PGI is 'produced to a higher standard' and 60% agreed it is 'the best available' after the 2016 "Wham Bam Lamb" campaign.

Last year's successful campaign also saw identified Scottish origin sales of lamb in Scotland increase by 10.5% in value and command a retail price premium of 11%.

Busy mum-of-two Andrea, who is a huge fan of lamb, confessed: "Juggling appearances on Loose Women and the hectic social lives of two kids means, as a family, we can't always dedicate the time we'd like to creating laborious meals in the kitchen."

She added: "It's great to have a go-to ingredient like Scotch Lamb, which is the perfect ingredient for rustling up great, versatile mid-week meals. It is also packed with protein, iron and vitamins; it keeps our family's diet balanced and my mind at ease."

During her visit to Bankhouse Farm, Andrea also learned more about the quality assurance, traceability and animal welfare standards which underpin the iconic Scotch Lamb brand.+



Andrea McLean with Graham Lofthouse from Bankhouse Farm.

AGRISCOT SCOTCH BEEF FARM OF THE YEAR AND SCOTTISH SHEEP FARM OF THE YEAR WINNERS ANNOUNCED!



Castle Sinniness - Robert with parents Rachael and John Fleming.



Barnside Farm - Jessica, Charley, Andrea and Tom Walker.

Congratulations to the Fleming Family, from Castle Sinniness near Glenluce, winner of the 2017 AgriScot Scotch Beef Farm of the Year award run by AgriScot and Quality Meat Scotland (QMS) and sponsored by Thorntons Solicitors.

The 2017 AgriScot Scottish Sheep Farm of the Year award went to Barnside Farm in Abbey Saint Bathans, near Duns, run by husband and wife team Charley and Andrea Walker.

Fergus Ewing, Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy and Connectivity, extended his congratulations to both families.

He said: "I would like to offer my warmest congratulations to the Fleming family on being named 2017 Scotch Beef Farm of the Year, and to the Walker family for being awarded 2017 Scottish Sheep Farm of the Year. They are both excellent ambassadors for our Scottish livestock sector and I wish them all further success moving forward."+



New QMS Video Highlights Health Benefits of Red Meat

QMS has developed a new video highlighting the important role of beef, lamb and pork in a healthy diet.

The video, entitled "The Meat We Eat", aims to dispel some of the myths about red meat and to communicate, as simply as possible, the many nutritional benefits it offers.

The video is played as part of the cookery demonstrations hosted by the QMS health and education team in primary schools around Scotland, which reach 3,000 children each year. The video has also been supplied to home economics teachers in high schools throughout Scotland as a teaching resource.+

The new video can be viewed on QMS's MooTube page on YouTube and on the QMS Facebook page.

Sharing Resources is Key for Future of Mixed Enterprise

Saughland Farm manager **Peter Eccles** is keen to work with Prestonhall Estate manager **Bill Gray** to establish a wholly integrated system between their respective livestock and arable enterprises and have combined to form the **Lothians Monitor Farm** near Pathhead.



Peter Eccles is responsible for Saughland Farm, which is primarily a livestock unit, while Bill Gray runs mostly arable land at Prestonhall. Although the two farms remain separate businesses, since the start of the Monitor Farm process, they have been pooling resources in a much more structured way, and the plan is to integrate further in the future in order to maximise production of profitable livestock while improving soil fertility and arable yields.

Since Peter arrived at the 330-hectare Saughland Farm in 2014, he has more than doubled the sheep numbers to the current 2,000 ewes and 500 ewe lambs. He has also restructured the 70-cow suckler herd into a tight nine-week spring calving period.

Inspired by the Borders Grazing Group, run by QMS and hosted by Jim Logan at Pirntaton, Peter has improved the grassland management at Saughland by

introducing paddock grazing, which has allowed him to carry more stock. He said: “We reduced the arable acreage by 30 hectares and rent 20 hectares of grazing seasonally at Tÿnehead, so now there are about 210 hectares of rotational and permanent grassland plus 12 hectares of rough grazing and 15 hectares of brassicas for finishing lambs and wintering ewes.”

The ultimate aim of the Monitor Farm programme in Scotland, which is jointly managed by QMS and AHDB Cereals & Oilseeds, is to help farmers improve their business performance, increase sustainability and reduce their reliance on subsidies.

Benchmarking carried out by Peter shows that the output of beef and lamb produced has increased from 517kg liveweight per hectare (including the rented and rough grazing) in 2015 to 634kg in 2016, with a projected output of over 700kg in 2017.



Prestonhall and Saughland farms have combined to form one of the nine monitor farms that have been established across Scotland as part of the Monitor Farm Programme managed jointly by QMS and AHDB Cereals & Oilseeds.



For more information about the monitor farm programme, visit www.monitorfarms.co.uk

While there has been an investment of £95 per hectare in electric fencing and water supply to subdivide the original 28 fields into over 60 paddocks of three and four hectares, Peter can demonstrate a positive return on this investment.

Management of the ewes has changed, too, with Aberfield and Romney genetics introduced, a switch to outdoor lambing and also a later lambing date. However, Peter said: "It is a fine line between lambing late enough for the ewes to receive the nutrition they require from the spring grass, but early enough that the lambs can utilise the big flush of grass in May/June."

Although getting the grass to match the nutritional requirements is a balancing act, Peter is pleased that this year his pre-lambing concentrate feed totalled four tonnes, which was exclusively for triplets and hogs carrying twins. In his first year at Saughland, 50 tonnes of feed was used for half the number of ewes.

This year he put the Aberfield tups out on 16th November, aiming for lambing to start on 10th April, seven days earlier than this spring. He said: "To flush the ewes, we aim to have them at body condition score 3 before being mobbed up and started on daily shifts at the beginning of November. Tups are introduced at a ratio of 85:1 ten days later. A scanning percentage of 180% would be ideal, and I am happy with 100% for the hogs, which only have one turn with the tup."

The ewes run as two flocks; the 'A flock' is the Aberfield nucleus flock of 1,000 ewes, and to remain in the "A flock" everything must lamb unassisted and have no mothering, feet or health issues. All replacements are kept from multiple reared births born within the A flock.

High index Aberfield tups are purchased, in which maternal traits and structural soundness take priority. Peter added: "Carcass traits are important, too, but first we need live lambs that can grow on to make milky mothers."

The "B flock" is made up of the original stock of Scotch Mules and ewes which have been demoted from the "A flock" and are all put to a terminal sire. Peter has been using Texel, Primera, Abermax and Suffolk rams; this year he is also trying Aberblacks and Blue Texels on the hogs, but he said he is still trying to find the ideal terminal sire.

Wether lambs and ewe lambs not retained are all finished and sold deadweight through Farmstock Scotland and United Auctions at an average of 19kg, with over 70% at R3L and better. This year, at the suggestion of the Monitor Farm community group, he has been snack feeding the most forward lambs 100g per head per day since October and has found this has improved their daily liveweight gain and ability to finish. He said: "They seem to respond well to a little concentrate, especially when they are on lush, wet pasture."

As part of the collaboration with Prestonhall, a lamb finishing enterprise is being set up there introducing stubble turnips, white clover and plantain into the rotation, which should not only provide good fodder for lambs, but also improve

soil fertility for subsequent arable crops. Likewise cover crop mixes of oats, rye, crimson clover and vetch sown into stubble fields can be grazed by ewes from the 1st of January which complies with EFA Greening regulations.

The sheep flock at Saughland is also part of SAC Consulting's Live Lambs project, so Peter and his staff of two carefully monitor and record every lamb death – even pre-

lambing – and the reason for it. This year, losses from scanning to marketing were 15.9%, but he said his target was to get below 15% and in a good lambing year, even reduce losses to 10%.

He said: "I believe the three most

important factors in minimising lamb losses are selection of good maternal genetics and our management of ewe nutrition and health. The lambs must be born unassisted and have plenty get-up-and-go, while the ewe needs to have a plentiful supply of colostrum and be fit to rear two lambs off grass alone.

"We vaccinate for enzootic abortion and submit suspect dead lambs for toxoplasmosis testing, with no positive results. However, I feel we need to reduce our use of antibiotics and reliance on anthelmintics. Lambing outdoors is healthier and reduces vet and medicine costs. We are also working to further develop the clean grazing system we use on the farm, using the cattle and arable enterprises to reduce the reliance on wormers and boost lamb performance."

The Monitor Farm meetings which have been held at Saughland and Prestonhall Farms so far have been very well attended, and Peter said the community group were coming forward with some great ideas. He is really looking forward to benchmarking within the group and, most importantly, year on year within his own business.

He said: "Now, more than ever, it is critical to know what every kg of beef and lamb costs to produce and how we can reduce these costs further while maximising our output per hectare. Knowing how to allocate costs is certainly a challenge when there are different enterprises on a farm, but that is where the expertise from the Monitor Farm process will be helpful."+

Taking a Fresh Look at the Scottish Red Meat Industry



Alan Clarke, who joined QMS as Chief Executive in July this year, has been meeting people involved in all parts of the Scottish red meat industry during his first few months in post. Here he gives us an insight into his early impressions and some of the topics farmers around the country have been raising with him.

What has been your priority in your first few months?

I have made it a priority to meet people in each part of the industry. I don't have a background in farming or red meat, so I still have a great deal to learn, but what I do have is an opportunity to look at the sector with a "fresh pair of eyes".

Something which has quickly become apparent to me is that QMS has a unique footprint in the Scottish food industry. Our levy-paying farmers and processors also depend on a wide range of stakeholder groups to ensure that consumers experience a world-class product. Our unique footprint also includes: auctioneers; feed suppliers; hauliers; food service providers; butchers; retailers; chefs; and consumers.

I have to say I have been impressed with the pride, passion and professionalism I have found throughout the Scottish red meat chain.

What do you see as the industry's biggest challenges?

One of our industry's biggest challenges is delivering a margin for each link of the chain, to ensure businesses are sustainable.



I am also very aware of the concern which exists among those working in our industry about the potential impact of Brexit and changes to the way agricultural support is delivered, as well as the implications for international trade and migrant labour.

What I have noticed in my initial time in my role is that there can be a tendency for the industry to talk itself down, which can

distract attention from focusing on our strengths and the aspects of business performance we can control and improve.

What does QMS spend levy payers' money on?

The vast majority of QMS levy income (around 77 per cent) is spent on consumer-facing activity, including our marketing and health & education activity. QMS has a strong track record of delivering successful marketing campaigns supported by engaging public relations activity.

Our strategy, set by the QMS board, includes a focus on improving the efficiency of our industry - and this is something our processor levy payers view as very important.

Our industry development work is vital but represents a very small part of our overall external spend of levy income - just 14%.

The reason we can deliver strongly on our industry development work with such a small budget is partly due to the success of the QMS team in securing external grants - such as the £1.25 million Scottish Government grant for the monitor farm programme. Partnership working is also key to performing well on a small budget.



Kathy Peebles, Vice Chairman of the National Sheep Association Scotland helped Lambassadors at the Scotch Lamb Sampling at Aldi Falkirk.

"The reason we can deliver strongly on our industry development work with such a small budget is partly due to the success of the QMS team in securing external grants."

What are monitor farms delivering?

There is always room in any business to improve efficiency further, and we know there is a huge difference between the performance of our top-third and bottom-third producers. This has been highlighted once again in our annual "Cattle and Sheep Enterprise Profitability" publication, launched last month.

In recent weeks I have taken part in some of the monitor farm activity that QMS delivers, and it has been great to see those working in the industry increasingly embracing benchmarking and other efficiency tools to help future-proof their businesses.

It has been particularly encouraging to speak with farmers at these meetings who have rarely, if ever, been part of a project like the monitor farm one and to hear their positive feedback about the potential to introduce new ideas to improve their business efficiency.

What is QMS doing to promote Scotch Lamb?

A working group, including farmer representatives, inputs into the shape of our lamb campaigns, which are timed to coincide with the highest periods of product availability during late summer and autumn.

This year's Scotch Lamb marketing campaign built on the success of the 2016 campaign which saw the value of identified Scottish-origin lamb sales increase by 10.5%.

The aim was to inspire consumers about the versatility and simplicity of cooking with Scotch Lamb and to challenge perceptions that lamb is slow and difficult to cook.

The red meat sector in Scotland has a worldwide reputation built on its PGI brands. I will be examining further opportunities - including taking a fresh look at the marketing campaign - to build on the work already done to promote Scotch Lamb PGI.

How important is quality assurance to farmers?

Our world-leading, whole-chain, whole-of-life quality assurance and commitment to animal welfare gives us a very valuable competitive edge as an industry.

Currently over 90% of Scotland's breeding cattle population and over 80% of our breeding sheep flock are quality assured, along with virtually 100% of significant pig farming businesses.

Looking at last year's figures, farmers who are members of our quality assurance scheme receive, on average, 17.2% premium for prime cattle sold at auction markets, with the premium for prime sheep being up to 5%.

Consumers expect to be able to buy Scotch Beef, Scotch Lamb and Specially Selected Pork with total confidence that it has been produced to a high standard. Our whole-of-life quality assurance is the only way we can offer them that guarantee of production and welfare standards.



Farmers at a recent Lochaber Monitor farm learning about soil structure.

What are your plans for QMS in the years ahead?

I am fortunate to have a team of staff who are very professional and committed, and one of my priorities will be improving awareness of the wide range of activities that QMS delivers - from marketing and health & education to quality assurance, industry development and economics services.

In addition, I will be taking a careful look at our strategy and structures to ensure QMS is working as effectively as possible and delivering full value for money for levy payers. There is also real potential to take the industry to a new level in the way different parts of the red meat chain engage and communicate with each other.

Finally, I am looking forward to building ever stronger partnerships with our stakeholders to ensure our industry is well-positioned for the post-Brexit era. +



IMPROVING CATTLE PERFORMANCE

Plans to increase herd size, optimise use of winter feed by weighing cattle regularly and further explore the potential of rotational grazing, are on the cards for 2018 for Shetland's monitor farmers, **Kirsty and Aimee Budge.**

QMS VIDEO ▶ YouTube 



A video introducing Shetland Monitor Farmers Kirsty and Aimee Budge can be viewed on QMS's facebook page, QMS website and QMS's Moo Tube channel on Youtube.

The sisters, who are the fifth generation of the family to farm the 300-hectare Bigton Farm, have introduced a range of changes to their cattle enterprise as a result of their monitor farm experience so far.

Kirsty and Aimee, supported by their grandfather Jim and mother Helen, run 70 suckler cows which are mostly Salers cross Shorthorns. Heifers go to the Salers bull and then the older cows go to either a Charolais or a Shorthorn bull.

The cattle side of the farm enterprise is an area where the pair felt their performance was strong. However, being a host farm in the current the monitor farm programme has opened the sisters' eyes to the potential to strive for better performance in their cattle herd by improving management efficiency.

Calves born at Bigton in 2016 managed to achieve an average daily liveweight gain of 1kg across the group between weaning and either when they were sold as stores, or finished on farm.

Most of the young stock are sold at a year old as store calves, but this year the family, encouraged by the monitor farm community group, decided to finish around 15 head of cattle.

“Up until this year, our calves have usually been sold at Lerwick auction market at a year old and a target weight of 500kg. However, this summer we finished 15 of our calves, which were sold to our local butcher at an approximate deadweight of 350kg,” said Aimee.

The sisters plan to continue to finish a number of their youngstock in the coming year and have also been looking closely at how they monitor and measure the performance of their calves.

“Being part of the monitor farm project has really encouraged us to look much more closely at the financial side of our business and to recognise the importance of measuring and recording accurately,” said Kirsty.

"Being part of the monitor farm project has really encouraged us to look much more closely at the financial side of our business".



Bigton Farm is one of nine monitor farms that have been established across Scotland as part of the Monitor Farm Programme managed jointly by QMS and AHDB Cereals & Oilseeds.

"We have always weighed our calves through the winter housing period, but what we haven't been good at is acting on that information," she continued.

However, last winter the girls decided to act on the results of the calf weighing in a bid to make more effective use of their winter feed.

"Last winter we split our calves into three groups. If, when weighing, we discovered there were calves that were underperforming, we shifted them into a small group which meant they had less competition for feed. This seemed to work well and we'll be looking to do the same again this winter," added Kirsty.

The Budes had also been very impressed with the reviews they had read about farmers throughout Scotland introducing rotational grazing.

"We thought being a part of the monitor farm project offered us a perfect opportunity to give rotational grazing a go, with our target being to improve our

grass utilisation. It worked pretty well overall in our first year, despite a few problems with heifers escaping!" said Aimee.

The sisters plan to continue to increase their use of rotational grazing in 2018, and a further priority for the year ahead is improving their herd's Johne's status.

The family grows 24 hectares of barley, making it the farm with the biggest arable area on Shetland. One of their priorities for the year ahead is finding the best varieties of barley to grow in their conditions.

This year, they have grown Propino and Wagon. The barley is propcorned to preserve it and all their barley tonnage is used for winter feed, with any surplus sold to local farmers.

"This harvest our yield averaged 4.5 tonnes per hectare but our aim is to achieve 5 tonnes per hectare, said Kirsty.

"We will be working with AHDB Cereals & Oilseeds next year to run variety trials to help us find the optimal variety for growing in Shetland conditions. We are looking for a variety which gives us the dual benefit of increasing yield and achieving an earlier harvest."

The sisters have also installed a Liftlog 100+ device to weigh the barley as it is harvested and allow them to record the yield more accurately.

The Budes are very much looking forward to moving into the second crucial year as host monitor farmers. However, they both admit that hosting the first meeting, which attracted a huge turnout, was very nerve-wracking!

"We're really looking forward to identifying more solutions to our problem areas on the farm next year, especially with our business group, and hopefully finding more solutions with the community group," said Kirsty.

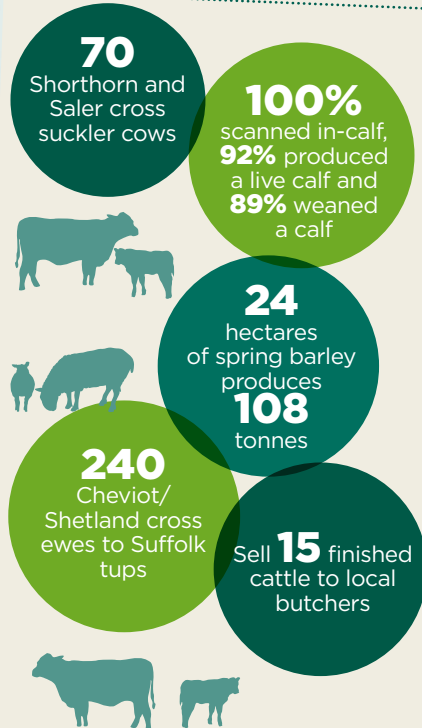
"Something we both really appreciate is getting suggestions about what we can do to improve each enterprise on the farm."

The sisters have been overwhelmed by the level of support they have had from the farmers and crofters on Shetland.

"We're very grateful for the huge amount of encouragement we've received. People of all ages – even those who have a huge amount of farming experience – have said after the meetings how much they have learned," said Aimee.+



Bigton Farm Facts





MATCHING GRASS GROWTH TO NUTRITIONAL NEEDS

One of the most difficult aspects of paddock grazing for farmers to understand is matching the seasonal variations in nutritional demand with grass growth.



In a bid to clarify the former, the second round of QMS's "Better Grazing" meetings introduced nutrition and body scoring timelines for both sheep and cattle.

To help the delegates at each of the six autumn meetings around the country, New Zealand vet and grazing consultant Trevor Cook was the main speaker and took some of the mystery out of controlled grazing systems.

He pointed out that he was in Scotland to work with farmers towards a common goal of making their farms more profitable through more efficient use of grass. He said: "I don't know anything about animals in sheds or about supplementary feeding; it's all about pasture."

He conceded that the New Zealand system has differences but pointed out that the same factors drive performance and profitability on both sides of the world – kilograms of product produced per hectare.

Since he first became involved with QMS Grazing Groups four years ago, Trevor has seen many Scottish farmers embrace paddock or controlled grazing systems and deliver better returns from grass.

One of the key objectives in such a system is to predict seasonal nutritional demand and ensure there is enough quality grass to meet it.

Trevor said: “The art of controlling the allocation of pasture to meet the feed demand of the grazing animals on it is an imprecise science; however, it is OK to be imprecise, as ruminants are used to variability and are very forgiving.”

Using the QMS Ewe and Suckler Cow Nutrition and Body Condition Scoring Timelines, Trevor emphasised the critical areas where nutrition has to be right to ensure performance. He said: “Key dates are 30 days before calving or 35 days before lambing, when good nutrition to maintain a condition score of 2.5 in cattle and 3 in sheep maximises calf and lamb vigour, colostrum quality, peak lactation and ability to get back in calf and lamb.”

If tups are out on 15th November then 1st March is the key date to know that there is sufficient grass so they will not lose condition before lambing.

Trevor has seen many Scottish farmers embrace paddock or controlled grazing systems and deliver better returns from grass.

It came as a surprise to many farmers at the meetings that he advocated earlier weaning of both lambs and calves, and he pointed out that the cows milk contributes little to calf growth rate after 150 days (and 90 days for ewes). Youngstock should be weaned onto the best available grazing (12–12.5ME). After weaning, the mother’s feed intake and nutritional requirements will reduce, so priority can be given to the youngstock, hence maximising output from the grass available.

He said: “There is no good argument for weaning calves at 200 days. Weaned cows don’t need high-quality pasture. Use the cows to tidy up paddocks after the calves, because if they are grazing together, the cows will always take the best grass. If calves are weaned earlier, the cows tend to be fitter going into the winter and cost less to feed, which lifts profitability immensely. We make cows expensive to run because we feed them too much!”

He warned that cow size was also an important factor in relation to forage requirements and pointed out that an 850kg cow will consume 1.1 tonnes more dry matter annually than a 650kg cow. That grass has a cost, and if most of it is going to maintain larger cows, it won’t provide a financial benefit.

It might take a bit of practice, but Trevor also suggested aiming to lamb just earlier than peak grass production is predicted. Peak lactation sees a ewe’s highest feed demand and occurs approximately three weeks after lambing. Coinciding peak lactation with peak grass production will help ensure good utilisation of the explosive spring pasture growth. This will then help maintain pasture quality into the summer.

He said: “In reality, animal demand versus pasture quality is a constant balance and being able to manipulate the demand is key. Spring pasture quality is set up in the autumn and the summer pasture quality is set up in the spring.”

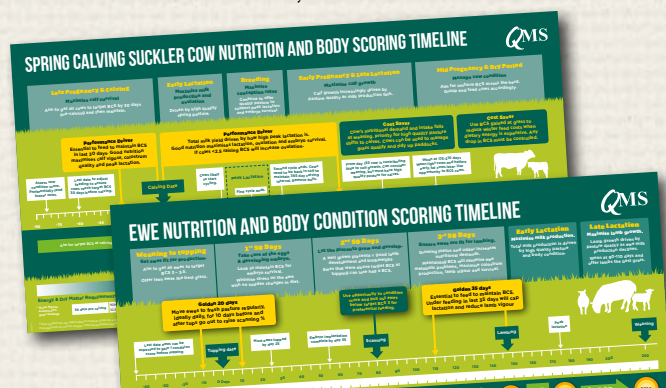
Trevor reckoned there had been an amazing change in Scottish grazing systems in the space of four years as farmers realised that the opportunity to increase profit in their flocks lay, not in improving individual performance but rather in reducing costs and increasing production per hectare. He said: “Scottish flocks are generally very high performing, but individual performance is not a profit indicator; more important are stocking rate and pasture utilisation.”

	Annual Grass Yield (T DM/ha)	Utilisation (%)	Usable Yield (T DM/ha)
Set stocking	8.0	50%	4.0
Moving stock every 4–7 days	9.2	65%	6.0
Moving stock every 1–2 days	10.0	85%	8.5

He recommended that farmers aim for at least 80% utilisation of grass, which can only be achieved by short (one to two day) rotations, which will also increase the yield of grass by up to two tonnes DM per hectare over set stocking.

There was plenty of food for thought at this latest round of Better Grazing meetings, and for some farmers it required a significant change in mindset. Trevor put it succinctly, saying: “Farmers everywhere think that genetics will solve all their problems, but genetics only provide the potential; it is how we manage the stock which unlocks the potential.”

He encouraged delegates to get started even in a small way by making larger mobs within existing fields, or dividing paddocks. In addition, he pointed out that controlled grazing can also work in an extensive system, giving examples from New Zealand of mobs of over 2,000 ewes and 50 cattle being rotated round hill farms on two-day shifts.+



To order your free copy of the cow nutrition timeline poster and/or the ewe nutrition timeline poster, phone QMS on 0131 472 4040 or email info@qmscotland.co.uk

Benefits of Improving Grassland Management

First-generation Lanarkshire farmer **Michael Shannon** has spent ten years developing and perfecting his paddock grazing system in order to make his farm more profitable.



Speaking at a Better Grazing meeting held in Perth in the autumn, he told farmers who attended that “grass is king” and not to over-complicate their systems, but to keep things simple and relevant to their own farms in order to increase production and save costs.

Michael and his wife Michelle moved to Thankerton Camp, near Biggar, in 1996 and run a 100% forage system. The farm’s 84 hectares are divided roughly into half-hectare paddocks, and Michael moves cattle every day using electric fences on a 21-day rotation.

“Once the system is set up, the cattle quickly get into the routine of moving and I can do everything myself with no other labour and no dog,” he said.



“The key is to follow the grass growth curve: graze it hard in the spring, which will improve the quality in the autumn, but be careful not to overgraze it later in the year when it will not recover.”



Michael buys native (preferably Aberdeen Angus) cross stores and finishes them on forage for his farm shop, Damn Delicious, with the surplus sold deadweight. The farm and farm shop are very much a family business, with Michelle and their eight children all helping out where they can.

He said: "There are around 200 cattle on the farm and I finish about 150 each year - two-thirds for the shop and one-third for Highland Meats. My system is not about speed of finishing; it is about profitability."

The farm also carries 280 ewes, and Michael rotationally grazes the sheep at 24 ewes with lambs per hectare, shifting them every two to three days. Even with this high stocking rate, each year he has surplus grass to make silage.

Stocking rate for the cattle is based on liveweight; at the peak in the spring it is nearly 3,000kg liveweight per hectare, dropping to 2,400kg and then 2,000kg at the end of the season.

He said: "I have never had a year when I have had enough livestock to eat all the grass at its peak growing time.

"The key is to follow the grass growth curve: graze it hard in the spring, which will improve the quality in the autumn, but be careful not to overgraze it later in the year when it will not recover."

Michael recommended the optimum time to graze is when the grass is at 10 to 12cm, and it is critical to avoid grazing it after the third day to prevent stock eating any re-growth.

He is currently achieving 600kg of liveweight per hectare and one of his targets is that, between purchase and finishing, the value of every beast he brings onto his farm must increase by £1 per day off grass alone. He calculates his summer grazing system costs 29p per head of cattle per day, while his wintering system costs 48p per head per day, including fertiliser and reseeding.

Over the winter months the cattle are strip-grazed on Swift, which is a hybrid rape/kale, with access to silage. He has recently tried fodder beet, which has increased his winter daily liveweight gain, and he has been impressed with it.

He said: "Feeding cattle kale and silage is basically a maintenance

diet where they only gain about 0.25kg per day, but the ones on fodder beet have been gaining about 0.7kg per day."

Each year, about ten hectares are taken out of grass and sown in kale, followed by spring barley undersown with grass. The first-year grass is grazed by sheep, before being grazed for up to five years by cattle.

By summer 2018 Michael plans to have 300 cattle and 300 breeding ewes on the paddock grazing system, with reduced winter numbers of 200 cattle.

He said: "With Brexit looming, I plan to make every blade of grass the best quality I can and make my 84 hectares work for me."+

QMS BETTER GRAZING PROJECT

The three-year Better Grazing project launched this summer follows the successful QMS Grazing Group project, which came to an end in the spring.

There are six regional groups around Scotland, which have the aim of helping farmers identify opportunities to improve profitability through better utilisation of grazed grass.

The new programme isn't based around a host farm. Instead there are regular farm visits to those who have already made changes to their grazing management or to new group members keen to make better use of their grass with the help and support of the rest of the group.



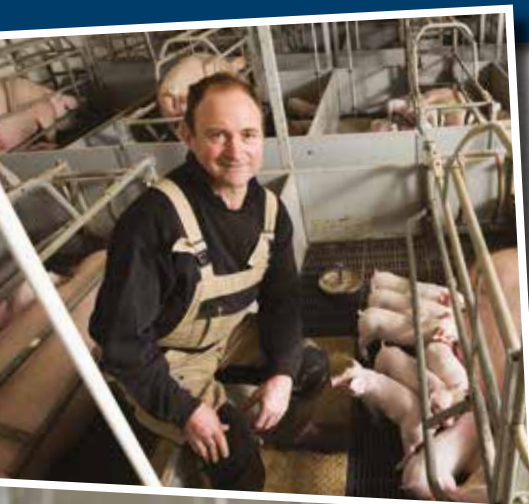
For more information about the Better Grazing project, visit www.qmscotland.co.uk/grazing



Better Grazing = Better Business

Changes Result in Reduced Piglet Mortality

The beauty of trying new ideas in a pig unit is that results can be seen and evaluated very quickly. Patrick Stephen's breeding and finishing unit, near Inverurie, became part of the Monitor Farm project in November 2016 and already it is reaping the benefits of changes in practice.



Manager Wayne Ducker and his staff of three look after 550 sows at Mill of Carden, Pitcaple, and have managed to reduce mortality rates in piglets and improve production in the last year.

Wayne explained that they were not happy with mortality rates of around 14% two years ago due to piglets with poor viability and splay legs. He said: "There are many theories as to the cause of splay legs, but we have focused on feeding sows more accurately in order to improve the piglets' viability."

They have done this by installing new electronic sow feeders and backfat testing sows, so the feeding curve can be matched to gestation and condition, with excellent results. Wayne said: "Mortality is down to about 12% and continuing to drop; we are hopeful of achieving our target of 10%."



This means that the number of pigs produced per sow per year has also improved from 28 to nearly 30.

Genetics are always improving, and the Carden unit is replacing the old JSR Genepacker 90 sows with JSR 9T females which are crossed with a Duroc terminal sire. However, Wayne finds that the feedback from the Monitor Farm meetings has led him to make management changes which have also improved production.

Meetings are held off-farm, with facilitators Grace Webster, a specialist pig vet, and George Chalmers from SAC Consulting, part of SRUC, showing videos of day-to-day practices on the unit. Wayne said: "The community group has been very forthcoming, and we have had to accept we were doing some things well but also some badly."

Project funders:



(l-r) Manager Wayne Ducker and owner Patrick Stephen.



The monitor farm project is jointly funded by Quality Meat Scotland and Opportunity North East (ONE), a private sector economic development company that aims to broaden and strengthen the regional economy through sector initiatives in food, drink and agriculture; life sciences, oil and gas; and tourism.

Wayne has found that being part of the monitor farm process has made him and Patrick look more carefully at what they are doing on the unit, and the discipline of collecting data means they can easily see the exact cost of production at each stage and make improvements. Grace said: "The focus so far has been on improving recording so Patrick and Wayne can analyse what they are doing and base decisions on fact rather than assumption."

Apart from the improvements in the farrowing house, which include providing a square of carpet in the crates for the first 48 hours, they evaluated their restricted feed versus ad lib feed systems for the finishing pigs and found the ad lib system to be better, with pigs reaching their target finishing weight on average one week faster.

The pigs are wet fed from weaning right through to finishing, with weaners on the Pocco system for the first four weeks before going onto the Hampshire wet feed system, which includes local brewery by-products.

Wayne said he was pleased with the growth rates of 556g per day from weaning to 61 days, which is in the top 10% of UK herds on the wet feed system, and a major benefit is that it is less labour intensive.

The figures from Primary Diets show that feed conversion rates are poorer than average at 1.88, but Wayne pointed out that they know the reason for this is poor trough design. As there is no lip to catch the wet feed as it is poured in, there is too much wastage, but hopefully they can invest in new troughs in the future.

"Mortality is down to about 12% and continuing to drop; we are hopeful of achieving our target of 10%."



Grace pointed out that part of the recording exercise has been to measure cost per kg gain as a key performance indicator instead of concentrating solely on daily liveweight gains. She said: "This has shown that it is not always the pigs with the best growth rates which give the best £/kg gain." She added: "Rations generally become less expensive as the pigs get older, so we have been concentrating on moving pigs onto the next ration at the optimum time, to maintain liveweight gains but also to control costs and become more efficient."

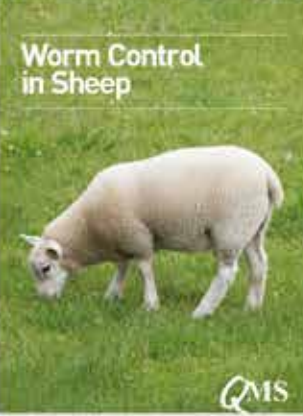
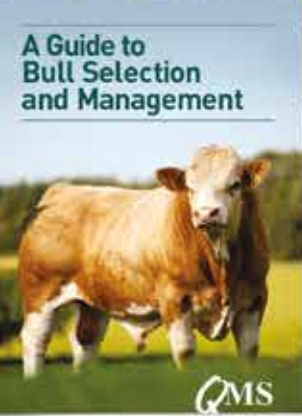
Pigs are finished at an average of 162 days at 112kg liveweight (83kg deadweight) and sold mostly through Scottish Pig Producers to Quality Pork Ltd at Brechin, of which Patrick is a director.

One of the projects currently taking place at Carden involves a fourth-year SRUC student looking into the water-to-meal ratio in wet feed to find out if there is an optimum. Wayne said: "We should have the results from this soon, and it will be interesting to see whether pigs fed a drier meal just spend more time drinking, or if they have a higher daily liveweight gain and a corresponding lower cost per kg gain."+

Weaner Growth Performance between Weaning and Moving into Finishing Unit

Average weaning weight at Mill of Carden - 7.9kg				
Average weight when moving into finishing units at Mill of Carden - 41.8kg				
	Top 10%	Average	Poor	Mill of Carden
Days	61	64	66	61
Intake (kg/day)	0.78	0.79	0.83	1.04
Daily Gain (g/day)	556	530	514	556
Feed Conversion Ratio (FCR)	1.40	1.50	1.61	1.88

We produce FREE guides to help boost livestock performance and business efficiency.
Download free of charge from www.qmscotland.co.uk/publications



Alternatively call QMS on 0131 472 4040 and request a copy to be sent to you.