

Case Study

Ian Dickson – Scalpsie, Isle of Bute



National Advice Hub
T: 0300 323 0161
E: advice@fas.scot
W: www.fas.scot



Ian farms Scalpsie alongside his father John and fiancé Lisa.

437ha total with 100ha rotationally grazed, 200ha hill and the rest in a loose grazing rotation or forage crops.

160 Saler cows selling weaned Charollais calves in October plus followers calved at 2 years old.

800 Highlander and Aberfield cross ewes plus replacements. Lambs sold finished off grass and forage crops. Growing flock of 80 herdwick ewes.

Contract rearing 56 dairy heifer calves and 30 yearling heifers.

Ian also provides grass measurements and samples as part of the [GrassCheck](#) GB programme

2020 highlights

Cows reared 100% with an average weaning weight of 300kg at 200 days. 85% calved in the 1st 6 weeks in a 9-week calving period.

All ewes were successfully all-grass-wintered without supplementary forage or concentrates with the exception of triplet bearing ewes in late pregnancy. Just 2t of ewe nuts used in total.

Ewes reared at 166% with an average weaning weight of 33kg. 1000 lambs finished off grass alone by the end of October.

Approach to grazing management

Rotational Grazing Management

Ian has rotationally grazed the home block for 5 years now. In the 1st year Ian trailed 200 ewes with twins on a rotation. Lambs on rotation were 1.5kgs heavier than their set stocked counterparts after 8 weeks. This gave Ian the confidence to invest in infrastructure and rotationally graze the farm.

The home block is set up into 6 rotations, 3 sheep and 3 cattle. Each rotation is built around 7 paddocks of 1.5-2.5ha with stock moved every ~3 days to give a rest period of ~21 days. Rest period is extended as the season progresses with silage ground or neighbouring fields taken into rotation.

Sheep enter a paddock at 2800kgDM/ha and cattle at 3500kgDM/ha and graze down to 1500kgDm/ha (5cm). On the first post-lambing rotation in May, Ian is careful to make sure that target residual is achieved to maintain grass quality later in the season. However, Ian says that he is not as concerned with hitting target residual in later rotations with ewes and lambs, so to avoid pushing lambs to consume poorer quality feed which impacts growth rates.

The heavier land doesn't have the same level of infrastructure in terms of water and electric, so a looser rotation is employed with stock moved every 5-7 days with flexibility depending on field and mob size. Excess grass allows fields to be taken out of rotation on this block to build up covers for deferred grazing later in the season.

2020 adaptations

Drought conditions during May confounded by the dry sandy soils of the home block meant that grass growth on rotation was well below average with post-lambing AFC at just <1500kg/DM/ha.

To reduce stocking density and build covers, ewes rearing singles were moved off to heavier ground and the decision was made to not make 1st cut silage and graze these fields. Ian notes that they have 400 bales less than previous years but that an increase in deferred grazing and brassica crops should fill the feed gap. This combined with rain eventually falling late May allowed covers to build back up to >2100kg/DM/ha going into June.

Forage crops

Forage crops are used as a break crop for reseeding and late autumn/winter feeding. 12ha of redstart and swift are in the ground this year which will be used to finish all remaining lambs and feed ~50 1st calvers and mature cows under target body condition score (BCS) 3.5, Ian's target for those on deferred grazing, from November through into the new year. Ian notes that brassica crops are an effective feed for maintaining condition without supplementary feed.

Lamb growth rates are superior on the forage crops than late autumn grazing. Last year 200 38kg lambs were finished off swift in November in just 3 weeks to an average carcass weight of 19kgs.

Deferred grazing on hill

All mature cows are out-wintered which is a significant cost saving, with only bulls, replacement and dairy heifers now housed.

Mature cows graze excess grass deferred on the in-bye from weaning in October before going onto deferred grazing on the hill in November, which has on been lightly grazed during the summer with covers >4000kgDm/ha, which takes them through into the New Year. Cattle are then fed silage on coastal ground through to calving.

See Ian's Vlog Series [here](#).



For more from our Vloggers, please go to [Fas.scot/grassland](https://fas.scot/grassland). We thank them all for sharing their lessons and success stories through the 2020 grazing season. For more livestock and grassland management articles, factsheets, videos and podcasts, please see fas.scot.