



**LAMBING AT SHEEP FARM OF THE YEAR**

FAS TV is back for season 5!

FAS TV is back, and we are looking forward to getting back out and about on farms and crofts across Scotland.

We kick start the season off with a visit to Stewart and Lorna Shaw at Smailholm Mains, AgriScot Sheep farm of the year in 2024. We visit during lambing time to hear from Stewart about their set up to produce high quality fat lambs and a cross ewe lamb for selling on as breeding stock. Lorna fills us in on the importance of getting the nutrition right on a livestock farm and the changes she's helped make on the family farm.

Watch our first episode by scanning the QR code below, or visit www.youtube.com/fasscot



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Managing grass swards through dry conditions

When compared to the frequency of days in which it rained in 2024 it has been a very different year and it poses very different challenges. The rainfall across the UK for winter 2025 was on average 90% of the average annual rainfall from 1991-2020. Rainfall in March and April was typically 49% of the average annual rainfall from 1991-2020. The rain has arrived for most but there will be a period of recovery for those crops and swards affected and perhaps already some forage deficit concerns for the coming winter.

- Priorities**

There are a number of things you should be prioritising to help your sward recover.
- Consider Supplementation**

Ensure livestock feed demands are being met which may require supplementary feed where swards have been burnt off or growth is far slower than demand.
- Give Time to Recover**

When grass is grazed below the target height of 4-5cm the plant must use more energy from its root reserves to produce leaf area to then photosynthesise, slowing down recovery and reducing root growth. This also places significant stress on the plant. Moving stock off fields at target residual 4-5cm will ensure the plant is given time to recover. If possible close off the fields worst affected as livestock will continually seek out the freshest grass leaves, slowing recovery further.
- Don't Over-Apply Nutrients**

Nutrients supplied through synthetic fertiliser or organic manure application over the previous few months will not have been taken up by plants with slow growth due to restricted water. These nutrients will still be in the soil and available for uptake as plants start growing again so caution should be given to over applying nutrient due to risk of losses to the environment.
- Consider Topping Pastures**

A grass plant's default response to stress, such as drought, is to flower and set seed. This poses a challenge in providing quality forage for grazing livestock or making high quality leafy silage. As swards recover topping of pastures to remove the stemmy material will help to reset residuals. Rotational grazing to reduce the amount of selective grazing and provide the rest which will give those developing leaves time to grow. There is also value in resisting the urge to top immediately to leave a layer of protection for the soil, but this must be balanced with grass growth rates, pasture quality and feed demands.
- Consider Cutting Early**

Grass heading dates have been earlier this year due to the warmer, drier conditions but the added stress from a lack of rainfall will also push grass plants to go to seed earlier. This will affect silage quality and consequently have an impact on winter feed budgets. Consider whether you need the quality for feed requirements so should cut earlier before too much of the crop has gone to seed. A change from 25% of a silage sward with seed heads emerged to 50% of the crop can decrease the metabolisable energy from 11.5 MJ/kg DM to 10.5 MJ/kg DM. Energy which will need to be replaced in the winter ration.

Assemble a Feed Budget

There is still plenty of summer in front of us, but it is wise to identify any possible gaps early and make an alternative plan. Prepare a feed budget to assess what your winter feed requirements are and how you can achieve this in a cost-effective way.

Lorna Galloway, SAC Consulting



Free Events

At the Farm Advisory Service we run a range of events both online and in-person.

Visit www.fas.scot/events to sign up or contact the advice line and we'll help you get booked on.

- Royal Highland Show Women in Agriculture Drinks Reception**

Ingliston, 20th June, 5:30pm - 7:00pm
- Lower Mill of Tynet Farm Organics Walk**

Buckie, 23rd June, 2:00pm - 4:00pm
- Farm Wildlife Walks - Fife**

Glenrothes, 25th June, 10:00am - 1:00pm
- Crop Trials Evenings**

Lothians, 24th June, 5:00pm - 9:00pm

Aberdeenshire, 26th June, 6:00pm - 9:00pm

Lanark, 30th June, 6:00pm - 9:00pm

Data driven flock decision making

Michelle Bruce is farming 700 ewes at Meikle Tillyeve, near Ellon. She collects data from the flock throughout the year, using a handheld stock recorder. This allows her to capture key data at handling times, to then analyse and make flock decisions, to increase the productivity of the flock for the future. The aim of the flock is to have a maternal ewe, rearing two lambs, and weaning 100% of her body weight annually.



The business breeds their replacements from their "A Flock". This is made up of the ewes, who consistently wean 100% of their body weight. If a ewe does not wean 100% of her body weight, she will be downgraded to the B Flock. Once in the B Flock she will remain here and will not be upgraded to the A Flock. If a ewe is downgraded, then her ewe lamb will not be retained in the flock.

Data Capture at Weaning

With weaning approaching, the lambs will be weighed, giving Michelle the knowledge of the ewe's performance to weaning. Using parameters such as lamb weaning weight, ewe weaning efficiency, weaning %, lamb deaths from tagging to weaning, ewes scanned not in lamb and ewes lost lambs, will allow for decisions to be made for the next breeding year, including who remains in the A flock, and the top choice for the following year.

- Tips For Monitoring Your Own Flock Performance**
- Do analysis after weaning and in advance of tupping
 - Identify what data is important to your system and what you want to track (weaning weight, weaning efficiency etc)
 - Gather data at multiple points for more accuracy
 - Find a method of data recording that suits your system

Vlog Series

FAS has followed Michelle and two other farmers from weaning 2024 to lambing 2025, read the full case study and watch her journey at: www.fas.scot/article/monitoring-flock-performance-vlogs/

Kirsten Williams, SAC Consulting

For further information, articles, videos and more visit our website at www.fas.scot



National Advice Hub

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

If you need advice on any topic, the Farm Advisory Service can help

Advice line

For free telephone advice on a wide variety of topics, including the Whole Farm Plan, cross compliance, water framework directive, and other technical issues, call us on **0300 3232 0161** or email advice@fas.scot. The advice line operates between 9 am–5 pm Monday to Friday.

Funded advice and grants

Integrated Land Management Plans (ILMP). Up to £2,000 of funding is available for you to commission an adviser to undertake a confidential assessment of your business and develop a step-by-step action plan.

Specialist advice. Get support to take a deeper look at specific issues of concern or interest. You are eligible to receive specialist advice for two topics with £1,600 of funding per topic (see www.fas.scot/specialist-advice).

Mentoring for new entrants. If you are new to farming, you can receive up to **four days of FREE**, one-to-one Mentoring support from an experienced farmer or crofter.

Online

More information can be found at www.fas.scot/advice-grants/