

News from the Farm Advisory Service:



Thrill of the Hill podcast: Staggering Good - Raising the profile of venison in Scotland

Venison, an underappreciated meat in Scotland?

Despite the abundance of deer in Scotland, farmed and wild, venison has never been a staple of the Scottish diet. Scottish Government reports that the amount of farmed venison in Scotland increased by around 4.9% on the last five year average, but the Venison Advisory Service suggests that accounts for only 3% of national production, with the remainder coming from wild venison. With plentiful supplies of venison on our hills, could we be making more of it?

In this episode Anona Gow discusses the virtues of venison, its nutritional value, cooking options, perception of the sector and reflects on her new book, The Venison Kitchen.

Find our episode by using QR code below, or visit www.fas.scot/sounds



Turning out heifers, fed not forgotten

Nutritious spring grass is an effective tool for promoting growth in youngstock, supporting growth rates of up to 1kg/day. Grazing heifers can reduce rearing costs and lessens pressure on forage and straw stocks. To achieve the desired growth rates for calving at 24 months, effective grassland management and knowing when to target supplementary feeding are essential.

Daily liveweight gain (DLWG) targets are a key assessor of heifer development. Calves need to be averaging 0.75-0.8kg/day to be on target for calving at 24 months (assuming a 700kg mature body weight). Heifers should reach 55-60% of their expected adult body weight in preparation for their first service at 14-15 months and be around 85-90% of their adult body weight by 22 months.

Monitoring growth is desirable but not always practical. At a minimum, weigh before turnout, midway through grazing, and at housing to calculate DLWG. Monthly weighing allows detection of poorer growth rates, enabling corrective feeding. Alternatively, measuring wither height can help monitor growth if weighing isn't feasible. Target weights and wither heights for Holstein-Friesians are noted below but depend on mature body weight.

Heifer age (months)	Target weight (kg)	Target wither height (cm)
3-4	100-125	85-95
6-8	170-220	100-105
14-15	360-400	115-125
24	585	125-135

Source: CAFRE

Young heifers will benefit from being fed supplementary concentrates in their first grazing season, particularly after turnout and when pasture quality declines. Turning the youngstock out with access to concentrates or their housed ration can help prevent summer scour syndrome (SSC), which is most commonly seen in calves under 6 months old but can be an issue up to 12 months of age.

For rotational grazing, heifers should graze pastures with a pre-grazing cover of 2400-2800kg DM/ha or a sward height no higher than 4 inches (10 cm). Grass quality will suffer if the group cannot graze down to the desired residual of 1500kg DM/ha or a sward height of 1.5inches/4cm for youngstock. If the heifers cannot keep up with grass growth, close a paddock for silage production or top the pasture after moving the heifers to allow for a leafy regrowth.

Tips for rearing heifers at grass:

- Monitor growth rates throughout the season to ensure heifers are on track for service and calving at 24 months.
- Maintain grass quality and measure sward height with a plate metre.
- Supplement the heifers with their housed ration or concentrates to ease the transition to grass and reduce the risk of SSC.
- Monitor the heifers for signs of a parasite burden. Consider utilising the Preparing for Sustainable Farming, animal health and welfare intervention funding to investigate if a parasite burden is present and receive veterinary advice on the best treatment options.
- Consider utilising FAS specialist advice funding to create tailor made heifer rations, including grazing plans. Visit www.fas.scot/specialist-advice or call **0300 323 0161** for more information.

Keira Sannachan, SAC Consulting

This article is part of the March edition of Milk Manager News. Read our full publication at: www.fas.scot/publication/milk-manager-news-march-2025/



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.

Benchmarking - Cost of Production
Stranraer, 24th March, 6:00pm - 8:00pm

Women in Agriculture Orkney - Soils & Seeds
Kirkwall, 3rd April, 7:30pm - 9:00pm

Biodiversity Audits - Help with Habitat Mapping
Online, 26th March, 7:30pm - 8:30pm

Sheep worrying during lambing time



Reports of dog attacks on sheep seem to be a common occurrence in the media. These dog attacks can result in death of the ewe and lambs being carried or serious injury, and can be prevented by dog owners being responsible in the countryside. Worrying of sheep has serious implications to animal welfare, the farmers finances, but also results in added emotional stress of farmers who find dead or injured stock during what is an already stressful period in the farming calendar.

The National Sheep Association (NSA) reported 76% of farmers surveyed in their 2022 annual survey, had reported an increase in dog attacks.

To assist in reducing the problem, The Dogs (protection of Livestock (Amendment) (Scotland) Act 2021, came into force in November 2021, where owners of dogs worrying livestock can be fined up to £40,000 or sent to prison for 12 months. As land managers and livestock farmers, there are limited options to help reduce livestock worrying, however some options may be as follows.

- Check fencing along areas where people walk dogs and ensure there are no holes or gaps.
- Identify fields surrounding public walkways, could they be used for cutting silage or growing forage crops instead of lambing sheep?
- Signage is another preventative tool for sheep farmers. Warning people that there are sheep and young lambs in fields may seem obvious, but increasing awareness is important. Especially as we approach lighter nights and Easter when many people are likely to be taking short breaks and walks in the countryside.

The NSA have a number of signs, which can be downloaded free from their website for farmers to display on footpaths and gates.



It is important that if farmers do find a dog worrying sheep, to report it to the police.

More information can be found at: nationalsheep.org.uk/for-the-public/culture/sheep-worrying/

Scotland's Farm Advisory Service is funded by the Scottish Government. It is delivered by SAC Consulting, part of Scotland's Rural College, and Ricardo Energy and Environment.



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

If you need more advice on any topic, the Farm Advisory Service has a range of support and help available:

Advice line

For free telephone advice on a wide variety of topics including cross compliance, water framework directive requirements, climate change and other technical issues call us on **0300 323 0161** or email advice@fas.scot. The advice line operates between 9am and 5pm Monday to Friday.

Bespoke Advice and Grants

FAS can also help you to increase the profitability and sustainability of your farming business through Scottish Government grants including Integrated Land Management Plans (ILMPs) – worth up to £2,000.

The ILMP will identify opportunities and cost savings for your business, based on an independent and confidential assessment of your business by an experienced farm business adviser of your choosing. As part of your plan you can choose to benefit from up to two further specialist advice plans.

Online

Our website contains articles, videos and much more at www.fas.scot



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