

Case study

Establishing a Sustainable Beef Enterprise with ILMP Support

Leveraging FAS advisors and the Integrated Land Management Plan to build a resilient family-run beef farm



Name: **Lee Thomson, D & I Thomson**

Lee was inspired to start his own small, sustainable beef farm to give his children a healthier countryside upbringing and reconnect with the lifestyle he grew up in. The support from FAS through an Integrated Land Management Plan (ILMP) provided him with a vital foundation for planning, funding, and long-term sustainability.

What inspired you, as a new entrant, to pursue farming?

Both my wife and I come from farming families. She grew up on her parents' beef farm, located about a mile from where we now live. I was raised on the Island of South Walls and spent much of my youth helping and working on the farms of relatives and friends, so farming has always been a significant part of our lives.

We are now a professional couple – a General Practitioner and a Marine Engineer – with a young family. Although we had been living in Kirkwall, it became clear that our children were much happier in the countryside. When the farm came up for sale, we saw it as the perfect opportunity to give our family a more rewarding and fulfilling lifestyle.

What were your initial goals or vision for your farm?

We chose to focus on building a small, sustainable, family-run farm that our family could grow with – something manageable in size yet flexible enough to fit around our professions. The key objectives were to provide a healthier upbringing for our children, allowing them to have a similar connection to the lifestyle in which we grew up, while also producing high-quality beef in a low-stress, well-managed environment.

“From a new entrant perspective, the ILMP has been invaluable, and I’m incredibly grateful that he pointed us in that direction.”



Why did you apply for ILMP?

I must confess, I was unaware of the ILMP until Graham, our advisor, brought it to my attention. He suggested that we do it, as it would provide a good base to work from in terms of understanding our options regarding objectives and funding, and how we should approach building the farm. From a new entrant perspective, the ILMP has been invaluable, and I'm incredibly grateful that he pointed us in that direction.

How did your advisor help you in these early stages of your business?

Our advisor advised us on setting realistic and achievable targets, explaining everything in a concise and straightforward manner. He took what was a very steep learning curve and significantly flattened it.

"He took what was a very steep learning curve and significantly flattened it."

What benefits do you anticipate for your business as a result of having the ILMP?

The ILMP is an incredibly informative document. It provides far more information than I ever expected and has given us a clear understanding of our current business position, highlighting our strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities for growth. It supports long-term planning by helping set realistic goals and prioritise actions, while also improving financial performance through cost analysis and efficiency gains.

Importantly, it enhances environmental practices by assessing land use, soil health, and biodiversity, ensuring sustainability is built into our approach. Working with accredited advisers has provided us with tailored expertise, and the plan also enhances our applications for grants and funding. Overall, the ILMP has become a vital tool for guiding both immediate improvements and future development.

"Overall, the ILMP has become a vital tool for guiding both immediate improvements and future development."

Would you recommend SA/ILMP to other new entrants?

100%! Not only does it advise and set out clear goals and objectives, but there is also more information in the ILMP than I ever could have imagined. I doubt I would have ever managed to research and collate it myself. I will continue to use it as a reference for years to come.

For further information about the support available, please visit www.fas.scot

Or contact us
T: 0300 323 0161
E: advice@fas.scot

