



New Start to Agriculture Factsheet – Supplying the Buyers

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This factsheet aims to highlight what buyers of cattle and sheep are looking for in the animals coming from farms in the West Coast of Scotland.

It is designed to give new entrants and new starts into agriculture information on different areas to consider when setting up their business including breed of stock, age of stock at selling and what to expect when your animals go to market.

Breeds

When considering the breed of cattle or sheep for your business, it is important to think about the final product and carcass of the animal. The breed of cattle and sheep that come out of the West Coast of Scotland will be different to other areas of Scotland due to a variety of factors, therefore you need to think about your farming system and what breed would work well for your business.

Animals coming out the West Coast tend to be the native, hardier breeds like Angus, Highland or Scottish Blackface whose carcasses do not grade as well as the Continental breeds. An option for West Coast farmers is crossing these native breeds with a continental breed which has a better carcass conformation thus improving the final product. It is all about managing and finding a balance of what suits your farming system and what will produce the best final product. If using Angus or Shorthorns for premiums, having the bulls as registered sires can be advantageous.



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Selling cattle and sheep

Prime cattle are typically finished at 30 months, so it is important to consider what age to sell your cattle as stores. From the West Coast of Scotland, stores are typically sold between 8 to 12 months of age as this gives the buyer time to finish the cattle. Remember that the animal may potentially go onto 2 or 3 more holdings before slaughter. Age is the first thing buyers will be looking at when the cattle enter the ring as they need to consider how the amount of time, they have to finish the animal.

West Coast farmers typically sell their suckler calves in the autumn sales whilst lambs will be sold from the end of summer through the autumn months depending on their breed. Presentation of your animals is important; it is an opportunity for you to showcase your livestock and shows that you are proud of the animal that you are selling. Presentation can include clipping your calves, however it is key to not over clip particularly breeds that are hairy. For both calves and lambs, you can consider giving the animals some concentrate in the run up to the sale to keep their condition and continue their growth.

When selling your cattle or lambs, ideally batches of stock are better than selling them individually through the ring. Although, if you only have small numbers this may be difficult for you to achieve but it is best to try and avoid selling cattle and lambs as individuals. The ring looks better when it is full of your store cattle or lambs which is more appealing to the buyer. If sold singly, the buyer may not bid as far as they would if it was a batch of animals. Luck penny, definitely encourages buyers to bid on your stock, a tradition which has been lost with Covid as sellers are not able to be in the market.

A sale report can be a deceiving as it is highlighting the best of the best from the day, important to understand where your stock are compared to other stock and that you may not get those high prices seen in the reports. It's also important to note what breed of cattle or lambs are being reported as this will impact the prices seen in the report, for example a Beltex lamb will average higher in price than a Scottish Blackface lamb.

Selling through the ring, it is having the eyes of the buyers around the ring looking at your animals which means there is more chance of getting more bids which can increase the price. It's a chance to showcase your stock which you have worked hard to get to the stage of selling. Certain buyers will come back each year to buy from the same farms as they know how the animals will do on their farm for finishing. Your first sale is your opportunity to get into the buyers books as they will remember how your animals grow on their farm.

Travelling of your animals to market will mean there is a weight loss due to the stress of travel and change of scenery. Typically it may be a couple of kilogram's for cattle, rumen fill will also be lower if your animals have gone straight from farm to market on the same day. If your animals are travelling a distance, there may be the option of putting them into the paddocks or pens at the market the night before the sale. This allows the animals to settle into their new surroundings and gives them a chance to eat some silage or hay prior to going through the ring. Typically, animals will go into the market the day before the sale particularly when the animals are being sold in the Stirling area. If you have a small number of animals going to market, consider the option of using a transport company that will be picking up animals from your area.



When to sell your cattle?

At the spring sales, buyers are looking for cattle that will go straight out onto the grass and thrive, the native, hardier and outwintered cattle are very attractive to buyers at these sales. Farmers in the West Coast of Scotland, typically send store calves to the autumn sales to reduce feed and bedding costs throughout the winter months. Buyers are attracted to these calves as they know that the calves will go onto thrive throughout the winter and reach their target growth rates. Similarly, they buyers may prefer to buy these calves in the autumn as they have come off grass so will adapt quickly to their preferred feeding, for example the calves may go onto a total mixed ration (TMR) diet which is unlikely to be fed on a West Coast system.

Finished stock

Important to understand the next part of the process even though stock out of the West Coast of Scotland will mainly be sold as store rather than finished animals. Buyers need to produce beef and lamb that meets the market specifications which includes fat cover, fat colour, toughness, and shelf life. All of these factors can influence the quality of the final product. Killing out percentage is important to understand as it determines how much of the carcase is saleable and this is dependent on breed for both cattle and sheep.

- **Prime – finished stock, these will go straight into the food chain**
- **Store – farmers buying cattle and lambs to take through to the prime stage**
- **Store cattle should be sold between 8 to 12 months, this gives the next buyer plenty of time for the cattle to grow and thrive**
- **Store lambs can be sold straight off their mothers at 3 to 4 months of age which again gives the buyer plenty of time for the lambs to grow and thrive**
- **Reach out to your auctioneer, they are all about a good working relationship and will give advice on when to sell the animals. It's all about building up a relationship with the auctioneer, buyers and market.**
- **Luck penny for the buyer, buyers speaking to the seller to find out information about the animals.**

