

Graze debate 2022 –

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Farm Facts

- Organic since 1998
- 95 ha (235 acres) cultivatable land and 110 ha (270 acres) hill ground
- Soils maintained at 6.2–6.5 pH. Phosphorus and Potassium are monitored but are staying on target.
- 70 Luing cows
- Finishes 35 homebred youngstock (finishing weight 285kg)
- Finishes 80 Angus cross brought on in June (finishing weight 310kg).
- Majority sold for slaughter by 19 months
- Cow wintering cost is £75/head including rent and some barley
- 18t of barley and rocksalt – only bought in inputs, except for fuel.



Herd Management

- Six-week bulling – 95% in calf. 81% calved in 21 days, all calved by 35 days.
- 9–10 calf crops per cow.
- Six weeks pre calving the heifers weighed 395kg and cows weighed 590kg. At scanning cows weighed 605kg.
- Use an Angus bull over the older cows (22) to increase average calf weaning weight. The progeny will be easier finished than pure luings with a better kill out percentage.

Key challenges

- Organic input costs
- Youngstock winter performance; wintering of weaned calves on forage crops has led to varied results
- Tight feed supply in Spring – the bought in steers often come in May and the cows come down from the hill pre-calving at the end of March, past slow spring grass growth has made management challenging at this time

Grazing Management

All cattle start grazing the in-bye land from mid-April, moved every 2–3 days through electric fenced paddocks and grass is given an 18–21 day rest period. A multi-species grassland mixture (Watsons Seeds Fyvie™ plus Plantain and Chicory. NZ Plantain varieties trialled for persistency and palatability) is sown under a barley/oats and peas wholecrop to maintain high quality grassland for finishing stock whilst producing winter fodder.



Growing steers rotationally grazed on multi species swards will average 1.3kg liveweight per day over the grazing season.

Deferred grazing on hill

Moving from grazing bare during the summer months (previous tenant) to deferred grazing for the winter months has benefited the Orchids and wildlife. Ground nesting birds will benefit from less disturbance and longer grass. The business benefits from reduced wintering cost.

From mid-February, the heifers are split from the herd to put on to better grazing with hard feed.



Cows and heifers are put to the hill deferred grazing over the winter; Mid-November to end March (except incalf heifers, older cows and twins); Cows will move from body condition score 3.5 to 2.5 during this time.

Other mutually beneficial practises

All field boundaries are lined with hedgerows except two, which are due to be done hopefully with support from AECS funding. 8km of hedgerows put in in the last 25 years, 250 m laid in the last two years. These will be more sustainable, long term livestock barriers than fencing as the stops keep rotting on fences.

Hedgerows laid in February with fencing either side will benefit the nesting birds and invertebrates. Hawthorne will not flower during year of cutting, therefore better to stagger the cutting to benefit pollinators if possible.



The high value area is the grassland fenced along the hedgerows; this will offer foraging for pollinators more than the hedgerows themselves.