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News release

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*For immediate use*

**Finishing beef bulls at grass cuts costs at Deeside Monitor Farm**

Farmers from across Scotland this week came to hear how [Deeside Monitor Farmers](https://www.monitorfarms.co.uk/farm/deeside-monitor-farm/) Duncan and Claire Morrison are finishing their mainly Stabiliser beef bulls at grass in a ground-breaking trial at Upper Ingliston farm near Inverurie.

Visitors at the Monitor Farm summer open meeting heard how last year’s high feed prices had made Duncan and Claire consider whether there was a more cost-effective option than intensive finishing indoors.

Duncan said: “We got the idea from our experience with our breeding bulls, which we bring to sale off grass. They do really well, and the few which don’t make breeding spec have finished at a good weight and before the 16-month deadline.”

Key to his system is rotational paddock grazing on high quality grass – analysis in May showed it had a metabolisable energy (ME) of 12.7MJ/kg DM and 27.1% protein. The swards they feed on are mainly ryegrass with red and white clover and a small amount of plantain and chicory. Bulls were split into two groups at turnout in April; those more than 350kg and those weighing less than that. They move paddocks every two days or so.

Duncan continued: “We started feeding a little concentrate in February, about 1kg/head, and have continued this in the field, using an all-terrain (ATV) and snacker. We’re just moving from feeding a roll to introducing some barley as the higher starch will help them finish.”

Average daily liveweight gain at grass has exceeded 2kg/day for most of the bulls, said Kirsten Williams, senior sheep and beef consultant with SAC. She has costed the system using fair assumptions, and while output/head may be slightly less due to potentially lower finishing weights, variable costs look set to fall from £712/head to £387/head. This gives a speculative gross margin of £466/head from finishing these bulls at grass compared with last year’s margin of £214/head finishing intensively inside; a £252/head additional return at grass.

However, both Kirsten and Duncan are keen to wait until the bulls have been finished and slaughtered before coming to a final conclusion. Kirsten cautioned that the killing out percentage may be less off grass. Kirsten said: “We have done some sensitivity analysis looking at 50% killing out versus 54%, and even so, it still leaves a better gross margin - £347/head - compared to last year’s intensive system.”

Duncan is a keen user of Farmax grazing software, using it to plan grazing rotations, as well as being able to assess different scenarios. Its use helped give confidence that they had enough quality pasture to finish bulls at grass, and so could also run steers at grass if processor requirements change in future.

He added: “I am really pleased with how this project has gone, and the weight gain so far has been very good, so I am cautiously optimistic. But I would caveat this by adding that we are not finished yet, and will need to see how they grade.” A trial update will be provided once the cattle are processed and final costs and prices are known.

Other speakers at the event included Gregor Welsh from SoilEssentials, talking about the SKAi precision spot-spraying system, which may help Duncan and Claire tackle docks while protecting mixed species swards and reducing spray costs and time. Lanarkshire farmer Michael Shannon discussed how he finishes all his cattle off grass and forage crops, plus how he markets his livestock.

Jill Hunter, beef and sheep nutritionist for Harbro, covered how finishing cattle can be managed at grass and how best to transition onto feed, and Highland Meats buyer Stuart Annand explained what he looks for in finishing cattle, and how farmers can optimise the price they receive.

Peter Beattie, Monitor Farm regional adviser, said: “It was great to see almost 100 farmers from across Scotland come to hear about Duncan and Claire’s bull beef project and its impact on costs. Our other speakers all fed into this focus on making the most of forage and the ability to make greater use of it for finishing.

“Our thanks to Duncan and Claire for opening their farm gates and all of those involved in making the event a success – including the well-received Scotch beef burgers from the local Louise’s Farm Kitchen.

**Ends**

*Photo captions:*

1. *Bulls finishing at grass on the Deeside Monitor Farm.*
2. *Duncan and Claire Morrison's bull finishing trial attracted plenty of interest*

**Notes to editors:**

About Monitor Farm Scotland:

· The Monitor Farm Scotland programme is managed by Quality Meat Scotland with support from AHDB.

· The programme is fully funded by the Scottish Government Knowledge Transfer Innovation Fund.

· The nine farms chosen to take part in this four-year programme reflect the diverse tapestry of livestock and mixed farming across Scotland.

· The aim of the programme is to help to farms reach full economic, social, and environmental sustainability by optimising production.

· The programme is farmer led and farmer driven with support from specialists and experts to assess farm performance, explore opportunities, and develop solutions to the challenges faced.

· Each Monitor Farm will be steered by a management group of 10 to 12 farming businesses with support from the local community group.

· The learnings and the example set by Monitor farms aims to benefit farmers across the whole of Scotland.

· The programme is managed by an in-house delivery team, who are funded through the programme and managed by QMS.

· For more information visit: https://www.monitorfarms.co.uk/

About QMS:

QMS is the public body responsible for promoting the PGI labelled Scotch Beef and Scotch Lamb brands in the UK and abroad and also promoting Scottish pork products under the Specially Selected Pork logo.

Please note that the use of the word Scotch in the Scotch Beef PGI and Scotch Lamb PGI brands is correct and should not be substituted for an alternative such as Scots or Scottish. The history of the use of the word Scotch in this way, traces back to the 18th century.

QMS also helps the Scottish red meat sector improve its sustainability, efficiency and profitability and maximise its contribution to Scotland's economy.

The quality assurance schemes run by QMS cover more than 90% of livestock farmed for red meat in Scotland. They offer consumers in the UK and overseas the legal guarantee that the meat they buy has come from animals that have spent their whole lives being raised to some of the world’s strictest welfare standards.

Scotland’s beef, lamb and pork producers make an important contribution to the country’s economic, social and environmental sustainability, contributing over £2 billion to the annual GDP of Scotland and supporting around 50,000 jobs (many in fragile rural areas) in the farming, agricultural supply and processing sectors.

For more information visit www.qmscotland.co.uk or follow QMS on Facebook or Twitter.