

## LIFELINE CUTS FEED BILL FOR DUNMAGLASS SHEPHERD

Some Highland estates see farming almost as a by-product of their sporting enterprises, but the Hayward family's Dunmaglass Estate near Fort Augustus on the south side of Loch Ness runs a successful farming business alongside a thriving grouse moor.

Farm manager, Jimmy Mills has been at the 13,000 acre estate for 12 years and is responsible for 800 ewes and 70 suckler cows. Dunmaglass is nearly all hill ground, with very little in-bye land, although after the annual Rock Ness concert is over, he has access to the grazing at Clune Farm on the banks of the loch where he over-winters his cross ewe lambs.

The flock of 600 Blackface ewes have four crops of lambs to the Blackface tup and their fifth to the Berrichon du Cher to breed cross ewes, which are then tupped by the Beltex and the progeny fattened. "The biggest problem with the Blackies in this area is they become broken-mouthed early, so four crops of lambs on the hill is enough for them," Jimmy says.

The Berrichon cross ewes now number about 100 and run with 100 Cheviot ewes, which are being phased out as more crosses come through. Jimmy started using Rumenco Lifeline Lamb and Ewe buckets on the Cheviot and cross ewe flock five or six years ago and reckons he has seen a big improvement in lambing percentages and feed costs.

"I used to buy in about 22 tonnes of cobs for the 200 ewes, feeding them just over 2lbs per head per day, but since using the buckets I only have to buy in about 16 or 17 tonnes and feed them 1.25lbs per head per day. This is a significant financial saving."

Jimmy has also increased the lambing percentage on this flock from around 150% to an average ranging from 176 to 183%. He says that not only were there more lambs, but their survival rate was better. "The biggest difference is how quickly they get up and suck and I also think the ewes have more milk."

The Beltex cross lambs are born from 6<sup>th</sup> April onwards and the first are sold off their mothers by the beginning of August with all finished off grass by the end of October.

Last year was the first time he used Lifeline for the Blackfaces on the hill and he said it was too early to say how successful it had been but he was expecting similar results. He has already increased the lambing percentage a little to about 138%, but for ewes that spend their life on a heather hill, it is tough to get it much higher.

He was delighted, however, with the way the Blackface ewes took to the buckets and was relieved that not too much of the product was lost to deer. "Deer numbers are well down on the estate the last couple of years, which makes it viable to put buckets on the hill; if hinds get a taste for something, they can be a nightmare!"

Normally the Blackface lambs are finished off grass and hoppers throughout the winter but this year there was a lack of grass and Jimmy decided to sell them all store at United Auctions in Stirling in November where they averaged £44.80. It turned out to be an excellent decision as the price for prime lambs has recently collapsed.

Jimmy works closely with the gamekeepers on the estate. He has few problems with ticks on his lambs and only treats the ewes three or four times a year, as well as dipping in the summer.

The farm also holds 70 Simmental and Limousin cross suckler cows which are crossed with a British Blue bull and the calves sold at six months old at Dingwall Mart. Last year he was thrilled when Mark Munro of Invercarron bought one of his best calves for the show ring. 'Thunderthighs' went on to be overall champion at the Christmas Classic show at Thainstone.

Two-thirds of the herd is spring calving with the rest calving in the autumn and Jimmy is currently trying out the Lifeline Pre-calver product on his spring calvers. "If it works as well for the cows and calves as it has done for the ewes and lambs, I will be delighted."

- ends -