

Open Day at Low Arvie, Corsock, Castle Douglas

By kind permission of Mike and June Taylor

Thursday 6th September 2018

June and Mike Taylor moved their Glentyne fold of Highland cattle and Whitebred Shorthorns to Low Arvie in 2017 after 28 years on the island of Arran. Mike and June first became interested in Whitebred Shorthorns about 4 years ago following a visit to an Open Day held near New Luce, Stranraer.

They were looking for a breed to cross with some of their Highland cattle to add value to the progeny without losing ease of calving, hardiness and ability to thrive on low quality pasture. They were very impressed with what they saw at New Luce and have bought a Whitebred Shorthorn bull and 10 pure Whitebred heifers at the Association sales in Carlisle over the last 3 years. Their pure Whitebred female numbers expanded to 17 this spring with the purchase of 7 in-calf cows from the [Forestry Commission at Loch Katrine](#).

A good turnout of 50+ Whitebred Shorthorn members and commercial suckled calf producers gathered at Low Arvie, Corsock, Castle Douglas in glorious sunshine to discuss the use of Whitebred Shorthorn bulls as maternal sires to improve the mothering ability, milking performance, temperament and profitability of suckler cow production.



Low Arvie visitors enjoying the sunshine before the farm walk commenced

There was a considerable amount of discussion surrounding the various factors affecting profitability of suckled calf production. Current trends in the beef industry favour the use of a smaller (500-550Kg) cow that is hardy, docile, milky, has hybrid vigour, longevity and can rear a calf yearly that can attain a weight of approximately 45% of the dam's weight at weaning around 210 days of age. With the current climate trend towards more extreme wet spells a hardy smaller cow can be kept outdoors for longer each year, hold its condition and poach the ground less than the bigger continental cows currently favoured by many suckler units. The massive fixed costs of sheds, fodder, bedding, high cereal prices and all the associated equipment requirements are making suckled calf production a very high cost and high input enterprise.

Discussion highlighted the need for more of the farm support budget to be directed towards the hills and uplands where suckler cow production was once the stronghold of suckled calf production.

A small shift in Basic Payment funding could open the door to more opportunities for young farmers to gain a foothold in the industry in the less favoured areas of west and north Scotland and herald a move back up the hill for beef suckler production.



Low Arvie Highland and Highland x Whitebred cows and heifers

In recent years Whitebred bulls have been crossed with many different breeds and often for different reasons. When crossed with the hill breeds such as Galloway and Highland they produce first cross calves with hybrid vigour, early maturing, easy calving and fast growing offspring. The steers have improved conformation, good temperament and grow quickly in predominantly grass based systems. They grade out at attractive weights and can attract carcass premiums under the Morrison's shorthorn premium programme. The heifers make superb milky, hardy small to medium sized cows. They will breed every year and produce quality calves to a terminal sire with calves often reaching up to 45% of their dam's weight at weaning. Whitebred Shorthorns are being used on Aberdeen Angus, Limousin and Simmental cross cows to produce a cow that breeds, milks and lasts better in the current production climate.



Young Whitebred Shorthorn bulls at Low Arvie



Whitebred Shorthorns doing well on rough grazing at Low Arvie