The Characteristics of Top-Performing Beef and Sheep Farms in the UK – 2024 Update

Compiled For

By

The Andersons Centre

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

There are 50,000 or so full time and part time farms with beef and or sheep in the UK[i]. All different in one way or another. The diversity in the production of grazed livestock is arguably broader than any other farming sector in the UK. Thus, you might expect the financial performance of each farm will vary according to what it produces. More often though, the variation is generated by the way it is managed. The decisions made by the proprietor have a considerable impact on the overall farm performance, regardless of whether it is a breeding unit, finishing unit or mixture of the two. Top-quartile beef and sheep farmers, on average, make approximately £50,000 profit per year more than the bottom 50% of farms; and that is about four times as much in cash terms. This is not necessarily because the farm is four times larger, but a mixture of several things. This report, explores the actions that a beef and sheep farmer might take to become among the best performers, updating work undertaken in 2017.

We set out to find answers using two methods; firstly, an analysis of the Farm Business Survey (FBS), matching pairs of similar farms from different performance quartiles. Secondly, two case studies then describe extremes of performance, one at a high level and the other not so.

The study finds a series of pointers for improvement, statistically from the FBS analysis and then in examples from the case studies:

- Size helps in beef and sheep farming, but make sure you are profitable before you grow the business else you might grow the loss making enterprise.
- Keep costs as low as possible without impacting animal output or health and welfare.
- Renting land, if it helps provide the best farm structure, can add to the viability of the farm business.
- Similarly, paying for good staff can prove more profitable than depending on 'free' family labour.
- Concentrate on what you do best, as taking on other non-farming enterprises can become distracting unless you have enough resources including management to do so.
- Make sure you are technically outstanding, as there is no room for mistakes in this type of farming.

The case studies put the findings to life. One of the farms was built on a clear vision, well planned and costed, with sensible timely decisions on animal health and welfare, and market requirements. Growth rates are identified as critical, so measured closely with decision made weekly as a result. Grass is measured regularly in the growing season and managed well.

The poor farming case is a medley of various breeds and farm systems, based on what the farmer *thought* was a bargain at the time of purchase. He makes farming very hard work by allowing his farm system to become unnecessarily complex, naïvely thinking that is what farming is all about. He therefore has less time

to do things that would genuinely earn money. He takes off farm work to top up his earnings which is distracting from his core business.

Finally, farming is an industry that provides far more than simply financial rewards, offering a way of life that most would not swap. Most farmers are hard-working, a necessity for success. But to raise performance requires change which often involves bravery and self-belief to do well. Focus on the things that make you and your business partners happy, but within that, make sure that your business is viable.

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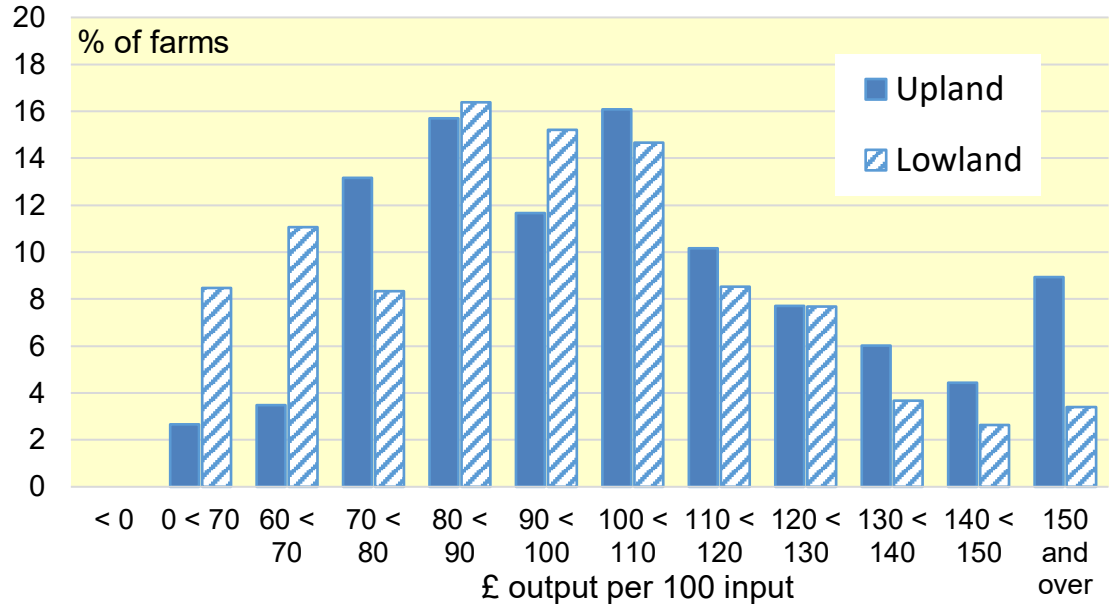
1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT

There is a wide range of beef and sheep farming systems throughout the UK. In the beef sector alone, some calve, others buy youngstock, some finish, others move unfinished stock on, some keep their own calves through to finishing. There are numerous breeds, several markets, both at commodity level and added value, and there are many ways to keep and feed the animals. Yet, this variation is not necessarily the determinant of financial performance. If it was, we would expect the unsuccessful systems to whither away, and the others to become dominant. There are farms operating similar systems, with vastly different returns. This paper takes a look into the reasons why two similar looking beef and sheep farms can generate substantially different financial returns each year. It builds on a series of publications in 2017 and 2018[2] exploring the differences in performances between the top 25% of beef and sheep farmers and the bottom 50%. What are the highest achievers (in financial terms) doing, that their less financially successful counterparts are not?

Figure 1 shows just how broad the spread of performance in beef and sheep farming is. It shows the range of returns achieved by all beef and sheep farming systems in the Farm Business Survey, for every £100 of expenditure they made. The figures are inclusive of support, i.e. Basic Payment Scheme, excludes unpaid family labour, and has no rental charge on owner-occupied land. It is split according to upland and lowland systems. The returns vary widely, from making anything up to £70 (i.e. losing between £30 to £100 for every £100 spent) and making over £150 for every £100 spent. In other words, some farms are losing considerable sums of capital from their businesses, whilst others are consistently making a remarkable 50% profit from every pound they spend. And all in the same time period. How can this be?

Figure 1 ~ Distribution of performance across Beef and Sheep farms (England), 2021/22 (£ output per £100 input)



Source: Defra: Farm Business Survey

This report provides evidence of how UK top performing beef and sheep farmers operate differently to their less successful peers. Actions have been examined to see how top quartile grazing livestock farmers make different decisions, do different things and perform activities in differing ways to others. It is therefore intended to provide a guide to farmers looking to raise their *own* financial performance regardless of which quartile they are currently classified in or consider themselves to be in. Comparisons are made between high performing, and poorer performing farmers to highlight differences. Averages have the potential to be misleading, so ranges of performance are addressed where possible and case studies and direct comparisons are used too. This study is not written to tell farmers how to farm, but to suggest some ways of providing a strategic framework to change for the better. Why should people change? There is always a way to improve and simply, life is too short not to.

The backdrop to this report is the Agricultural Transition in England. The agricultural industry is going through the process of the Basic Payment declining to nothing after 2027, and the rise of payments for public goods, which, given it is a form of market correction and not subsidy, is likely to be a less lucrative form of Government support for most. Policy in other UK countries is likely to change in coming years too. Beef and sheep farming has, historically been the least profitable sector of farming on a per hectare basis. This means that a greater proportion of these farmers have been reliant on the support they have received through BPS. With this tapering away, and the new support mechanisms being less lucrative, many farmers

in this sector will have to either start doing something else as well as farming, come out of farming altogether or simply get financially better at doing what they are doing. Whilst this is easier to say than do, that is the harsh reality of the change. We are also acutely aware that farmers have multiple objectives and they are not always motivated solely by making more money. Several, for example, have secondary sources of income that finance the farming lifestyle. These farms are not the focus of this paper, partly as few are likely to read it, but more fundamentally because they are unlikely to (want to) change to increase their farming financial returns.

1.2 THE APPROACH

This paper has a two pronged approach to identifying the key actions of top performers. The first is a statistical examination of the Farm Business Survey (FBS) data. The FBS is undertaken by country. Only the English survey was used here because of time constraints and data consistencies, but the geographical scope of the AHDB is broader. The results are relevant in any devolved region. This study encompasses the entire UK. In simple terms, if a farmer is doing an outstanding or awful job, the location is seldom the determinant.

The second method is to describe two extreme beef and sheep farms, that are operating at opposing ends of the financial performance spectrum. This gives two real-life examples of actions farmers are taking and how their decisions lead to outcomes on farm and therefore on the bottom line of the profit and loss account. The case studies are written to inject life and reality into the list of things the study generates from analysis of data.

Finally, at the end of this paper, is a list of 50 things that a beef and sheep farmer should consider, that would help increase their financial performance. They are not all relevant to every farmer, but are tailored to suit beef and sheep farm businesses. If every idea made a small improvement in the farm business, then the overall impact would be considerable.

1.3 DEFINITIONS

The definition of 'performance' will depend on what the individual is trying to achieve. Measuring it will therefore also vary accordingly. Part of the definition of 'farming' is undertaking activities for commercial gain, and this is what is measured here. Most farmers value other benefits of farming such as accommodation and lifestyle. A farmer should value those separately. Financial performance can be measured in various ways such as highest profit, greatest balance sheet increase or highest return on capital. In this study, performance

is measured as; sales generated by the farming operation divided by the costs associated with it. This creates a **return on turnover ratio**:

$$\frac{\textbf{Turnover generated by the farm}}{\textbf{costs associated with it}}$$

Figure 2 ~ Demonstrating Typical Returns on Turnover

	Farm 1	**Farm 2**	**Farm 3**
Turnover (farming income)	70,000	450,000	900,000
Costs	50,000	400,000	840,000
Profit	20,000	50,000	60,000
Return on turnover Ratio	**1.4**	**1.125**	**1.03**

Using this method, farms of varying sizes can be compared. Indeed, beef and sheep farms can be compared with each other, or, in fact any other farm or any other business; it examines how a farmer manages to convert inputs into outputs. It is the return that a farmer has managed to generate as a proportion of their output. This suggests that a farmer with a large estate receiving millions of pounds of sales and making £200,000 is not as successful as a small business with minimal turnover and making £50,000. Figure 2 demonstrates that out of the 3 examples, whilst the last one is making most profit, its return on turnover is the lowest, and the small farm (1) is generating more profit as a percentage of its turnover.

Some consider the return on capital as a more critical determinant of business performance and in some situations, it is. However, businesses can remove nearly all their own capital by borrowing money and therefore improve the return on their own capital but lowering profits (finance costs rise), raising business risk (high gearing) and potentially jeopardising business viability (dependant on continued support by the lender). Other business managers might leave excessive capital in their businesses, have no borrowing at all but also leave an inefficient return on investment. This makes return on capital difficult to use as a tool for comparing performance. The matching approach employed in this study uses the agricultural cost-centre only. This is the costs and revenues solely to do with farming rather than the fuller, more diversified rural business that many farms have become. Other parts of the report explore the entire farm more widely.

1.4 CAUSATION

Identifying links between top performers and their activities is relatively easy, and the statistics have achieved that, but the causation link is not necessarily as obvious. For example, rich people drive more Aston Martins than poor people, but that is not why they are rich.

Similarly, with farms there are relationships between factors without the cause being explicit. One thing might cause the other or vice versa. Of course, a third factor might be driving them both. For example, the FBS analysis identified that larger farms tend to outperform smaller farms. Does this mean that a small farmer has to become a big farmer in order to improve? Almost certainly not. What is more likely, is that the better small farmers, make more money and therefore have the capacity within their farms (financial and management ability) to take on more land. They therefore grow over time and become successful large farmers. Less successful farms are more likely to have to sell land to pay for liabilities, thereby becoming smaller.

Sometimes causation is difficult to prove. But for farmers wishing to develop a business, mimicking a top performer is likely to be worthwhile regardless which way round it works (perhaps apart from buying the Aston Martin just yet).

1.5 OTHER LITERATURE

Since the last Edition of this report, little new work has been published in the field of what makes farms perform better. However, one notable set of reports has been published by Defra. The Edition most relevant for review here, written by Claire Betts explores the Characteristics of High Performing Grazing Livestock Farms in England[3].

Betts identifies that geographic factors such as location and soil type have roughly one percent impact on the financial performance of beef and sheep farms, with weather and other time-variable factors accounting for approximately a quarter of the variation. The remaining seventy four percent of the variation in farm performance is down to characteristics of the farm business itself, most notably the quality of the management. To improve financial performance in terms of ranking in your farming sector, you cannot depend on the markets as that affects everybody. A rising tide lifts all boats.

The paper refers to top performance in economic terms using a similar calculation to that which we use. Betts also identifies a series of actions that correlate either positively or negatively with farm performance. These actions are summarized in the table below.

Figure 3 - Factors Related to Grazing Livestock Farm and Business Performance (Betts 2020)

Variable	Farm Business	Agriculture
Debt	⇩	⇩
Diversification	⇔	⇩
Specialisation	⇧	⇧
AES Participation	⇧	⇧
Organic	⇧	⇔
Unpaid Labour	⇩	⇔
Contracting	⇔	⇧
Concentrated Feed Costs	⇔	⇩

⇧ *indicates a positive relationship with performance,* ⇩ *indicates a negative relationship, and* ⇔ *indicates no relationship.*

This paper identified that those farms with more debt tended to have less farming activity and therefore lower profit. Beef and sheep farmers that undertake diversifications tend to lose performance in their farming enterprise, possibly because resources including management have to be shared. In a similar manner, those farms that specialised in their own farming systems, tended to be better performing than others. Unlike other farming sectors, beef and sheep farms that undertook agri environmental schemes, tended to have higher returns. This is potentially because unlike other farming sectors, beef and sheep returns are usually lower than agri environmental scheme incomes.

Betts identified an interesting correlation with organic farming and the financial performance. She spotted that whilst it had no statistical correlation with the farming performance, the overall business was generally more profitable, almost as if the organic status advantaged other parts of the business more than the farming itself.

When a relevant hourly rate was imputed for the unpaid labour in businesses, the overall business tended to be worse off than employing paid staff. However, paying for external contractors is seen as beneficial, allowing the farmers to get on with doing their own thing, and not having to buy machinery either. Finally, the more a farmer spends on concentrated feed costs, the less profitable it tended to be.

2 FARM BUSINESS SURVEY ANALYSIS

2.1 MATCHING PROCESS

The Farm Business Survey (FBS) is an annual survey providing information on the physical and economic performance of farm businesses in England. The sample of farm businesses covers all regions of England and all types of farming with the data being collected by face-to-face interview with farmers. The Farm Business Survey sample covers over 2,000 farm businesses each year.

Here, we use the FBS data for beef and sheep farms for the five years from 2017-18 to 2021-22. Data is averaged across the years to smooth out the effects of annual volatility for individual farms. Performance is measured as the ratio of total value of agricultural sales (i.e. excluding subsidy income) to total cost of agricultural inputs. A farm will therefore record a higher level of performance if it produces more outputs for a given level of inputs, or, in other words, if it is more efficient in its use of all inputs. This project involved matching each farm in the top quartile of the performance distribution with one in the bottom half of the distribution which was similar in terms of geographic location and size. They were matched to be comparable with location, amount of farming taking place (measured by standard labour requirements[i] (SLRs)), farm size (on a log scale), organic status, LFA status and altitude. This ensures that the comparisons after matching, concentrate on factors that are potentially within the control of the farmer, rather than factors related to geography and farm size and system that are relatively fixed. Including organic status at this point means that the relative performance of organic versus non-organic herds cannot be compared in this analysis.

Farms were included where they were classified as beef and sheep farms in each of the surveyed years, and were present in at least 3 of the 5 years (2017-18 to 2021-22); 463 farms met this criterion, so that the top quartile contained 116 farms which were included in the matching process. As a check on whether it was appropriate to combine lowland and uplands farms, interaction terms were checked for the post-matching analysis, to see if the scale of differences between top and bottom performers varied with LFA status. Whilst a small number

i Standard Labour Requirements (SLR) do not measure the amount of labour on a farm, but are a measurement of the amount of farming taking place within the business. Each unit of input (suckler cow, hectare of wheat etc) is allocated a standard amount of time regardless of farm.

of interactions were statistically significant, their magnitude was not that great, suggesting that the decision to do a combined analysis was sound.

The measurement focusses on the farming aspects of the overall businesses. Some farms are less about growing commodities, and more about making more varied, added value, use of the resources within the business. However focussing solely on the agricultural operations, and not the diversified ones keeps the data more meaningful, relevant and comparable.

Family labour is often unpaid. Here it is imputed at the National Living Wage[4]. Other costs are not imputed where they are not incurred. For example, rents or finance costs are treated as they are within the business. This therefore compares businesses with the resources they have, rather than if all farms had the same resources such as land tenure and finance.

Multiple matches were allowed, i.e. several top-performers may be paired with the same below-average performer. Where more than two top-performers were matched with the same farm, the matching process was repeated for these farms, but with increasing thresholds for detecting a match and with the final match selected at random from those matches less than the threshold. This process was continued until no more than two bottom performers were matched with the same top performing farm. Three farms had poor matches. All three were organic farms, which will have limited the options for finding a suitable match. One of these was matched with a much larger farm, one with a farm with different LFA status, whilst the third was a poor match on a variety of variables. We therefore excluded these three farms from the post matching comparisons, leaving 113 pairs of farms in the post-matching dataset. In the results, some comments are made regarding the data before the farms are matched, but most of the analysis explores the relationship between the farms matched with similar pairs.

The measure of performance used in this analysis is solely based on the agricultural cost centre and it is important to remember that many upland farms get substantial income from other enterprises, particularly agri-environment payments. In the matched dataset, three farms, all bottom performers, received more in agri-environment payments than the value of their agricultural outputs. A further ten farms, nine bottom performers and one top performer, had AES payments totalling more than 50% of their agricultural output value.

2.2 RESULTS

Figure 4 compares the average income for the top 25% performers with their lower performing counterparts. Top performing beef and sheep farmers are making almost four times as much money; £50,000 more per year. Despite farming conditions being very different now than 5

years ago when the original report was produced, and policy having changed considerably, the difference between the top and bottom farmers in the beef and sheep farming sector has remained considerable. The more significant differences are listed on the table in Figure 5.

Figure 4 ~ Beef and Sheep Farm Business Income £/year – after matching

Mean of top performers	**Mean of matched bottom performers**	**Difference**
£66,000	£16,800	£49,200

A wide variety of variables were tested – this was very much a screening procedure[ii]. Going through the variables in turn, key points are:

1. **Economic size:** before matching the differences in farming activity, measured in SLR (Standard Labour Requirement) are enormous, with small farms much more common amongst poor performers. Such is the strength of this effect that, despite it being one of the matching variables, the difference remains large and highly significant. Top performing farms also remain larger on a per hectare basis. Economies of scale are clearly very important for this sector or at least a minimum efficient scale for operations.
2. **Fixed and variable costs:** All costs on top performing farms are inevitably higher overall, being generally larger businesses. However, fixed costs are proportionately lower and variable costs higher amongst high performers. The effect is less marked amongst LFA farms.
    - **Production-related costs:** the proportion of costs spent on bought feed, seeds, fertilisers and crop protection products are all significantly higher on top performing farms, even after matching.
    - **Machinery costs** are significantly higher on poor performing farms.

ii For those interested in the statistical process; continuous variables were compared using a t-test (paired t-test for the matched comparison), whilst categorical ones used a chi-squared test, with a permutation test to allow for the situation where low expected values invalidate the usual test. Some key variables were included in both continuous and categorical form. All figures used FBS data from 2017-18 to 2021-22. Variables were averaged across years, using a simple mean, except for categorical variables where the mode was taken. Performance was averaged on the percentile scale (i.e. a percentile was calculated for each year and these were averaged, before recalculating the percentile for the entire period), to minimise the impact of missing years.

- **General farming costs** are also proportionately higher on poor performing farms. This category includes things like electricity, heating fuel, insurance, etc.

3. **Tenure:** after matching, the percentage of FBT land is much higher amongst the top performers. This is one of the few variables where the effect varied with LFA status; top performing LFA farms have 36% of land on FBTs, compared to 11% for poor performers, whereas the equivalent figures for lowland farms are 28% and 23% respectively. This tallies with the previous analysis in 2018 when significant differences for FBT were only found for LFA farms.
4. **Unpaid labour:** bottom performers are more dependent on unpaid family labour, with better farms paying more staff. The difference is less significant after matching.
5. **Stocking rate:** average stocking rate is significantly higher on top performing farms, which may also be due to land quality.
6. **Diversification:** poor performers are more likely to have diversified activities, as measured by the proportion of their farm costs spent on diversified activities. Causation is unclear; diversified activities could be distracting management, or they may have diversified because the farm was generating insufficient revenue.
    - **SLR breakdown[iii]:** Within the above point, a higher percentage of the total SLR of top performing farms comes from cereals and less from grass. This may well be related to the quality of the land on the farms, since the matching process can only adjust for gross geographic differences such as regions.
7. **Contract rearing out:** 18% of top performers send animals away for rearing elsewhere, compared to 10% of bottom performers
8. **Proportion of fatstock:** fat cattle and sheep are more common on top performing farms. This may be related to the quality of land, but the significant difference for contract rearing noted above suggests that some high performing farms may be finishing animals elsewhere.

iii SLR is Standard Labour Requirement, an assessment of the total amount of farming taking place on the farm measured by the amount of labour that one would normally expect on the farm.

Other points

- **Farm assurance:** top beef and sheep performers are more likely to belong to farm assurance schemes, although the difference is reduced by matching. Membership is strongly related to farm size, which may explain why matching reduces the effect so markedly.
- **Farmer age:** bottom performers are significantly older
- **Nitrogen vulnerable zones (NVZs):** Top performing farms have a greater proportion of their farms in NVZs but this is not statistically significant.
- **AES payments:** there are very large differences before matching, but differences are not significant afterwards, suggesting the differences were down to geographic location and farm size, rather than being directly related to performance.
- **Debt:** debt effects are not great, but there is a significant difference after matching, with top performers paying less interest relative to other costs. Causation becomes a relevant question here.

Figure 5 provides a summary table of the paired actions we have explored and discussed in this analysis. Here, they can be viewed side by side.

Figure 5 ~ Variables between top and bottom performing counterparts (Pairings) ~ Beef and Sheep

Selected variables	**Mean of top performers**	**Mean of matched bottom performers**
Agricultural output (£'000)	204	76
Economic Relative Size (SLR)	62%	38%
Total agricultural costs (£'000)	190	114
Fixed: Variable Cost Ratio	48:52	55:45
Bought in Feeds (% of costs)	19%	15%
Grassland Variable Costs	7	5.3
Machinery Costs	19	22
General Farm Costs	10	15
Land in FBT	31%	18%

Selected variables	Mean of top performers	Mean of matched bottom performers
Owned Land	54%	62%
Paid Labour as % of all Labour	23%	17%
Stocking Rate GLU/Ha	1.4	1.0

2.3 ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

Here we explore the items from the list above individually in a bit more detail.

1. **Economic Size:** farming is a commodity business. Amongst other things, this means margins are usually slim. This is particularly true for beef and sheep farms where stock may remain on farm for a long time before its value is turned into cash. So, to make a profit, the number of units must be high. Keep a focus on how to raise output, without sinking considerable additional costs into the business. Think how you can you add another unit (suckler, finisher, breeding ewe etc) into a system, without changing the system or adding to overheads or workload. Similarly, recognise that good, large businesses become good first, then large. A poor business will not simply become profitable by taking on more land, stock, costs, debt and worry. Get the system right and then look to scale up.
2. **Costs: Fixed and Variable:** There are several points in here. Firstly, costs need to be kept inherently low, and only spend money on something where a return is likely or inevitable. This is usually in the production costs rather than overheads.
    - Top performing farms spend significantly more money per hectare on seed, fertiliser and grassland sprays. Spending money on improving the quality of grass pays dividends. Consider yourself a grassland farmer as much a livestock farmer. Top farmers spend a lot more money per hectare on grassland costs and get a lot more out of their number one resource. In the case of seed costs for example, whilst they average less than 1% of total costs, their impact keeps grazing quality up, cattle outside longer, better forage, less purchased feeds and so on. This reduced the costs of bought in feed, raises the possible stocking rate, increases herd or flock health and therefore survival rates, raises weigh gain rates and so on. The effect is more marked on LFA farms.

- Similarly, a more money is spent on livestock than the overheads on top performing farms. Whilst noting better farms spend more on bought in feed might lead to an inefficient decision to feed more, sometimes, a well planned additional feed maintains the growth rate, condition, health and fertility of stock.
- Poor performing farms have proportionally more machinery. It is one cost where large businesses benefit over smaller ones, being simpler to utilise a machine more fully. No farm machine is utilised completely efficiently. However, there are clever ways to get jobs done, even on small farms, often with contractors, which are usually cheaper than buying and operating machines. Reflect on how many lambs would need to be sold simply to buy a tractor (net margin, not sale price). Then calculate how many are required to run it.

3. **Tenure:** Point 1 identifies that larger farms are likely to be more profitable. That means that a good small-scale farmer is likely to want to grow. The ability for small farmers to simply buy land is not great, partly because not much land is sold in the UK, and secondly, because small farmers might not have the financial resources to purchase additional hectares at short notice. Thus, many farmers take on rented land. As long as the cost of taking the land on is comfortably outstripped by the overall additional margin of occupation, then there is a margin in it for you. So do the sums and work out what the marginal benefit would be. What costs can be spread? What other benefits of scale can you generate from the market? Not all available land will add to the profitability of your farm so work out the viable rent for all the possible fields in your area.
4. **Unpaid Labour:** The same is true for labour. As you grow, you cannot do everything yourself. You may have family help which is usually useful, although can be challenging to manage, a salaried person is often easier to direct than a volunteer or a loved one. Paying for good staff gives you a different working relationship to unpaid (often family) labour. Whilst they may be less personally engaged with the farm, they may work more efficiently on the jobs that generate a return rather than those most enjoyable. You can manage paid staff differently, they have set hours so can not do everything, and will therefore do those jobs with the greatest economic return. Paying

for staff also gives you the opportunity to do more of other things yourself, either building the business on the farm or earning a good wage elsewhere.

5. **Stocking Rate:** If there is a benefit of increasing the amount of sales for the market, then consider land as another resource and look to become more efficient with it, i.e. generating more sales per hectare. In other words, a higher stocking rate increases the farm size (measured in output) whilst spending less on rent or land occupation costs. Calculate how much consumable meat is generated per hectare of your farm per year. It is easy to calculate on an arable farm (yield) but complicated with livestock. However, you may be surprised how little lean meat is sold per hectare on many farms. Try to address that.

6. **Diversification:** Taking on another enterprise sounds like a solution to all the farm's economic problems. It also sounds like a challenge and a lot of fun. It might be all of the above. Equally, it might be the distraction that takes resources from the main farming enterprise, probably including management, possibly other resources too such as labour, land or capital.

   Good farm managers usually turn out to be good diversification managers, as many of the required skills overlap. But think carefully before taking on another enterprise whether you have the skills, energy, dedication and commitment to do something else.

7. **Contract rearing out:** Better farmers do more of it. This is a kind of specialisation in effect, passing the role of contract rearing to third parties. It might be considered as the opposite of diversification. Within that, the logic fits in this farming system.

8. **Proportion of Fatstock:** this is a technical point regarding the balance of enterprises. Higher performing farms have more fatstock, which might be a land quality point. It might also be that some farmers have found keeping finishing stock more profitable than keeping breeding stock (which tend not to earn any direct income).

3 CASE STUDIES

In this section, we have an example of two very different farms. They are real farms with names and some details changed so they cannot be identified. One operates in the top quartile sector, and indeed at the top of that, and the other one is at the other end of the performance spectrum.

3.1 TOP-END FARM, THE OUTSTANDING BEEF AND SHEEP FARMER,

Sam runs a beef finishing enterprise and a small sheep flock. He buys cattle all year round with the majority purchased in the spring. The cattle are kept in two systems, the first is an indoor system into which he buys around 600 young cattle per year. The second is a grazing system which he purchases about 400 stock per year.

Under the indoor finishing system, these are kept on farm for around 100 days. He started looking at the indoor option after considering ways of making better use of the sheds that were on the farm that had historically been used to house suckler cows. The sheds would stand empty for 6 months of the year. Sam buys dairy cross Aberdeen Angus cattle. There is a regular supply at local markets as it is a predominantly dairy part of the country. He has noticed that Aberdeen Angus at the weight he buys, trades cheaper than other popular breeds like the British Blue cross. But when it comes to selling, he can achieve a 10-20p/kg premium for his Angus cross cattle providing they have named sires.

Sam has also found that sending a regular supply through to the same abattoir means they guarantee him a 3-month price which he finds useful for financial planning. He purchases the cattle for indoor finishing at a weight of between 450-500kg. His target sale weight is 625-675kg meaning they have 100 days to put on 175kg, a target daily liveweight gain (DLWG) of 1.75kg each. To break even in his system, Sam knows they need to achieve 1.2kg DLWG. This gives him a strong buffer between what he needs to break even and his target DLWG.

As this is an important measure of financial success, the cattle are weighed every week. It takes a lot of time but using this information Sam correctly identifies which animals are ready for sale. It is not just the heaviest that go, as those still achieving above 1.5kg DLWG stay on farm, as long as they are in condition. Those below this number are considered for sale as they are not performing as well as some of the others.

Sam has also been using the weight information to monitor the health and welfare of the animals. After setting up the new weighing system 3 years ago, he realised that the cattle in one of the finishing sheds were outperforming those in the other. Following this discovery he

had a housing expert visit the farm to do some trials with smoke bombs to assess the shed ventilation. They concluded that the ventilation could be improved and opened the side of the sheds to improve air flow. After making the changes, Sam observed a 12 percent improvement in DLWG. Growth rates now match that of the other shed. There has also been a reduction in how often he needs to bed cattle down as a result of lowering the humidity in the shed.

The cattle have a ration of 6kg of a finishing blend and a mix of grass silage and red clover silage. These are fed to the cattle along a feed barrier using a bale chopper to chop the silage. He had previously been putting entire bales out in front of the feed barrier but after buying a straw chopper to ease bedding down, he also tried chopping silage. He discovered an increase in DLWG with cattle eating more silage when it is chopped.

The second system is a grazing system. These cattle are bought in the spring and turned straight out to grass. They come onto the farm at between 400kg and 450kg and are sold at 600 to 650kg liveweight. The target DLWG for these is 1kg per day and are on the farm typically for 200 days, being sold in late October. From mid August, they are fed 1kg a day of beef finisher to push them on and to ensure adequate fat cover before they're sold. If Sam feels like any won't make the grade, he takes them in to join the indoor finishing system.

Good grassland management is critical with this group. Sam has a rotational grazing system with larger fields split by electric fences. Using electric fencing is a cheaper method of splitting the fields than permanent fencing and also allows these to be removed should the paddock sizes need to be altered or if the field is closed for silage. Sam has measured a significant improvement in grass growth since starting rotational grazing. Giving each paddock a 28 day recovery before cattle are put back in the field allows plenty of regrowth opportunity. He has also noticed the cattle are less selective at grazing as well as a reduction in worm burden which he monitors with regular faecal egg counts.

Another key aspect for Sam is grass measuring. Daily measuring his grass with a plate meter allows Sam to calculate when fields can be closed for silage based on the forage requirement of the cattle he has grazing. It also allows him to identify easily which fields are performing well and which should be considered for re-seeding. Sam re-seeds a minimum of 10% of his grassland every year. Regular soil sampling gives him the ability to ensure pH is at the correct level as well as knowing which fields to spread manure on to improve the P and K levels. Sam has recently sown some herbal leys to prepare for the SFI as he thinks this might be the best route for the farm to secure funding. It could also reduce the worm burden with these being a

natural anthelmintic. He also suspects the leys will offer more drought tolerability with many of the varieties being deep rooted.

The sheep enterprise run on the farm is a low input system. He buys 300 ewe-lambs every year and these are run empty through the winter and are sold as yearling ewes for breeding. The farm used to run a flock of early lambing ewes but found the system too labour intensive for the output produced. The current system offers a good return on investment with very little labour. They also work well to graze the old grass left by the cattle to give a fresh start in the spring. Running these every year also gives the farm flexibility to go back in to lambing ewes very easily should they see a change in demand for lamb or see a need for a change in system.

Sam achieves a gross margin of £150 per head for his indoor cattle system, £190 per head for his grazing system and £50 per head for his ewe lambs. This gives the farm an overall annual gross margin of around £181,000 annually. Overheads total around £60,000 including small amounts of building depreciation and maintenance but no opportunity cost or finance and excluding his own labour. That leaves £121,000 of profit before finance charges and his time cost. Whilst Sam recognises he might be able to achieve that by renting his land and taking a local job, ultimately he is a farmer and doing what he wants to do. He finds the work fulfilling and is proud of the good job he does.

Summary of Beef and sheep Farm

- Be selective on what cattle are available that could bring the best return.
- Make best use of grassland production for conserved forage and grazing through regular monitoring of performance and rotational grazing
- Focus on technical performance to finish beef within a set timeframe to keep profitability per animal high and the buyer pleased with timing and carcass quality.
- Focussing on DLWG gives in depth understanding of performance and which animals are most profitable.
- Utilising unused sheds brings significant added value to the farm.
- Be brave enough to change systems if profits are insufficient.

3.2 FLOOD FARM, THE FINANCIALLY POOR ONE.

Mark has a suckler herd, usually of around 18 suckler cows. He also tends to purchase around 50 calves to bucket rear most years. Mark also runs a flock of around 200 ewes, preferably Welsh ewes.

The suckler herd is a mix of various breeds, mainly dairy cross but there are a couple of home bred cattle in the herd that he kept on from the last calves he had, before he changed his bull. Mark used to run a home bred Limousin cross bull until he changed to a pedigree Limousin bull in 2020 costing £3,500. Suckler cow numbers had been around 30 cows but in the last 2 years numbers have declined substantially following a run of empty cows. The new bull has had some trouble with lameness and Mark admits he's been slow at getting his feet looked at which is likely to have led to the bull being infertile for large parts of the year.

The sucklers calve all year round which is labour intensive for such a small herd. But Mark knows farming is hard work so that is alright. It also means there is a big mix in calf ages at housing and makes marketing inefficient. However, Mark likes taking one or two cattle to market at a time, as he sees that as a social event, and his small trailer would not fit so many cattle. He justifies it by pointing out the continuous cash flow, albeit small.

Mark normally sells the suckler calves at around 16 months but struggles to reach the £800 bracket at sale. The calves don't seem to grow as well as Mark would like but he can't be sure why. They typically lose ground at housing and never seem to recover. Mark's sheds are home-made that he and his neighbour built some years ago. He is very proud of them as they were so cheap, being made from reclaimed materials; spare telegraph poles roofed with corrugated tin sheets he had behind an old garage. The roofs sit high on the sheds and enclosed walls mean they don't have much air flow. This, combined with the corrugated tin that can be an issue for condensation rather than the more modern fibre cement roof, means the sheds are stuffy and humid. Mark sees calves struggling with pneumonia and does call the vet regularly to treat the poorer calves. This is costly. These calves never seem to fully recover and grow to their full potential. Again, he can't be sure.

Mark has also started bucket rearing calves. With the decline in the suckler cow numbers he wanted an easy enterprise that could bring a quick cash boost. He buys in dairy-bull calves as these are cheap at his local market and can fit plenty in his little trailer. The system ran well for the first year but with the significant rise in costs of milk powder and feed in the last year, Mark suspects he has not made a profit on these for the past two crops. Not that Mark is sure about that.

The calves are also labour intensive. But Mark knows farming is hard work so that is alright. Mark can feed 5 calves at a time with his 5-teat feeder. This is then moved around each batch of calves. Mark doesn't wash the feeder in between moves as he has a lot to do, he only rinses it with cold water after all the calves are fed every feed. Feeding takes quite long enough

already. But the lack of hygiene between feeding groups increases the spread disease from one group to the next.

The calves live in the same home-made sheds as the suckler cows. It is very convenient. They share the same air-space as the cows, which spreads disease from older to younger cattle. The sheds also get cold for the calves being high roofed. The calves are sold as weaned calves back in the local market. The value of these calves is low as there isn't a great demand in the area for dairy bull calves and like the suckled calves they don't grow as well as they should. This was manageable when input prices were lower and Mark was falsely lulled to think the enterprise was an easy win. He has since considered keeping the calves longer, but he does not have the space and would require building another shed for them over the winter. He doesn't have the capital to invest in further buildings. This does also leave the farm at risk should they go down with bovine TB. He would likely have to sell some cattle at a significantly lower price to an Approved Finishing Unit (AFU).

Mark's ewes lamb from the middle of March through to roughly the end of April but a few always cross in to May as he leaves the rams in with the ewes. It is convenient and he considers a late lamb is better than a barren ewe. The ewes run with 5 rams (currently all Texels as it happens) for the first month and then Mark tends to buy 2 or 3 cheaper rams at the local market without being fussy on breed to turn out half way through tupping to spur the other rams on. This means several lambs are born to the lesser value rams.

The ewes lamb indoors and generally scan, he thinks, around 130 percent with around 1.1 lambs sold per ewe. Most losses occur when the ewes and lambs are turned out. Mark has problems with foxes, badgers and buzzards picking off the weaker lambs. He generally tries to keep the ewes and lambs in for a few days after lambing but after a week or 2, space gets tight in the shed and lambs are turned out younger as a result. He hopes for the best.

Mark creep-feeds the lambs from around July onwards to try and push them on. That is what his neighbour does so it must be the best thing to do. His Welsh ewes have small heads so many can access the creep feeders. They also seem to find the gaps in the hedges too. The lambs are mostly sold anytime from October to January. Mark is happy with the sheep enterprise; he was told by a FFRF[iv] consultant they generate a gross margin of £60 per ewe. But

iv Future Farming Resilience Fund – that pays for farm advisors to visit farms.

the advisor also reminded him that gross margin and profit are not the same. With the type of land the ewes are run on, the feed used in his system and the housing available, Mark could have a heavier ewe like a mule like his neighbour has. That system should produce a higher litter size and higher lamb value. Mark has considered this approach but is not one for change.

Mark works part time on a local farm to bring in some additional income as he doesn't make enough profit from the farm system. This leaves him slightly short of time as farming is a busy job to do. He finds he works long hours and late in the day so is bitter about the other farm job. When he is tired, he becomes impatient with his farm jobs.

He does not know what income is generated from each enterprise on his farm. He suspects the sucklers are not making much money but has always had them and is hoping that the new bull will add some value in to his calves. He suspects the bucket reared calves are currently 'just about' breaking even but hasn't calculated any labour against them. The ewes are making money but again there is room for improvement. Mark thinks the ewes are probably the most profitable enterprise but he probably spends around 40% of his time with these. Mark relies heavily on the Basic Payment but is not aware just how heavily it matters to him. He does not have a plan though, and this is where he differs from his neighbour.

Summary of Beef and Sheep Farm

- Lack of understanding of profit generated per enterprise.
- Slow to adapt to changes in the sector where some systems could be more profitable
- Trying to run 3 different, inefficiently run, enterprises while also working part time gives a complicated farming system and not enough time to focus on quality of production.
- Reliant on government subsidy that is already changing.
- Lack of focus on animal health and hygiene at housing.

4 CONCLUSIONS

4.1 TOP TRAITS OF HIGH PERFORMING FARMERS

This report has studied the difference between financially top performing beef and sheep farming businesses and what sets them apart from the poorest ones. Common themes become evident as concluded below. Ranking them is difficult as their impacts vary from farm to farm according to farming systems, the farmer's personality and attitude, current levels of farm management, staffing and cost control. However, for a general perspective of importance overall, the following order is identified:

1. **Size matters in beef and sheep farming -** It does appear from the analysis in this report, and also the case studies that there are benefits to be achieved from being above a certain size. This should generally be measured in total farming activity, rather than simply hectares or head of cattle because lots of cattle might mean they are finished very slowly. An analysis of beef farms once undertaken for an entire country, showed the largest loss makers were very large farms doing a very poor job. The conclusion of this is that growing is not sufficient, you have to be technically good (and profitable already) to start with.
2. **Cost control** – Agriculture is a commodity industry with tight, variable and unpredictable margins. The only way to win whilst remaining in this system is to keep costs to an absolute minimum (without jeopardising profitable output). On almost all beef and sheep farms, there are more opportunities to reduce overheads than variable costs. Variable costs will improve the grassland, and the stock that grazes it, and these are easy to vary from year to year. Overheads, once they are in the business are very hard to remove.
3. **Tenure –** Renting land is clearly not an insurmountable business cost. It offers the opportunity to reach the critical farm business size in hectares. It might also help sharpen the mind with some additional costs to pay. It is not clear if tenant beef and sheep farmers are simply better or whether renting land simply allows them the opportunity to grow. Whichever, it appears to have helped many farmers.
4. **Unpaid labour** – The resources on farm either come at a cost, or come at an opportunity cost. In other words, you either pay for them in cash or something similar, or you pay for them by not doing something else that could be generating an income for you. Whatever the value of what it is you are not doing is referred to as the

opportunity cost. When a farm grows, you need people to operate it and paid staff, it appears generates opportunities for you.

5. **Stocking rate** – More farming allows greater output. Getting the optimum stocking rate to maximise the output from forage forces better use of land, a key resource on any grazing livestock farm. It also diverts from simply pumping more expensive bought in feed into livestock which is an expensive way to raise output and not always successful, especially at the marginal level. The statistical research is clear here, work on improving the productivity of land and the quality of the grass and forage produced. This is the cheapest way to produce livestock.
6. **Concentrate on what you are good at** - This is farming. The statistical research tells clear stories of how taking on a secondary enterprise can distract the management, steal resources from the farm and be fundamentally less profitable than the main farming system. We also saw that in the poor farm case study.
7. **Technical excellence is critical** – Livestock farms are busy businesses with plenty going on. Keep the system simple and understand what you are doing exceptionally well. Identify where excessive time can be saved by making the system efficient. And make sure it works for you without feeling like you have to spend more and more time on something. That will allow you to make time for family and friends.

A rise in prices at the livestock market could make you a bit more money one year, but it will not change your performance quartile as a rising tide lifts all boats. To achieve that aspiration, requires change. This is more difficult than any technical or management point considered in this entire study as it involves bravery and self-belief as well as a culture change. Nobody should do the same thing and expect different results. Yet people regret inactivity or indecisiveness more than regret doing something.

Ultimately, success is about achieving what you aspire to achieve. So have aspirations. These might not be solely financial which have been considered here, but to achieve most things with a farm, financial sustainability is a necessity.

5 50 WAYS TO HAVE AN OUTSTANDING BEEF AND SHEEP ENTERPRISE

Actions that affect particular sectors of farming inevitably become more technical. This list considers some ideas that would be relevant to the beef and sheep sector. They might not all be appropriate for every farm:

1. Could your system finish lambs early and hit the higher priced lamb market? What would be the additional costs on your farm system? Do you have enough early spring grass to lamb earlier? Can creep feeding lambs to increase their DLWG prove profitable to catch higher lamb prices? Have you done the sums?
2. Deal early with succession planning, have a Will and a lasting power of attorney in place, and make sure that non-farming siblings/children are catered for fairly (if not necessarily equally). Where necessary, use an external facilitator so that all family members feel heard and respected.
3. Do you have the right number of rams for your system? Ewes that have run with a teaser or that have been implanted with cidr's/sponges will require a higher ram to ewe ratio than those that are turned straight to the ram.
4. Regularly weigh cattle to monitor performance and health. This can aid in knowing which breeding animals are performing well and which to cull. It can also indicate when animals are ready for sale/slaughter. If cattle aren't putting weight on is there a health reason for this?
5. Ensure ewes are in the correct body condition for tupping. Body condition score ewes pre-tupping and consider feeding concentrates to thinner ewes if needed to increase body condition. Plan their grazing platform to move on to a fresh platform 2 weeks prior to tupping for flushing.
6. Forage analysis is an important insight in to energy and protein values of home produced forage. This can indicate if there is adequate feed value in silage or if cattle require additional supplementation depending on what is expected of the animal, is it a maintenance or a growing diet?
7. Use of EID tags and compatible monitoring systems can reduce labour and increase accuracy and efficiency of recording when weighing livestock and adding in management notes about specific animals.
8. Minimize nose to nose contact and contamination from neighbouring fences where possible. Consider a grazing rotation that avoids neighbouring livestock being over

the fence at the same time, use these as cropping fields if needed or add an electric fence 3m from the boundary.

9. If feeding lamb concentrates, consider what age they are fed. Feeding a greater volume of feed to young lambs should increase gain from feed compared to heavy feeding at an older stage as their feed conversion rate will reduce with age.
10. Are you too lenient with late calvers from block calving units. A tighter calving block reduces labour input, increases ease of management with calves being the same age for vaccination and treatment and aids sale with a consistent run of cattle of a similar size and weight.
11. Consider the size of livestock trailer you need. Would hiring a lorry be better? Moving stock in a larger group can be less stressful on the animal and more efficient. Hiring a lorry to take one load of stock that might otherwise take you 4 loads could save you time and money.
12. Monitor lamb and prime cattle condition in order to meet the correct fat coverage at sale. Lean or over fat animals will likely result in a reduced price. Most abattoirs have fieldsmen that can come out and aid in selection, this can help from time to time to keep your eye in.
13. Having adequate slurry storage to last the winter so that slurry can be used at the optimal time. Targeting application after a silage cut can make much more efficient use of slurry rather than taking it out to the driest field in the winter because the store is full.
14. Increase the area of herbal lays. Herbal lays are noted for being a natural anthelmintic (wormer). Adding more herbal leys in to a rotation alongside rotational grazing could significantly improve the worm burden on farm, and there's further support for them in England too now.
15. Could you cope with being shut down with bTB? What changes would you need to make to your system if you were under restriction and could you afford to make these changes? Do you have enough housing for all the stock on your farm if you couldn't sell any? Draw up a contingency plan.
16. Visit other farms to see how their systems may differ from yours and if some of their practices might work on your farm. Having a different perspective might give you some useful tips to go away with, or make you happier with what you have at home.

17. Use a plate meter to monitor grass growth. Measuring grass can identify if you have enough grass in your grazing platform to meet your animals requirements and can you shut some more fields for silage. It can also identify which fields should be re-seeded.

18. Consider use of rotational grazing to maximise grass growth as well as increasing grass quality and lowering wastage. Improvements of 1-2 tonnes DM/Ha are achievable. There are added benefits of giving grassland a rest period such as reducing worm burden by regular rotation.

19. Challenge yourself to improve lamb weaning percentage. Identify where most loses occur and aim to make changes to reduce these. Is there a need to look at vaccination protocol or husbandry practices at lambing.

20. Consider increasing re-seeding, this should increase grass productivity and quality aiding in reducing purchased feed and fertiliser. An increase in yield of 1 tonne of dry matter grown per hectare is achievable on most farms with this approach. Aim to re-seed at least 10% each year.

21. Analyse soil (including pH levels) and organic manure - ensure efficient use of organic and inorganic fertiliser. Apply nitrogen at optimum rate and timing for crops, maintain clover content of swards, consider covering slurry stores and injecting slurry.

22. Identify problem ewes at lambing. Ewes that prolapse, refuse to take their lambs or have problems with mastitis are costing you time and money. Ensure these are not bred from again. EID system can make for easy recording.

23. Plan your maintenance jobs. If housing facilities require attention, do this well in advance of animals being housed so that when the time comes animals can be housed at short notice. Maintain livestock fencing prior to turning out. Chasing escaped animals costs time and causes frustration.

24. Clearly identify animals that are being treated or have been treated with medication so that all staff know which animals are undergoing treatment. This is highly important when it comes close to animals being slaughtered that none are sold within a withdrawal period.

25. Invest in good, safe, handling facilities. This will minimise stress on animals as well as creating a safe environment for all involved to work in. If looking to update handling,

keep an eye out for possible grants that can fund 40% towards fixed or mobile handling facilities.

26. If you share equipment/machinery with other livestock farmers, disinfect equipment before it leaves your farm and on it's return. Ensure it leaves your farm clean and comes back to your farm clean to reduce disease transfer risk.
27. Do not underestimate the importance of ventilation. Good airflow in housing is key to animals health and to reduce problems like pneumonia. Smoke bomb sheds to analyse airflow. Consider which way the weather comes and if you could open the shed up.
28. Have good financial discipline stemming from accurate costings, robust budgeting, and financial monitoring. Forward projections should be based on past performance and an understanding of the market, combined with setting realistic goals and implementing plans to achieve them.
29. If finishing cattle you have bred, cost the sucker herd and finishing herd separately and show internal transfers. Do they both make money? If not, change your system.
30. Aim to calve at 24 months. Any reductions in age at calving can have a significant impact on emissions' footprint and increase in herd efficiency. Reducing age at calving has also been shown to increase cows longevity.
31. When buying rams or bulls, consider looking at estimated breeding values as well as what the animal looks like. EBV's can be a useful tool to show traits such as calving ease, eye muscle, weight gain and litter size.
32. Chase bad debtors more frequently or even stop trading with bad payers. With rising interest rates, finance comes at a cost and your business is operating as a lender to theirs.
33. Consider using social media to highlight what your farm is doing well. Educating the public on how food is produced is an important factor to combat misinformation and to display the hard work that farmers do to put food on the table. It is also a good tool to advertise stock from home.
34. Look after your machinery. This can be as simple as using a power washer on equipment when it is put away. Manure can degrade metal work, ultimately decreasing it's lifespan. Blow out air filters; change engine filters in-line with recommendations; use the grease gun when required

35. Consider if an integrated beef scheme could work for you. Guaranteed sale prices when animals arrive on farm can give security and ease management decisions. Visit farmers who are already participating in one. Discuss what challenges they find within the scheme.
36. Take note when buying stock where they've come from. If these animals perform well then call the sellers when you're ready to buy again and consider giving a little more for animals that you know thrive in your system.
37. Join discussion groups to network and learn about other businesses. This can be an opportunity to compare where others have had successes or problems in the same farming year and climate as yourself. Be careful of others bragging/ exaggerating performance.
38. Consider outwintering if your soil types suit and growing winter forage crops – they are a low cost source of feed and can work well on free draining land. It can be a much cheaper system than investing in infrastructure and these fields can then join in the re-seeding rotation.
39. Reduce age at slaughter by 1-2 months where possible. Breeding, feeding and environmental factors can all impact on animal performance and are key areas to focus on. Any reductions in age at slaughter can also have a significant impact on emissions' footprint and efficiency.
40. Intake of fresh clean water positively correlates to feed intake and is essential to productivity. Growing and finishing cattle consume between 15-75L of water each day so a good supply is needed to meet demand at peak times. Minimise feed contamination in to water tanks.
41. Sales reps are not allowed on the farm without an appointment.
42. Have a clean, tidy, and well-organised workplace. This helps with workflow and efficiency, increases staff retention, and gives a positive representation of the industry to visitors and those passing the farm.
43. It's important to keep the feed space and feed offered clean and well in reach for the cattle, a smooth floor material will make it easier for consumption. An easily accessible feed space will reduce the labour needed to push feed and remove waste feed.

44. The transition from grazing-based diets to silage-based diets should happen gradually to give the rumen time to adjust. Without this cattle are at a greater risk of having acidosis, stomach ulcers and liver abscesses.
45. Weaning calves should be creep-fed for 3-6 weeks before housing to help develop their rumen and avoid any dips in intakes at a time when they need it most.
46. Wear high-visibility clothing, provide it to your staff, have your phone charged and with you when you are lone-working and tell people where you are going and for how long. When doing anything potentially dangerous, have a second person in the area too. Stay safe.
47. Make best use of the shed space you have. In a number of beef and sheep systems costly infrastructure such as sheds are only utilised for the winter months. Consider what other uses you could have for the building outside of these times to increase revenue.
48. Look after your workers. Provide staff with good welfare facilities above the basic requirements: such as a kettle, microwave, toaster, shower etc. Aim to develop your staff, funding courses if possible. A happy staff member is a more productive staff member.
49. When feeding any animal, hygiene is key but it is especially important with younger animals as they are developing their immunity. Ensure feeding equipment for calves and lambs are cleaned and sterilised properly after every use.
50. Consider using walkie-talkie style radios if phone reception is poor – important for staff safety.
51. Go the extra mile and do a little more than is strictly necessary.

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