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An insight into work at SRUC's Hill and Mountain Research Centre

In the last five years, hard work by staff at SRUC's upland research farms at Kirkton & Auchtertyre near Crianlarich has reinvigorated a facility that has been in existence for over 40 years. While, during those four decades there were periods when research funders showed little interest in hill farming the programme presently underway at Kirkton & Auchtertyre is most definitely focussed on addressing the challenges of the 21st century.

We have been helped in planning many of these new activities by an Advisory Group comprising farming, industry, consultancy and Scottish Government agency representatives.

Many of the positive developments arising from the work of that Group and from the investments that SRUC has made – in both staff and infrastructure - have become a lot more visible over the past few years.



So we have renewed fencing across the farms which will allow us to ensure that the cattle in particular can make more use of, and help with improvement of, large parts of the grazing resource on the farms. We have also established a group of local farmers who come together three times a year to discuss grassland management issues.

This group have not only set in train in bye improvement works but are also looking to do more about bracken, rush and thistle encroachment that has occurred on parts of the farms – all of which are common issues affecting hill farms across the Highlands & Islands.

We have also seen marked improvement in our livestock handling facilities, with the cattle moving into a purpose built shed at Kirkton last winter and the new sheep handling facilities at Auchtertyre being put through its paces during sheep work over the last year.

I hope that future articles in this column will help highlight how the research being conducted at Kirkton & Auchtertyre is making a genuine contribution to the sustainable future of Scottish hill farming.

Davy McCracken
Head of SRUC's Hill & Mountain Research Centre