

## Technology key to help keeping research going

Like countless others across Scotland, myself and most of the team at Kirkton & Auchtertyre have had to adapt to the movement restrictions caused by the ongoing pandemic.

The vast majority of field-based research across Scotland has not been classed as essential.

So we are all sitting out lockdown in our separate homes across Scotland – or in New Zealand, where one of the team was visiting friends when the travel restrictions kicked-in.



But although travel and face-to-face meetings have stopped, our work goes on through the use of emails, phone calls and online video conferences.

Some of that ongoing activity revolves around discussing with project partners and funders what alternatives can be put in place where planned experiments or events can no longer occur.

So instead of on-site workshops, we are looking to develop a Virtual Tour of the farms. This would help, for example, to illustrate where different public goods are being produced across the farms, and how the remote sensors we have in place are helping to provide data on those.

And normal day to day work also continues. Such as working with project partners to finalise the grant agreements for a major new European project we are leading on which will now be launched in the autumn.

Or pulling together another European consortium to develop and submit a proposal later in the summer to an AHDB (Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board) call for carcass quality research.

And working with SEFARI (Scottish Environment, Food & Agriculture Research Institutes) colleagues to help make existing educational activities and resources across those institutes more readily accessible online to primary and secondary school pupils and their teachers.

And of course, time and tide wait for no man, woman – or sheep. And fortunately, farming and ensuring livestock health and welfare have been classed as essential activities.

So when you read this we – like hill farms across Scotland - will be well into lambing of all the sheep on the farms.

Our farm-based shepherds – together with the one research technician who lives on site - will therefore be catching, measuring, recording and tagging lambs as soon as they are born.

Such data allows us to know how well individual ewes and lambs go on to perform throughout the rest of the season.

But it also provides essential information to help inform management decisions on the farms later in the year.

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