

McCracken, D. 2020 Introduction of Beef Shorthorn paid dividends. *Press & Journal*, 20<sup>th</sup> July 2020. <https://www.pressandjournal.co.uk/fp/business/farming/2348996/introduction-of-beef-shorthorn-paid-dividend>

## **Introduction of Beef Shorthorn paid dividends**

We reintroduced a herd of cattle to our Kirkton & Auchtertyre farms seven years ago.

Initially we focused on the 24 Aberdeen Angus cross cows being put to an Aberdeen Angus bull.

Those Aberdeen Angus cows worked well out on the hill – despite the average 3m of rain per year - for the first four years.



Nevertheless, Ewen Campbell, our farm manager, felt that some of them – especially those with thinner skins - were not coping as well as they should in our extremely harsh environment.

So in 2016, he decided to introduce Beef Shorthorn into the herd. As a result, we now operate a Beef Shorthorn cross Angus criss-cross breeding strategy. And it is working extremely well. So much so in fact that we have now agreed to become one of the Beef Shorthorn Cattle Society's new Focus Farms.

These Focus Farms feature a number of producers working with the breed within their respective suckler herds. The information available for each one highlights how Beef Shorthorn fits commercially in the herd and what the subsequent impact on performance has been.

Our Aberdeen Angus cross cows and Beef Shorthorn cross heifers spend the vast majority of the year out on the hill – which rises to over 1,000m – feeding solely on forage. They only come down into the shed at Kirkton in December, where they calve over a six week period starting in early February.

We then look to get the cows and calves back out onto the hill as soon as the weather and grass growth allows in May.

Over the last three years the herd has averaged 100% calving with 100% calves reared.

We wean the calves at an average of 200 days and have an efficiency target that at weaning each calf should ideally be 50% of the cow's body weight.

Despite the fact that the calves don't receive any concentrates, the best cows are achieving over 40% efficiency whilst last year some achieved 45%.

Calving went very well this year, with all the cows and heifers producing live calves with minimal intervention.

The nine Beef Shorthorn cross heifers did very well, calving in a 26 day period and with the calves averaging 39.6kg at birth.

We have a second batch of twelve bulling heifers out running with a native bred Aberdeen Angus bull. And a further batch of twelve yearling heifers will be bulled next year.

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