

McCracken, D. 2020 New flock technology is worth training support. *Press & Journal*, 26<sup>th</sup> September 2020. <https://www.pressreader.com/uk/the-press-and-journal-inverness-highlands-and-islands/20200926/282540135777672>

### **New flock technology is worth training support**

Six years ago we hosted a visit to the farms by Scottish Government officials and farmers from around Scotland delivering the first round of Farming for a Better Climate Monitor Farms.

During that visit – as with all farmer and consultant visits to the farms – we demonstrated the use of our weigh-crate and autodrafter.

This links to the electronic tag on each individual sheep, automatically collecting information on their weight and sorting them one of five ways depending on how we want to split the flock on the day.



We highlighted that there was a strong climate change rationale for more hill farmers to use such technology. In particular, such kit can allow farmers to manage their flock as a group of individuals and help inform decisions on feeding, worming, drawing animals for slaughter and selection for breeding.

Getting all of these factors ‘right’ can improve the cost-effectiveness of management, improve the health and performance of individual animals and thereby help reduce the overall carbon footprint of the flock.

An added bonus is that it can also save time and labour for the farmer, reduce handling stress for the animals, reduce paperwork and increase the ease and accuracy of performance data recording.

We highlighted, however, that one reason for lack of uptake of the technology was the initial cost of purchase. Hence, we advocated the need to provide some financial assistance to hill farmers to enable them to invest and thereby improve their management.

We have made that case so often without success that it came as a pleasant surprise to see this technology included within the range of items available for support within the Pilot Sustainable Agriculture Capital Grants Scheme.

But having the ability to purchase such technology is one thing. Knowing how to use it effectively to help address the issues of relevance to any particular farm is quite another.

Hence we have also consistently advocated the need for effective training in the use of such new technology –to ensure not only that the full benefits can be achieved but also that hill farmers are confident to invest in the first place.

I do hope that the opportunity to obtain this equipment will be embraced by the industry. But I also hope that one of the lessons learned from this Pilot will be the need to facilitate training alongside the purchase of any new equipment.

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