

**Cairngorms Farmers Forum**  
**Report on Inaugural Meeting**  
**Tomintoul**

**07-10-2009**

**Gordon McConachie**

The first meeting of the Cairngorms Farmers Forum took place on the 7<sup>th</sup> of October 2009 in Tomintoul. An audience of between 60 and 70 farmers, crofters and land managers from Strathspey, Badenoch, Glenlivet, Tomintoul, Glenlivet, Donside and Deeside attended in a very packed meeting room in the Gordon Arms Hotel.

I gave a general introduction to the meeting and gave a brief overview of why the Forum was set up and what it hoped to achieve over the coming months and years. I emphasised that it was up to Forum members to decide how this future was shaped and what subjects were discussed. I also reminded the audience that there was an excellent Land Based Business Training Unit within the Park Authority and it was there very much to provide training on a whole host of subjects. *(Copy of presentation available on request)*

The main theme of the meeting was Animal Health issues affecting businesses within the park Area.

Speakers were as follows:

**Andrew Rafferty** – Strathspey Vet Centre and Cairngorms National Park board member, set the scene by highlighting the main diseases affecting cattle in his practice area. This covered mainly Bovine Viral Disease (BVD) and Johne's Disease. He went through the screening and testing programme that is required to identify and deal with these diseases. He made the audience aware of the scale of the problem within his practice area and the possible ways to combat them.

He was keen to instigate a pilot project in a distinct area within the park to see if it was possible to get all livestock producers in that area to join up to one or other of the main Cattle Health schemes available at present. A small group of Forum members will be assembled within the next 2 months to take things forward. *(Copy of presentation available on request)*

**Ian Pritchard** – Manager of SAC's Premium Cattle Health Scheme again gave an industry wide overview of the problems associated with BVD and outlined SAC's scheme which covers all the main animal diseases.

**Michael Durno** – Vice chairman of HI Health and local suckled calf producer also outlined the benefits of being in a scheme both to the business and to the livestock themselves. He also gave more details of the HI Health Scheme and the process of joining.

**Alistair Smart & Charlie Adam** – both livestock farmers and founder members of the Cattle Health Improvement Programme in the Donside area gave a very practical example and justification for vaccinating cattle against BVD. They outlined the real financial benefits that can be obtained from such a programme.

**John Gregor** – General Manager of Aberdeen & Northern Marts based at Thainstone spoke about their newly introduced High Health status breeding sales for animals that have been tested free of BVD and vaccinated prior to sale. He outlined what he saw was an excellent opportunity for buyers to get good quality breeding stock of known disease status without the worry of introducing problems onto the farm.

A **Panel discussion** then took place involving all the speakers and also including representatives of the main pharmaceutical companies dealing with vaccines – Pfizer and Intervet. There were a variety of good questions from the floor which the panel members answered competently.

The final item on the Agenda was a talk from **Peter Beattie** – Technical Projects Manager from Quality Meat Scotland on the Monitor Farm project currently operating on a farm near Ballater. He outlined the process of selection for a Monitor Farm and the real benefits from both hosting one and attending as a group member. There is now a real emphasis on a Community involvement and buy-in to the Monitor Farm in their area. The main source of funding for this project is via the Skills Development part of SRDP. The Monitor Farmer at Ballater was in attendance and gave a valuable insight into what he had to do and share with other farmers in the area. He was very supportive of the Monitor Farm programme and would be keen to attend another one in the area and help out with the initial set up of one. Peter also stated that he is working with CNPA to look at getting a Monitor Farm in the Strathspey/Badenoch area of the Park. There seemed to be a genuine interest from farmers to have another Monitor Farm with lots of questions from the assembled audience.

There was very positive feedback from the meeting with many of those attending suggesting topics for future meetings – Renewables, Environmental Issues, Woodland Management and Organic farming.

#### **Action Points/Follow up:**

1. To follow up on possible Pilot area for disease monitoring via small group of Forum Members
2. To continue working with QMS and other partners to set up a Monitor Farm in Strathspey/Badenoch area.

#### **Next Forum Meeting:**

Scheduled for January/February 2010