

SAYFC Agri Affairs – Yorkshire Study Tour 2022

8th – 13th July

Day 1

[Matt and Dani Blair, Thrimby Farms – Jillian Kennedy, Aberfeldy](#)

Bright eyed and bushy tailed on Friday morning, the bus left the Young Farmers' Centre at Ingliston on route for our Yorkshire Study Tour. Making use of the time travelling south, we made a stop just south Penrith to *Thrimby Farms*, ran by Matt and Dani Blair. The business is run over two neighbouring farms, *Thrimby Hall and Thrimby Grain*, with each of the farm steadings sit between the northwest main railway line and the M6. Matt and Dani took on the farms three years ago (in 2019) under a 10-year tenancy. Matt and Dani run the farms themselves with the help of Matt's father John, and they bring in a lambing assistant.

In the past, the farms were a dairy business, as were many in the area: they still use the cubicles in the sheds. More recently, *Thrimby Grain* was a low input arable farm up to 1000ft but the farm wasn't working as efficiently and effectively as it should be. and the old milking parlour at *Thrimby Grain* has been pulled down and is to be replaced with a cattle handling system for young stock.

When the farm tenancies became available, Matt and Dani won a tenancy to run both farms together (totalling 500 acres), as a beef and sheep enterprise. There is a lot of competition for farms in the area, and to win the tenancy, Matt and Dani had to put up a £50,000 buy for the sheds, cattle yokes and handling system. Their first two years at *Thrimby Farms*, they were also contracting to bring in extra income that they could invest into the farm. They now run 150 suckler cows and 1000 ewes. They are looking to increase but there isn't enough shed space to enable more cattle. On arrival to boost the numbers they already owned, they bought Black Angus and Simmental cattle from Hawick. They are doing well at *Thrimby*, they've avoided Limousins as they've found they don't do as well and had a problem with the cows drying off too quickly after two months. All their heifers are going to a Charolais bull this year as it has worked well in previous years. All cattle are sold at 19 months, mostly sold through markets at Kendall, Carlisle and Cockermouth.

Grass is growing March to November at Thrimby which provides good steady substance for much of the year, meaning cattle condition does not fluctuate much through the year. The cattle are heavier than would be expected but the Simmental breed in conjunction with a steady condition has meant there are very few calving problems at all. If there were to be issues, Dani being a qualified vet comes in very handy! They grow red clover silage which is generating 19-21% silage protein which has been good for milk. This will be followed by barley which shouldn't need much fertiliser.

Young stock are fed TMR (total mixed ration) and calves are weighed regularly. Before the calves were being crossed with Charolais, they were increasing 1.1 - 1.3kg per day. The Charolais crossed calves are averaging a daily live weight gain of 1.8 - 2kg. They've noticed the recession buying, particularly in the last year where weight is paying. Fancier cattle are going for steaks but largely Matt and Dani have noticed that beef weight is where the demand is to produce high demand, basic products such as mince.

The farm is within a tuberculosis hot spot area, but Matt and Dani are cautious, and thankful that they have not had a problem to date. They have plenty grass at *Thrimby Farms*, but the risk of tuberculosis being brought in by summer grazing dairy cows is too big a risk. The closest cases were approximately 4 miles from *Thrimby Farms*, where it got into the local badger population. This instigated a cull, and the area is in it's fifth year of vaccinations. Examinations on culled badgers now are thankfully now not showing any signs of tuberculosis. Testing is still done every six months, once February-March before calving, and a second test August-September.

Thrimby's 1000-strong sheep flock consists of swales, mules, texel crosses, pure texels and pure beltex's. Most of their lambs are sold through the ring and have been making £125-140/head: with swales ewes fetching £110 at market. Some lambs go to ABP, up to 21.5kg dead. The ewe prices doing so well is another indication of recession buying where again Matt and Dani are following trends to make the best use out of their tenancy, pushing for numbers, while acknowledging they have seen a slight impact on breed quality. The weather and the grass have been great which has meant they've been able to market lambs sooner as well.

Ewes are brought in in January to let a Spring bite come in. The plan is to increase the February lambers to 400 to take advantage of the early market. They have fell agreement with RSPB which runs 250 swale ewes. These are crossed with a Leicester tup providing a lamb cash crop in September. The swales spend most of their time on the fells but are brought into in-by land for lambing and are wintered for a few months on a large reserve down near Cambridge.

The farm is also being run under a mid-tier environmental scheme with areas of low input agricultural systems and activities protecting and encouraging ground nesting birds. Barley is produced as a low input cereal as well. They also allow and encourage educational access through schools as part of the scheme. This in turn opens up further capital grants which they are in the process of utilising to assist in putting a roof over their cattle handling system, and they would like to do further concreting. A capital grant helped them in their first year to concrete the original cattle handling system.

They have also planted 4000m of hedging, and constructed 9km of double fencing to create biodiversity corridors. Matt and Dani are very open to making positive changes for environment and are active in doing so, but they need to see it also benefitting the business.

So far it has meant contributions towards new fences and creating greatly improved shelter for sheep.

Matt and Dani are doing a great job at *Thrimby Farms*. They had a very impressive set-up to show us, and they have achieved so much in a short space of time, continually investing to improve the business. They admit they are still looking for a balance on the farm, but they have certainly grabbed all the opportunities available to them to strive for an improved farming business and livelihood.

Wareing Sheds – Jack Young, Carl Luke

In the afternoon of the first day, we visited J. Wareing Buildings in Wrea Green just outside Preston. The bus arrived and we were greeted into the offices by 3 generations of the Wareing Family, brothers Peter and Andrew (2nd Generation), Neil and Christopher (3rd Generation) and Joe (4th Generation). The business was founded in 1909 when Peter and Andrew's father bought a joiner and coffin makers business in Wrea Green, since then the Wareing's have progressed into the business it is today, employing 70 full time staff members and quoting around 8 structures per day. At Wareing's they have been the pioneers in kit frame buildings, they supply kits to 12 sub-contractors on a regular basis as well as the 7 squads of erectors employed directly by themselves.



We started our tour through the offices where we saw how the business uses CAD from the initial quoting right through the full process to erecting. We then moved through the fabrication shed where we saw components getting cut and welded and all the other specialized machinery used day in day out to aid the business. After seeing some of the finished product in the yard we headed over to the Wareing heritage center, this was something we could all tell the full family were very proud of and it was a great asset to the business to show where they had come from over the last 112 years.

Day 2

Pembertons Dairy and Farm Shop – Scott Dey, Garioch

The Saturday morning saw the group arrive at the Pemberton farm shop, a farm shop that most of us knew as Tom the farmer's son has his own YouTube channel showing the daily life on their family farm. The farm is located in Lytham not far from Blackpool. They run a 120 dairy herding producing milk to sell in their shop and to be home delivered as well as bread, water and yoghurt. The tour was given by Tom's dad who really took the time to explain the whole business and how they've gotten to where they are today. A really interesting thing about the business is that they can sell their milk out the vending machine raw this means it's not pasteurized something that is not legal to do in Scotland, after the tour we all bought our lunch from the farm shop and continued on our travels.

Massey Feeds – Lauren Nelson, Lower Nithsdale

On the 9th of July the group visited Massey Feeds. Massey Feeds is a progressive run family business which supply animal feed to farms across the Midlands and Northern England. They own two mills of which they manufacture their feed across Lancashire. They range from an extensive section for all ruminant and monogastric species including game feeds.

In 2012, they created Massey Harper Feeds group when they joined forces with Harper Feeds, another like-minded well-established feed business in the Southwest of England. This was to improve their national market.



During our visit the group was taken through the feed mill where they showed and explained the process step by step of how they manufacture their blends. Each different raw powdered materials are run through a ribbon blender to achieve uniform mixing. The group was then shown the control room where the blends are programmed and set. Massey Feeds purchase most of their grains from local farmers which they transport using their impressive fleet of lorries. As the tour continued the group was taken to the storeroom where they package all their produce. They explained how game feed is a massive part of their profits in the winter months.

After the tour of the mill the group was taken to the conference room where Massey Feeds had prepared a very factual presentation on livestock feeding. They educated the group on the ruminal function of livestock alongside feed efficiency and cost-effective feed choices. The company presented and explained their newly marketed unique PLANT FEEDS. This is

the UK's first range of sustainable ruminant feeds with no palm kernel or soya products. This range is to help farmers move towards net zero carbon.

Day 3

Stallion AI Services and Twenlows Stud Farm – Morven Nelson, Lower Nithsdale

After we got back on the bus for our morning visit, we headed from Newcastle upon Lyme to Chapel Field Stud. This is home to the Stallion AI Services in Shropshire. Upon arrival we



attend a presentation which discussed how Stallion AI services evolved from a commercial dairy and pig farm to the multi award winning facilities the business operates today. The visit was shared by Charolais Society which were also completing a trip around the UK. Due to the number of people on this visit we were split up into 2 groups, the group I was in was led by Tullis Matson who owns the business.

Chapel Field Studs is home to 300 mares and can house up to 39 stallions at one time. This is home to cloned show jumping star Arko as well as Olympic stars. To provide a stress-free experience for all horses on the stud especially the stallions, they are given access to outdoor turnout as well as exercise via the horse walker to maintain mental wellbeing. The stallions are also routinely weighed to ensure that any issues can be addressed as any problems will affect quality and amount of semen which can be collected. The mares also have access to turnout. They can currently store up to 1400 different stallion samples and 1 million semen straws as well as collect semen samples from recently deceased animals which helps to preserve breeding genetics. They offer frozen, chilled and fresh semen straws, embryo transplant, recipient mares, fertility testing and training courses. On site through training courses, they have a vet team which will provide all veterinary treatment as well as scanning up to 100 mares a day. This is to identify key stages of impregnating mares such as ovulation, optimum follicle size and the required 14-day, 28 day and 42-day scan to ensure correct formation, heartbeat and sex of foal.

Stallion AI services also carries out charitable services through their Nature SAFE charity. The work carried out by this charity is crucial in redeveloping and saving many endangered species. They have the only



living species biobank which currently holds over 110 different species which can be used to bring a species back from extinction. For this work they have received the Queen's Award for Enterprise in 2022. The facility relocated and was also officially opened by Princess Anne in 2018.

Overall, this facility is amazing and has helped to progress both horse genetics as well as provide a substantial answer to the overwhelming issue of losing species. I couldn't recommend enough for anyone who gets the chance to visit to do so!

Half Moon Farms – James Hay, Kinross

John and Louise Hobson farm in partnership across 2 holdings close to the village of Harden in West Yorkshire. In total they farm 500 acres plus an additional 100 acres on seasonal grass lets. Most of the land is in permanent pasture with their own silage made for their own use and a little contracting done by their self-employed worker.

They farm 350 Easycare ewes and 100 Stabilizer cows plus followers, both cattle and sheep are run on low input systems with the sheep being finished on farm and sold direct to slaughter. They found the performance of the lambs through the live ring was minimal to that of their kill out grades and price that they receive from the processors.

Louise plays an active role in both the breed societies of the Easycare and the Stabilizer breeds where she regularly attends breed sales as the Easycare secretary. In addition, she has been on several visits to ranches in the USA to learn more about the best genetics of the breed and has bought embryos and semen back for their own use.

The cattle are also taken through to slaughter by use of a local contract finisher who takes them through to slaughter weight with finished cattle being sent to a few local processors. Similar to the sheep, the use of the market did not realise the true potential John thought of his cattle. John focused heavily on the feed conversion and daily live weight gain of the cattle and the grading at slaughter he put a lot of reliance on to measure improvements in his breeding and genetics. He seldom weighed his cattle noting that the stress caused by handling outweighed the benefit of regular weights for records.

Purpose built livestock holding with outstanding cattle handling facilities which had been installed in the past few years. Careful thought and design implementation of the system for ease of use by 1 man and to minimise stress on the livestock. The handling system has been fitted with unique 7 bar gates that allowed for universal use of the system by both cattle and sheep. They have worked alongside a cow behaviourist to help perfect the system they have invested in.

To conclude it was a very informative visit into 2 breeds that nobody in the group had experience with and as a result gave a fresh perspective to suckler beef and sheep production. The group thoroughly enjoyed the afternoon, and we were gratefully treated with some great hospitality too.

Day 4

Metcalfe Farms

We were up bright and early on the Monday morning of our study tour to visit Metcalfe farms in Leyburn, North Yorkshire, run and owned by the Metcalfe family. Metcalfe farms is a large scale dairy, contracting and haulage business employing over 200 members of staff and run by the three Metcalfe brothers, David, Brian & Philip. We were kindly shown around their HQ at Washfold farm where we received an in depth and thought-provoking guided tour.

The farming enterprise covers 3000 acres including 1000 acres which is contract farmed – quite an expansion since the business started in 1939 with 120 acres and 10 cows!

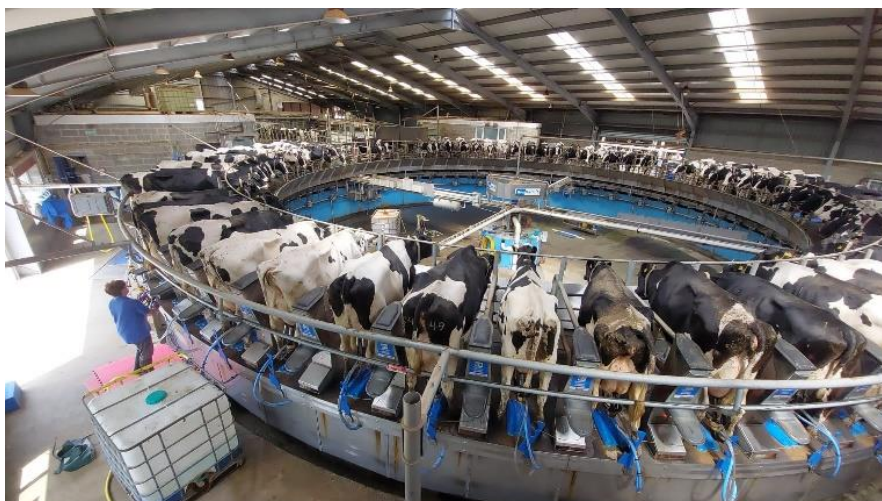
Alongside the dairying side of the business is a busy yard with a hive of activity crossing multiple sectors. The Metcalfes have a quarry open on site where they're crushing 10,000t per week as well as running a concrete plant. Other enterprises on site include a vet's practice and a New Holland tractor dealership. Buildings are rented out on site for other uses including storage of woodchips and an army equipment restoration company.

The Metcalfe Farms heavy haulage business comprising of 100 lorries is based on the farm site at Washfold, which operates as one of 3 depots.

The agri-contracting side of the business provides a service for a multitude of tasks including forage harvesting where 3 forage harvesters chop around 16,000 acres of grass in total per year. A further 3000 acres of maize and whole crop are also harvested as well as 3500 acres of cereals being combined annually.



Metcalfe farms dairy run 1300 head of Holstein cows and employs 35 people. Cows are housed inside all year round and milked 3 times per day in their 72 point rotary parlour. Milking takes 4.5 hours with 12 – 14 staff members being present on the farm at any one time



for milkings. Cows are divided into 8 milking groups and kept for a total of 4-5 lactations per cow. Cows are fitted with pedometers and auto ID in which yield, production and activity is automatically recorded.

Replacement females are selected from the top 30% of the herd. The best colostrum is also carefully selected for feeding the heifer calves which are then fed by automatic milk feeders.

5 cuts of grass silage are taken each year with around 28-30 days between cuts before the grass fields are then rented out for grazing lambs. The remainder of the ground is used to grow whole crop wheat which is fed to the cows as part of their TMR along with the grass silage.

At the time of our visit the cattle sheds were in the process of having skylights removed and dimmable LED lights fitted instead to limit the intense heat of sunlight enabling further control to the temperature within the buildings and to enable the optimum brightness at the desired times of day for the cows.

The site is also home to a 200KW anaerobic digester plant which receives all slurry from the cattle. This digester can produce enough electricity to provide green electricity for the entire site including all its various enterprises and divisions. After the slurry has been digested in the plant the digestate is pumped down a slurry lagoon where it can be spread on to the fields and used as a valuable fertiliser.



As a group we were left in awe by the Metcalfe's enterprise. The scale, attention to detail, progressiveness, and general forward thinking - well outside the box - left us struck full of admiration! We are very grateful to the Metcalfe family for their insightful tour of their premises, which really needs to be seen in person to be fully comprehended receive full justice.

Day 5

Great Yorkshire Show

On the second last day of the study tour we headed for a glorious sunny day at the Yorkshire Show. The Yorkshire show is ran over 4 days from the Tuesday to Friday, celebrating the best of agriculture, food, farming and countryside. It was easy to see why this was a high light in the English farming calendar as well as being supported by many from further afield . On the first day of the show there was a fantastic display of sheep, cattle and horse, with the horses filling the entertainment for the day in the main ring, the cattle had the charolais and shorthorn national shows filling their show rings for the day with some very strong well supported classes, and the sheep had a great display of a wide variety of breeds on display for showing and also a strong shearing competition taking place during the day!

Around the rest of the show was a fantastic display of cutting edge machinery and farming equipment, gardening displays, bee hives and honey along with the best quality food and drink on offer around the show. With a pack out food hall really highlighting the best in British food and drink. There was also a wide display of country pursuits and shopping selling some high quality clothing and trinkets enough to empty many a wallet!

The show was very well set out with plenty open areas and the stands were well mixed to take in a good range as you moved around the show. To conclude this was a fantastic day enjoyed by everyone on the trip with a great chance to socialise with fellow like minded people in the industry and to learn about new innovations and see the best of British farming.

Day 6

Mainsgill Farm Shop – James Fleming, Avondale

On the final day of the trip, we visited Mainsgill Farm shops an exceptional impressive well run farm shop. We were kindly given a tour of the shop by the owners Andrew and Maria Henshaw. Originally bought Mainsgill Farm in 1995 just 57 acres at the time, they reared dairy heifers and pigs at the start. Later realising there was a gap in the market they butchered a pig and sold the produce door to door. This later grew to selling at farmers markets. The first shop was built in 2001. Being situated 4.6 miles from scotch corner and directly accessed of the A66 the shop quickly grew in popularity.

Now a days they employ 60 head of full-time staff between the shop/cafe/butchery/farm. Withe farm consisting of 500 ewes, 120 cows, 195 pigs and 5 camels which are extremely popular at the farm shop. They are also farming 1300 acres. The farm finishes 400 head of cattle a year, buying in 300 odd heifer stores, only heifer meat is sold through the shop/cafe. Selling home grown lamb and cull ewes though the farm shop. Andrew comes from a family of veg growers so even the veg in the shop is family sourced.

The enterprise is powered through on farm biomass boilers and solar panels

The family have very ambitious with more plans of expansion, with the hope of a fuel station in the plans and an extension onto the farm shop, the family do have their own full times builders so even this is kept within house.

In conclusion this was an extremely impressive visit, every part of their business was of the highest quality down to the finest details, the shop and cafe it's self was surprising big it just seemed to keep on going. A family at the forefront of buying and sourcing local food.

Tom Neill, Thornington Farm – Alan Lindsay, Bathgate

The final farm that the group visited was Thornington Farm Dairy, farmed by the Neil family, who have been tenants since 1954.

The farm extends to a total of 2,500 acres and is situated 800 feet above sea level. The family are currently milking 265 Friesian cows through a 14 aside herringbone parlour with two dairymen working on site. The cows are currently averaging 7,900 litres per lactation, with the milk being sold to Arla at the most recent price of 47p per litre in the previous month of June. To increase the number of heifer calves, sexed semen is used, with 20 heifers sold annually at Carlisle market and the remaining kept. All cows are kept inside to calve as this has proven to reduce milk fever within the herd and increase the longevity of the cows, with the cows usually being kept for four lactations. After seeing the outstanding stock of Friesian cows and the parlour set up, the group then visited the calf shed, where calves were reared in individual pens until 10 days old and are then introduced into groups of 5.

In addition to the dairy side of the farm, 1,800 ewes run on the farm, where roughly 200 scotch mule ewe lambs are bought each year to maintain flock numbers. Suffolk tups are put over mules, where 400 ewe lambs are kept on for breeding and with the remainder being sold at St. Boswells market, the lambs are creep fed throughout the year to maintain lambs thriving throughout the summer.

Between 900 and 1000 acres goes towards arable ground for the farm each year, where 1/3rd is winter barley, 1/3rd winter wheat and the other 1/3rd getting planted in spring barley. To maintain costs and sustainability, barley is treated on the farm to be used to feed and fatten stock on site. With the farm receiving an average rainfall of 28 inch each year, Thornington farm has found these crops to be the best suited for their land. The farm sells on average 500 tonnes of grain per year and has found this as a valuable source of income for the farm. The arable ground receives dung, with slurry going onto the silage ground. The farm takes two, sometimes three cuts of silage per year depending on yields and weather, 250 acres is used for first cut, with 180 acres being taken for second cut.

After an enjoyable week visiting different farms, a massive thanks must go to all hosts! Thanks to the Neil family at Thornington Farm for very kindly welcoming us along to their farm for our last visit, sharing their knowledge and experiences with the group and their fantastic hospitality. I would highly recommend this trip to others, it was very worthwhile, good learning opportunity and an enjoyable trip.

Conclusion

To round up the trip I would just like to extend our thanks to the supporters of the trip, to the Ingliston Trust and to SAYFC for their efforts in organising a successful and enjoyable trip.