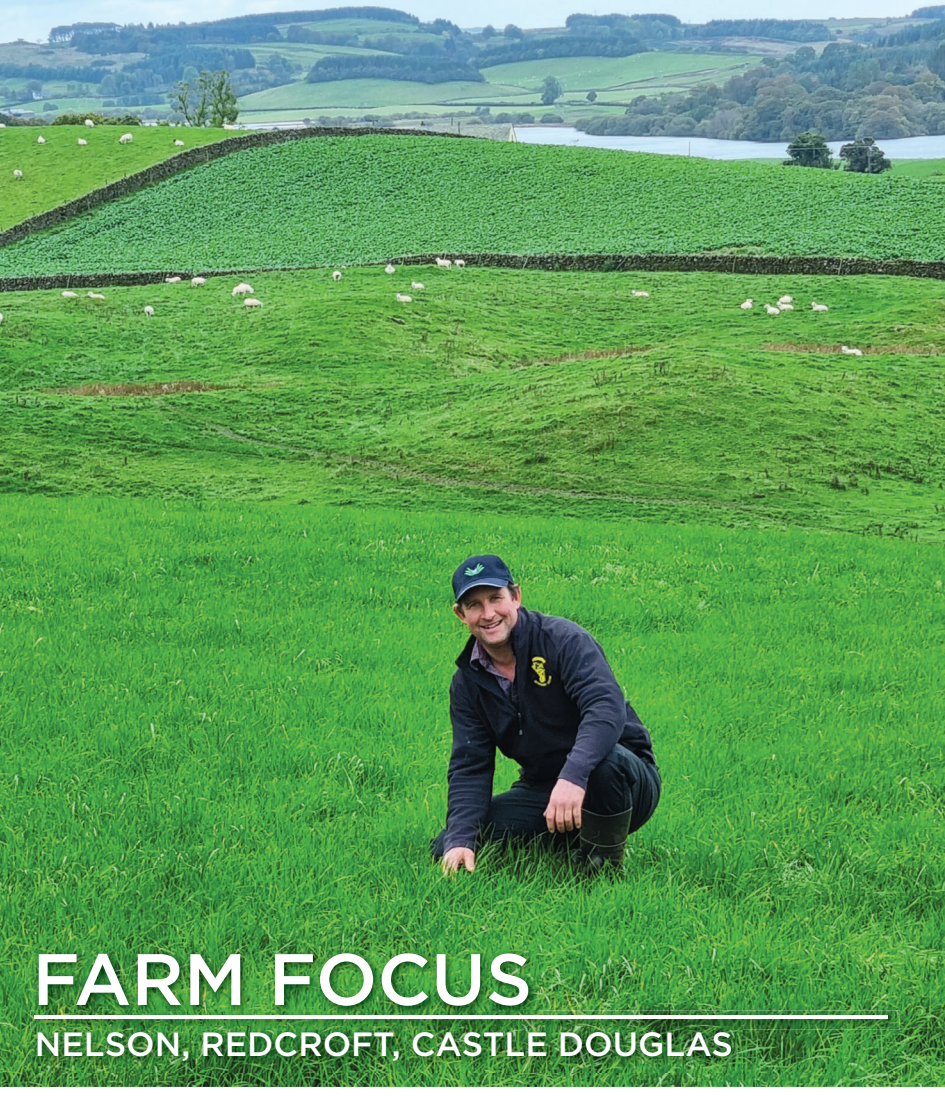




FARM FOCUS

NELSON, REDCROFT, CASTLE DOUGLAS

THE FARM

David is the third generation to farm at Redcroft, along with his father, Alistair. The land comprises two parcels. The main unit lies in the upper Dee Valley near Castle Douglas, where they run dairy and sheep enterprises. The other parcel runs alongside the River Dee and is lighter ground, used for silage production and finishing lambs later in the year.

THE DAIRY ENTERPRISE

The dairy enterprise moved from the traditional grazing model seven years ago to a robotic system. The pedigree Holstein herd now averages over 11,500 litres, with fat and protein levels of over 4.2% and 3.5% respectively, supplying Lactalis for cheese production.

The breeding policy aims to increase solids for cheese, as well as improve health and conformation to enhance feed conversion efficiency from every robot space. Genomic-tested bulls have been used for over ten years, and all replacement heifers are now tested to improve genetic progression and breeding accuracy.

The ration comprises high quality grass silage taken from three to four cuts, wholecrop barley, and is balanced with moist feeds and a blend for optimal feed efficiency. The herd has been closed for the past ten years, with all replacements reared on the unit and any surplus sold calved.

Around 60% of the herd is bred to beef, either Angus or British Blue. These are retained and sold as stores at around 12-18 months old, depending on the year and grazing availability. All youngstock are grazed through summer from six months of age and housed from late October.



THE SHEEP ENTERPRISE

The sheep enterprise fits around the dairy, with 300 ewes producing prime lambs which are finished on farm and sold through the local market. Over 95% of the lambs are finished from aftermath grass following silage for the dairy.

The flock is lambled indoors in March and April, with lambs turned out the next day onto higher grazing ground not suitable for silage. The sheep move higher up the farm as grass growth increases, allowing the dairy youngstock out to graze, only accessing the silage ground in late October for tugging or finishing.

In recent years, the flock has been bred to Easycare sires to shed wool naturally, eliminating the need for shearing and reducing losses associated with a heavy fleece in a warm, wet climate. Texel and Suffolk terminal sires are used over the older, non-shedding ewes.

FORAGE AND SOIL MANAGEMENT

High quality forage production is key for all stock. The soil is pH and nutrient mapped, allowing accurate applications of nutrients. Granulated calcium lime is applied to the whole farm annually, aiming to maintain a pH between 6.2 and 6.5.

Slurry is applied by dribble bar to silage and grazing ground from March to September and is the most important nutrient source. Bagged nitrogen with sulphur is applied where needed to optimise growth, though this is reducing year on year.

Watson Seeds have provided the grass mixes for all three generations, now predominantly Duart with clover. Silage ground is reseeded at around ten year intervals, often following wholecrop barley on the better fields.



Redstart rape/kale hybrid and stubble turnips are broadcast onto stubbles and slurry applied in early August. This allows dairy heifers to strip graze over winter, supplemented with silage bales, or for the last lambs to be finished on it as well.



FUTURE FOCUS

David is keen to investigate and, where applicable, use new science and systems to produce quality homegrown forage as much as possible, to feed the livestock efficiently and return nutrition back to the soil.

