



# BREED FEATURE

## WITH CULMAILY LUINGS

**Luing cattle have been the backbone of the McCall family's farming business since the 1960s, running hardy, low maintenance suckler cows which go on to produce progeny suitable for both the store and breeding rings.**

The ability to be outwintered in the north of Scotland all year round has been one of the key attractions to the breed for father and son team Angus and Ewan, who farm at Culmaily, near Golspie, with their respective wives Evelyn and Claire, and the next generation, Isla and Alan.

Home to 600 acres of land of which 400 acres is ploughable and the remainder permanent pasture, Culmaily has been farmed by the family for 51 years. They were fortunate to be able to purchase the unit in 2016 after 50 years as sitting tenants. A further 120 acres of rough grazing near Dornoch is taken as summer grazing for cattle, as well as 50 acres next door to home.



"After a visit to the island of Luing back in the 60s, my grandfather and his brother were so impressed by the fledgling Luing breed, that they purchased the bull Luing Agent at Oban to run with Beef Shorthorn cross Highland cows sourced from Uist," said Ewan.

"They then upgraded to pedigree Luing females and we've been working with the breed ever since. They are great animals for outwintering and can stand all weathers. The females are excellent mothers and they have a good temperament. Calves are suitable for selling store, finished or for breeding."

Since that first bull purchase, followed by Luing heifers, the family has built up a strong herd of 100 suckler cows, which includes 80 pedigree registered Luings and 20 Sim-Luings.

The farm is also home to 300 North Country Cheviot and Cheviot Mule ewes producing Cheviot and Suffolk prime lambs sold through Dunbia and store lambs at Dingwall & Highland Marts.

Roughly 200 acres of spring barley is grown for malting, with the surplus used at home for feeding. This also allows the family to be self-sufficient when it comes to straw and muck.

"From a commercial point of view, the Luing is about as good as it gets because they have the potential to be crossed with virtually any other breed such as the Charolais to produce good quality calves" - Ewan McCall

"At present, we are breeding 70 Luing cows purebred, 10 Luings to the Simmental, and the remaining Sim-Luings to the Simmental," explained Ewan. "We are planning to phase out the Sim-Luings but that's only to simplify things at our end - they are really good, productive suckler cows."



All cows calve from the end of February onwards and are kept in a tight calving pattern, with this year's season seeing 80 cows calve in the first six weeks. They produce good conception rates too as 99 out of 103 were successfully scanned in calf last year.

Angus and Ewan haven't purchased in any females since 2008 so they rely on home-bred replacements, introducing 12 heifers to the herd each year. For the past four years, they have been bulled as yearlings, with good management key to the success.

Half of the cows are calved inside and the other half are outside, calving on stubble fields. They could all be easily calved outside but I like to get fields ploughed ready for sowing. We have calving cameras in the sheds as a management tool and if we have to bring in a cow that has calved, the cow will easily follow the calf in the trailer behind the quad."

Autumn management is in late October- cows are weaned, PD'd, vaccinated and health tested. They then head back outside onto stubbles and are fed straw in feed bunkers, before being introduced to a TMR of straw, silage and sometimes draff depending on the weather.



The calves are housed in straw bedded courts and are fed a diet of straw, draff, barley and silage, before being selected for breeding. This year, we have decided to go down the route of bull beef so that we can keep all bull calves entire, rather than regretting on castrating a good breeding bull too early. We have our feed barley to make use of as well and I feel we will hopefully have a better choice of bulls at the end of the day."



With the breeding ring the main aim, males and heifers not suitable for breeding have been sold through the store ring at Dingwall at the end of April, where they regularly average £1000 per head at roughly 380kg. Around 20 heifers are grazed throughout the summer and are sold as two-year-olds at the breed sale at Dingwall in May, producing strong averages such as 2200gns achieved in 2020, with a top price of 2960gns.

Sim-Luing yearlings are also sold that day and have reached a top of 1600gns in recent years. The best of the pedigree bulls have been sold at Castle Douglas for the past 10 years, with their best price to date of 5500gns achieved this February for Culmaily Zulu. A few others have been sold at 5000gns, which have gone on to sire some of the lead priced bulls recently at 10,000gns and 15,200gns.

Most of the stock bulls used in the herd have been purchased at Castle Douglas, including Benhar Clyde, whose daughters are still going strong at 14-years-old and Benhar Houston, a breeder of milky females.

Another is Craigdarroch Texas, whose son Culmaily Zorro, will be sold at the breed sale at Dingwall,

along with 18 two-year-old heifers and 13 Sim-Luing yearlings. Last year, the family purchased Finlurg Ziggy as a yearling from fellow breeders Robert and Hazel McNee, Over Finlurg. His first calves are on the ground this spring and look promising. Ewan said: "When purchasing in a stock bull, we look for a bull which is pleasing on the eye and will suit our own situation, as well as correct on his feet with good locomotion. Special attention is paid to the dam classification, which is a great tool and has massively helped bull selection." Looking ahead, Ewan reckons the future is bright for the Luing breed given the swing in emphasis toward keeping native cows.

"Farming is only going to get more difficult with the rising costs so I reckon farmers will move towards native breeds to keep their costs down on feeding and bedding especially," concluded Ewan.

"The Luing breed has made a name for itself now and is becoming a cow of choice. You only have to look at the demand at breeding sales up and down the country, being able to adapt to many different land types and individual situations."

