Annual General Meeting

8\textsuperscript{th} March 2012, held in the Roslin Institute, SAC, Easter Bush, Midlothian
At 1.30pm

Present:
Sam Wharry, Janet Beveridge, Bobby Lennox, Ian Duncan Millar, James Duncan Millar, Sandy & Ann Welsh, Yvonne Jones, Jo Conington (SAC), Alison Glasgow (Signet)

1. Apologies:
Billy Brady, Brian Kaye, Andrew Hattan, Campbell Tweed, Rod Mackenzie, Sam Boon, Caroline & John Jeromson, Nancy Tuthill, Steven Johnston, Aileen McFadzean, Mark Armstrong, Billy Renwick.

2. Minutes of the AGM 10\textsuperscript{th} March 2011 & Matters Arising:
The adoption of the minutes was proposed by Janet Beveridge, seconded by Bobby Lennox and were then signed by Chairman Sam Wharry.

3. Chairman’s Report:
Sam Wharry gave his report on the year:
This is the sixteenth AGM of the Blackface Sire Reference group, and coincidentally, when I was checking that I realised that we have now been recording our Blackies at home for 14 years. We are really seeing the benefits coming through now, with better mothering ability, more milk, and faster growing lambs all contributing to less work and hassle, and lower costs. I have to admit that when we started there were times when I wondered if we were going in the right direction, and sometimes it was very useful to come over to meetings in Scotland to see other breeders who were making use of recording, and who had faith in EBVs to improve their sheep. We can often overlook this important aspect of the group, simply providing a forum to discuss problems and opportunities with other like minded individuals can give us all confidence. The benefits of using recorded sheep, especially for maternal breeds have still got some way to go to reach commercial sheep farmers, but the good work by Kathy and Rod with the Scottish Sheep Strategy is setting an excellent example. I think that this has got to be the future for knowledge transfer, showing that new technologies can and do work on commercial farms. I must admit to watching with a degree of envy from the other side of the Irish Sea.

The development group has met twice this year, once in person, and once by teleconference. The first meeting was held at Gartlea in July, and we are again grateful to Janet for her hospitality. On the agenda for discussion were the proposed name change, and relationships with the Maternal Sheep Group. It was agreed that following a lack of impetus from other breeders in the Maternal Sheep Group, that this group should take ownership of the name, whilst remaining open to any other breeding groups who wanted to come on board in the future. The teleconference held in February discussed the “Super Mules” initiative from the Blueface Leicester society, marketing the progeny of high index blue tups, and the formation of a recording woolshedding group who are interested in getting involved with the Maternal sheep group. It was also agreed that we should have a discussion on the future direction of the group and developments in the last year, to give all the membership a chance to comment. Janet has kindly drawn up a paper on our current position, which you should have received with your agenda and minutes, and we will be using this to guide the discussion this afternoon.

The other main event of the year was the technical meeting, which was held at Rotmell farm, by kind permission of the Brewster family. We had a good turnout of members and friends, and after an update on the SSS from Rod, and a comprehensive demonstration of the new electronic data transfer system from Alison, Alex Brewster outlined his thoughts on the benefits of using recorded stock. There was a wide ranging discussion, and I think everyone present found the day to be interesting and useful. Thank to Alex and family.
for hosting us, and to everyone involved in organising the barbeque, which was very much appreciated, especially by those of us who had travelled over from Ireland.

As I’m sure you’re all glad to hear I’ve now reached the end of my third annual report, and I would just like to thank the members of the development group for all their efforts. I would also like to thank all the office bearers, specially Yvonne as secretary, and Janet as vice chair for their work and support, and to thank everyone for all the hospitality I have received over the years on my trips to Scotland. It has been a privilege and a pleasure to serve as chairman of the Blackface Sire Reference group for the last three years, and I wish Performance Recorded Blackfaces every success in the coming years.

4. **Treasurer's Report:**

Ian Duncan Millar presented the Treasurer's Report 2011.

During the year the membership slipped to 15 members. So far, 7 Scottish members and 2 Northern Ireland members have paid, and the others still need to pay their subscription for this year.

The idea of the Maternal Sheep Group has not attracted the support we had hoped for. Collective collaboration and connectedness is required and if we dwindle further we will not have enough funds or energy to keep going. The Company role is evolving. It will depend whether it will catch on, and we may need a couple of years to get going.

Looking first at Page 3. The operating profit of £1230 is incorrect as the Secretary's fee of £1200 has to be deducted. Therefore, it is nearly breakeven. The Secretary receives £110 per full Scottish member.

There was no FEC work this year – although that does not affect our profit as these monies are only Bed and Breakfast.

Turning to Page 4. The accountant is still a modest £150.

The Net Worth is healthy, and will be about £5000 after the Secretary's fee is deducted. There is no semen in stock.

There are still 2 tiers of fees and it is the £50 members that have been lost. I am hoping that the umbrella of the Maternal Sheep Group will tempt other members in and therefore I propose that the fee for a full member remains at £150.

I look forward to receiving the outstanding fees as soon as possible.

Before I stop, can I thank Yvonne as Secretary and for keeping the IT away from me.

A short discussion followed about needing to make what we do and what we offer worthwhile for those members wanting to join, particularly for £50. In the past, when people from outside the group have been invited to meetings, they have received the benefits without paying a joining fee. We need to consider this.

The adoption of the accounts was proposed by Janet Beveridge and seconded by Yvonne Jones.

5. **Election of Office Bearers:**

Chairman: Samuel Wharry is standing down after 3 years in the chair. Sam Wharry proposed Janet Beveridge as Chairperson, seconded Bobby Lennox. There would be no vice-chairman this year.

Secretary: Yvonne Jones, proposed by Ann Welsh, seconded James Duncan Millar

Treasurer: Ian Duncan Millar, proposed by Sandy Welsh, seconded Sam Wharry.

6. **Appointment of Independent Assessors:**

The reappointment of Campbell Dallas was proposed by Sam Wharry and seconded Ann Welsh.

7. **Review of Current Directors:**

Ian Duncan Millar retires this year but Ann Welsh proposed a further term of eight years, James Duncan Millar seconded. The other current directors remain in position

Bobby Lennox 2014
Samuel Wharry 2016
Sandy Welsh & Janet Beveridge 2018
8. **AOCB**  
**Name of group:**  
Regarding Item 8 of the 2011 Minutes, Sam Wharry proposed that Performance Recorded Blackfaces was the group name and Bfelite would no longer be used. It was agreed to keep the registered name of Blackface Sire Reference Company, and bank account with Chequebooks reading Blackface Breeding Group. The Performance Recorded Blackfaces would exist under the umbrella name of Maternal Sheep Group and would be within a website showing this.

Janet Beveridge proposed a vote of thanks to Sam Wharry for all his work and his travel from Northern Ireland for all the meetings, and thanked the other Office Bearers too.

9. **Date of next AGM**  
This was agreed as **Wednesday 6th** March 2013 at 1.30pm.
The AGM was followed immediately by a General Meeting.

1 Minutes of the General Meeting 10th March 2011 and Matters arising
Adoption of the minutes was proposed by James Duncan Millar and seconded by Janet Beveridge. They were signed by Chairman Sam Wharry.

2 Developments since AGM 2011 – Maternal Sheep Group update and the future direction of the group with discussion of the aims and objectives.
Maternal Sheep Group is an umbrella name for Performance Recorded Blackfaces and any other breed recording group that would like to join. At present a wool-shedding group is at an early stage of formation and they have been keen to be part of the Maternal Sheep Group too. It is currently chaired by Campbell Tweed and Ann Welsh is secretary. It was considered important that as many breeds and breeders as possible work together, being able to cash in on our knowledge and expertise.

Janet Beveridge led a discussion on the aims and objectives of the group, this covering all breeds who might join and therefore applicable to the Maternal Sheep Group. The attached sheet (at the end of the document) lists the aims and objectives agreed.

Point A Review annually the structure of the Blackface Sire Reference Company
Office bearers, and the Development Group members, would be the same for both the Performance Recorded Blackfaces and the Maternal Sheep Group until other breeds joined. After that, these would be appointed annually.

Point B Promote and facilitate effective use and development of performance recording
i Maintaining connectedness, and how each member is doing so, should be discussed and recorded each year in the General Meeting.
Signet were unable to produce a connectedness report in 2011 as Egenes were developing a new report. It was considered best that the report should be produced after the 8 week weighing, although this relies on all members getting their lambing data in by then. Alison Glasgow agreed to promote connectedness with a Technical note when she sends a reminder for the 8 week weight deadlines.
ii Change the word 'Develop' to 'Review'
iii Delete this point as updates will be given by Jo Conington (SAC) and Alison Glasgow (Signet) each year
iv Change the word 'Review' to 'Consider'

Point C The promotion via a web site and new material would be considered later.

Point D Change the word 'Work' with 'Liaise'.
Suggestions for this included pushing to get information back from the abattoirs on health status and weights now all lambs slaughtered have eID tags.

3 Sheep Farmers and why they don't like using EBVs
Notes from a talk by Dr Ann Bruce, ESRC Innogen Centre, University of Edinburgh

Dr Bruce introduced us to the research project and attitudes of farmers using Estimated Breeding Values (EBVs). It was qualitative research – semi-structured interviews with farmers, vets, consultants, and others connected to the industry. Of the 42 interviews, seventeen were farmers that produced sheep, of which four were specialist breeders, and they had a variety of sheep farming systems across the country. They were not being asked to record, just being interviewed about purchasing rams and females with EBVs.

Less than 20% of these people appeared to be using EBVs. A proportion of farmers wholeheartedly embraced breeding using EBVs. A proportion of farmers selected primarily on appearance but also looked at EBVs. But the majority of sheep farmers didn't use EBVs at all.

The research found that much of the reason why people do not use EBVs is to do with their perception
that they do not trust EBVs, combined with a general cynicism about scientific 'experts', based on past experience of BSE, Foot and Mouth etc. The fact that EBVs change is difficult to grasp. There is no supervision at recording and therefore people could lie or cheat, so farmers might not trust them. Some may have tried using an animal with EBVs and seen no benefit, although this might be because the outcomes were not accurately recorded. Economic benefits from faster growth rates etc. are not immediately visible to many farmers. Several farmers were not in principle against EBVs but hadn't got around to doing anything about them. Comments such as 'no time' or 'Happy doing what I'm doing' were made. Some accept that genetics play a part but cannot be bothered or do not want to invest the time in learning how to use them.

Dr. Bruce discussed the Sheep Value Chain. Some farmers see no market in selling blackface females for breeding and therefore do not see the point in using a sire with EBVs. Many sheep may be bought to 'fit the system' to be reared only on grass and sold at a particular time of year. Sheep might be produced and grown on different farms, with little information from finisher to breeder. Buying breeding stock is very reputational, with buyers going back to the same group of suppliers year after year if the stock do well. Farmers are generally 'risk averse', making changes by tweaking existing systems rather than trying something radically new. Labour is often a limiting factor, and if they have a system that works, why change it? Some said that there were not any recorded stock to purchase anyway.

On questioning, Dr Bruce thought the 'Top Five' reasons farmers didn't want to use EBVs were as follows:

1. EBVs are associated with production in favourable conditions and hill sheep farmers don’t expect EBVs to provide benefits for them
2. Hill sheep farmers in particular may not keep close records and therefore economic benefits of EBVs are not immediately apparent
3. The challenges posed by weather dominate thinking about sheep production in the hills and combined with traditionally low margins means hill sheep farmers are reluctant to take big risks.
4. There is a general lack of trust of external ‘experts’ and suspicion about the accuracy of some breeding values
5. There is no one single barrier to adoption of EBVs, rather a complex array of them

Sam Wharry thanked Dr Bruce for a most interesting and thought-provoking talk.

A discussion following this talk suggested that one resolution was to encourage the use of very high index tups so that a visible difference would be seen by the purchaser. Connectedness should be reinforced, and farmers educated to know that the figures they see are accurate and comparable. The perception of EBVs in sheep is mostly seen as one figure – generally the hill index – and not considered to be for different traits.

It was suggested that the Technical day could be used to invite people who have bought tups from group members in the past for an on-farm talk and lunch. It could be informative, discuss genetics and target the purchasers. The results of the Sheep Strategy could be presented. It may or may not be an annual event but it would be worth while trying it to see.
4 Connectedness
Those members present listed what they had done to maintain group connectedness this past year. (Members in brackets sent their details but were not present).
Ian Duncan Millar had bought a tup from Kevin Wiggins and swapped a tup with Janet Beveridge. (Kevin Wiggins had bought one from James Duncan Millar and Allanfauld).
Bobby Lennox had used one tup bought from Sandy and Ann Welsh and one from Janet Beveridge.
James Duncan Millar had not bought a recorded tup this year, but would continue to buy in others and compare with his own breeding.
Sandy and Ann Welsh had sold a blackface tup to Andrew Hattan, and were buying wool-shedding tups from within the wool-shedding group.
Jo Conington had bought 2 tups from Ian Duncan Millar.
Sam Wharry had bought a stock tup from Janet Beveridge and one from Wester Tullich. (Stephen Montgomery had used a tup from Janet Beveridge).
Janet Beveridge didn’t use the tup lamb bought from Ian Duncan Millar, although will use him next season. She used a tup bought previously from the SAC.
Yvonne Jones used tups bought from Sandy and Ann Welsh and Janet Beveridge. (John and Caroline Jeromson used a tup bought from Wester Tullich the previous year and one from Dyke).
(Greenmount used homebred tup lambs, but bought 20 cast ewes from Sam Wharry and 20 hoggs from Steven Montgomery).

Recording data submission deadlines for 2012 are as follows:

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<th>Run</th>
<th>Deadline</th>
<th>Publication</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>3/8/12</td>
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<td>Run 3</td>
<td>28/9/12</td>
<td>17/10/12</td>
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5 Signet Update from Alison Glasgow
(Connectedness had already been covered). Alison will email the weighting of the hill index, to be circulated to all members.
The Signet electronic data transfer phase 1 has been completed, meaning electronic data can be directly uploaded to Signet. A template is completed with the records and then no further manual data entry is required. A document showing the order of data required will be circulated by email.
The second phase of electronic data transfer is ongoing and will generally only be used by small breeders entering their data directly onto the Basco database.
Eblex have commissioned an EBV for lamb survival. They are also looking at data for heritabilities and whether they have changed, and they are looking at ways of dealing with ET born lambs.
Work for the lamb survival EBV was put out to tender and the tender by the SAC has been accepted. New EBVs for litter size born and litter size reared are being considered, and the way that maternal ability is evaluated.
Alison discussed the activity in the Blue faced Leicester breed regarding producing supermules and the concern with the lack of high index BFL tups available. Wales have far higher index BFL sheep due to funding for recording, but Scotland is behind with lower indexes. The definition of a supermule has yet to be agreed.

SAC Update from Jo Conington
The EBV for lamb survival is going ahead, using existing data, probably based on eight week weights. It is planned to be completed by the end of May. There is no opportunity to look at data from scanning as this has not been recorded.
A discussion ensued suggesting that data should be recorded, even if it is not used at the moment e.g.
for fate codes. The opportunity for this has not been possible with manual inputting of data, but with electronic data collection the system is now better placed to capture it.

**Genomic Workshop Update from Ann Welsh**

Although everyone was invited, not many were able to attend the Genomics Workshop on February 29th. It had looked at what Genomic Selection was and then suggested a business model for breeders clubbing together to produce ebvs that are not measurable at the moment. This should mean top returns in the future, but required huge investment. It did not look feasible for the group, particularly if we had to match the funding necessary. The technology is there, and the structure of the Industry needs to be available – a pyrimidal-type structure and groups working closely together, such as BFSRCo. It could be a possibility if we could find 100% funding.

6  **Scot Sheep stand and promotional material**

It was decided to put all our efforts into a new or updated website and from this we should be able to produce promotional material. It was considered too soon to promote the group at Scot Sheep 2012. The website would be discussed in a teleconference by the Development Group as soon as possible. Barry Sangster, and some other members from the wool-shedding group, would also be invited. Ann Welsh would contact them.

7  **AOCB**

There was no AOCB.

8  **Date of next General Meeting**

This was agreed as Wednesday 6th March 2013. The format of the Technical Meeting is September is to be discussed.

The meeting closed at 4.45pm.

Thanks to Jo Conington for organising the Conference Room and the refreshments before and during the meeting, and to Ann Welsh for the cakes.
Janet Beveridge led a discussion within the General Meeting on the aims and objectives of the group. These aims and objectives were agreed as follows:

**Blackface Sire Reference Company**

To be known as the **Maternal Sheep Group** for marketing and web site purposes

Two sub groups at present
1. Performance recorded Blackfaces
2. Performance recorded Wool Shedders

**The Aim of the Maternal Sheep Group** is to use performance recording to achieve genetic improvements in member’s maternal sheep flocks through working together with group members and others to improve farm profits.

**The Objectives of the Group are**

A **Review annually the structure of the Blackface Sire Reference Company**
   - Actions-set subscription rate, secretary’s remuneration, appoint office bearers and development group members etc

B **Promote and facilitate effective use and development of performance recording**
   - Maintain **connectedness** by Signet producing annual report of breeders connectedness after 8week weighing and Signet will promote importance of maintaining good connectedness to non-group members. Encourage individual members to make an annual statement of the steps they have taken to maintain good connection.
   - **Review the weightings of the 7 EBVs** used at present to ensure they are meeting breeder’s economic requirements.
   - Consider **new EBVs** for lamb survival, ewe longevity and disease resistance.
   - Ensure **data handling** around performance recording is done as efficiently as possible-electronic data transfer, share experiences of effective handling etc
   - **Lobbying**- individual lamb specific information back from abattoirs, Signet for data capture facility for data which may be used to develop future EBVs

C **Promotion and marketing of members stock**
   - Support members in marketing their recorded stock through provision of **group web site** with a facility for members to upload information on stock available- new web site, performance recorded sheep
   - Produce a **new promotional leaflet** explaining who we are, what we do and provide point of contact for inquiries about performance recording and stock availability.

D **Knowledge Transfer**
   - Liaise with industry scientists on new projects that meet the group’s aim.