

Meeting the challenges to stay ahead

The late and difficult harvest in the North-east gave us an unexpected challenge for the autumn sales season. We saw the trade for cattle in particular drop quite significantly, with weaned calf and store cattle prices dropping by around £80-£100 a head on the previous year.

The bad harvest left buyers facing sales without having supplies of grain and straw secured while the prices of barley and straw were rising significantly. This meant that producers and finishers were all looking at much increased wintering costs for cattle. At the same time, the finished cattle prices were also lagging behind the previous year.

Depressed store market

The combination of all these factors depressed the store market and also had a knock-on effect on the sales of breeding cattle as breeders also faced up to the same problems.

I would hope that we would see the job turning in the New Year as we head towards spring and I believe that prime cattle prices will firm with a tighter supply situation.

The second half of the year has been much tougher than we anticipated, not just because of the bad harvest but also because of the early arrival of winter and the very bad snow conditions we all faced.

These snowfalls were exceptional, probably the worst November snow we have seen for almost 50 years. It has proved particularly challenging for both farmers and for ourselves here at Thainstone.

As I write this, still looking at a large snow cover outside, we are facing a steep drop in our December throughput as a result. Despite that, our exhibitors at the annual Christmas Classic pulled out all the stops to attend with an excellent show of both cattle and sheep and we were pleased that prices were on a par with the previous year.

Our Classic prime cattle champion was also the winner at an excellent and successful Spectacular show and sale of cattle suitable for further exhibition purposes at the start of September.

This reaffirms the Spectacular as one of Scotland's premier events in showcasing livestock with the cream of the North and North-east show circuit entered, including no fewer than nine summer show champions.

A special mention must also go to our staff here at Thainstone who worked exceptionally hard to clear the snow from around the centre, not just for the Classic but also for our normal sales and for the start of our Christmas Party nights season.

BVD sales

We have continued to build on the success of the lead the North-east has taken in tackling Bovine Viral Diarrhoea. Our BVD certified sales are likely to come more to



Worst November snow for almost 50 years.



the fore since the Scottish Government announced a programme to eradicate BVD from the national herd.

As many producers in the North and the North-east have already embraced controlling BVD in their herds, now is the time for our area to push ahead of the rest of Scotland and potentially reap the rewards if we establish a disease free status earlier than anyone else.

The sheep sector has seen a good run of sales in the autumn period with producers receiving good returns. This commenced with the early lamb sales at our Quoybrae

centre in Caithness, which saw record breaking prices with store lambs averaging over £61 and the average prices for half-bred ewe lambs up by £26.35 on the previous year

Buoyant trade

The trend from the good start to the season continued throughout the autumn with a buoyant trade for all classes of store and breeding stock. Going forward, the prospects for prime lambs and the spring hogg trade look encouraging with a tighter supply situation and lower New Zealand imports forecast.

Improved producer returns has given a welcome confidence boost to the sheep industry and this has been reflected in our special autumn sheep sales at Thainstone.

Here at the Thainstone Centre we welcome a new tenant, Envico, a renewable energy company, while we have extended the premises for one of our existing tenants, Turriff Agri Parts, which is a very positive sign in the current economic climate.

New ideas & projects

We also have some new ideas and projects in the pipeline for the coming year and despite all the challenges being thrown at us, we are determined to continue to strive to continue to make Thainstone the main hub of the North-east rural economy.

All that combined with a good year for Thainstone Specialist Auctions together with our other diversified activities will give us an acceptable result for the year for the Marts division.



A group of Aberdeen-Angus breeders and farmers from the Czech Republic are shown a Thainstone sale in progress.



The successful Spectacular attracted a good ringside crowd

Six Mart employees long service honoured

No fewer than six Aberdeen & Northern Marts employees received long service awards at the directors' Christmas lunch at Thainstone.

Between them they have rung up 260 years service for the company, which is remarkable in this day and age.

John Bremner, the manager of our Caithness Livestock Centre at Quoybrae and Robbie Gordon, his office manager, have both completed 40-years fulltime service.

They were joined by Thainstone-based fieldsman Michael Sleigh, who has worked with us for 30-years.

In addition, we had three former full-time staff, now retired and working part-time, who have now completed 50 years each.

Auctioneers Allan Fowlie and Philip Reid notched up the half-century along with Leslie Cruickshank, who works in the main office at Thainstone.