

Scottish Agritourism Monitor Farm Programme

Meeting One Report – WEST CENTRAL

‘First Impressions Count’

Shantron & Shemore Farms – Tuesday 7th May 2019



The second meeting of the new three-year Scottish Agritourism Monitor Farm Project took place on Tuesday 7th May 2019 at Shantron and Shemore Farms, run by West Central Monitor Farmer's Bobby and Anne Lennox, along with their daughter Kay Wilson and husband Dougie.

The family business is located near Luss, on the banks of Loch Lomond. As well as running the 1,500ha hill sheep and beef farm, Anne and Bobby run a three-bedroom self-catering cottage at Shantron, with Kay and Dougie running a two-bedroom self-catering cottage at Shemore.

The family have recently introduced a 'Lambing Live' experience on the farm with members of the public booking to come to the farm to see first-hand what happens during the lambing period. They hope to expand on this idea, introducing more farm tours throughout the year.

Kay and Dougie have recently secured planning permission for glamping pods on the farm to expand their Agritourism offering.

The meeting theme 'First Impressions Count' focused on how important customer views are and how the first impressions of your business is the starting point of the customer experience – good, bad or indifferent.



Anna & Bobby Lennox with Dougie & Kay Wilson



Meeting attendees looking round the self-catering cottage at Shantron



Over 50 individuals for businesses across Scotland attended the first West Central meeting.

MEETING ACTIVITIES

In order to give feedback on first impressions, the main meeting from 1 to 4pm started off with a tour of the agritourism elements of the business. This included viewing the self-catering cottage at Shantron Farm, the lambing shed at Shantron where the “Lambing on Loch Lomond” sessions had taken place, then the site of the new glamping business at Shemore, and Shemore cottage.

The group then met in a tent at Shemore to provide feedback on their views and to discuss positive aspects and areas for improvement in the business, followed by an optional discussion on the detail of the “Lambing on Loch Lomond” tours and experiences. The meeting closed with a visit to the reservoir further up the hill and a BBQ.

Feedback from Group Sessions

53 individuals from businesses across Scotland attended the meeting and had the opportunity to give their honest and critical feedback to Bobby, Anna, Kay and Dougie.

The individuals split into seven groups and shared their thoughts and opinions on their first impressions of both farms and the setup of the self-catering cottages, looking at everything from social media engagement to the overall appearance of the farms.

See below the summary of feedback from all seven groups.

Groups 1, 2 & 3 CUSTOMER JOURNEY RESEARCHING PRIOR TO VISIT

- Group 1, 2 & 3 Summary of Positive Feedback

Online presence, listings, website

- ‘Lambing on Loch Lomond’ appears in the top three of a Google search, however this is probably due to limited competition in the area
- Both Shantron & Shemore websites are mobile compatible
- Google+ comes up with Shantron Farm B&B
- Searching self-catering Loch Lomond, the website doesn’t appear but you can see the cottages when opening Google Maps
- Some local articles found online about the self-catering accommodation and the family business (Dunbartonshire Reporter, Helensburgh Local News)
- Searching ‘Farm Experience Loch Lomond’, the business appears for ‘Lambing on Loch Lomond’
- Both the self-catering cottages appear when searching the ‘Visit Loch Lomond’ site
- ‘Lambing on Loch Lomond’ appears on the ‘What’s on Glasgow’ site

Social media followers/posts/engagement

Facebook

- [Shantron Farm Holiday Cottages](#) – 496 likes
 - Good updates on what’s going on around the farm
- [Shemore On Loch Lomond Holiday Cottage](#) – 540 likes
 - Good updates, very similar posts to Shantron Farm Holiday Cottages
- [Lambing on Loch Lomond with the Lennox Family](#) – 854 likes (very good for the page being new end March ‘19)
 - Good updates, which are fun and engaging

- Competitions being offered to help increase followers
- Up to date and regular posts during the lambing season

Twitter

- [@shantronbanab](#) – 71 followers
- [@shemoreonloch](#) – 143 followers
- [@onlomod](#) – 25 followers (new page end March '19)

Instagram

- [@lambingonloch](#) – (new page March '19 with 141 followers)
 - Good amount of content on it currently for the length of time the page has been created

Online reviews (Trip Advisor, Google, others)

- 5 stars on Trip Advisor (however only 5 reviews)
- 9.4 on booking.com
- Online booking process looks good and straight forward

Vibe/Brand

- Sincere and authentic
- Rustic and keeping with the family/farming traditions
- A whole family effort

Link to farm/agritourism

- Excellent, lots of farm engagement on social media, etc.
- 'Lambing on Loch Lomond' linking farm and tourism and the development of future tours
- The self-catering accommodation on both farms are very much in the heart of the farm so visitors will be guaranteed to see some farming activity.

– Group 1, 2 & 3 Summary of Suggested Improvements

Places to stay Loch Lomond

- Both websites for the cottages do not appear in the first page of a Google Search (however there is lots of competition in the area)
- Accommodation doesn't appear on the first page of booking.com or Air BnB

Online presence, listings, website

- Website very text heavy and limited images (both sites)
 - Add in farm pictures to link the connection
 - More family images - strong family business
- Add social media feeds to the websites
- Blogs – very dated on the website, needs updating
- All areas of the business slightly disjointed – potentially bring everything under one brand/website to make it easier to navigate for the potential customer and person who is updating the information
- Link your 'Lambing on Loch Lomond' to the website/s

- Shantron is still being listed as a B&B on a number of booking sites. Make sure your information is updated and people are not mistaken for the service you now provide
 - Update Google+ account as Shantron Farm still appearing as 'Shantron B&B'

Social media followers/posts/engagement

- Active on all channels but the titles of pages could be clearer (e.g. twitter account for lambing on Loch Lomond is just '@onlomond' so hard to find if searching)
- On the self-catering Facebook pages perhaps include more on what is on offer at the cottages
- Try bringing all social media under one umbrella to make it easier ***Discuss social media in depth at a future meeting***
 - Create one page on Facebook and then setup groups within that page for specific areas of your business e.g.
 - Lambing on Loch Lomond
 - Shantron self-catering
 - Shemore self-catering
 - Glamping
- Post at peak times e.g. when people are home from work
- More videos, short sharp posts with images and then link to website/online booking
- Change Instagram page to 'business' page

Online reviews (Trip Advisor, Google, others)

- Ask people face to face that are staying to go on and review on TripAdvisor etc. They may feel their opinion is valued more

Vibe/brand

- Create a brand/logo to help sell/share everything together under one umbrella
 - e.g. a slogan or title that summarises Shantron, Shemore, farm tours and glamping
- 'Farm Stay Loch Lomond' – doesn't connect to the business and the tours/lambing offering
- Logo for the 'Lambing on Loch Lomond' but not for the other business enterprises
 - Use one logo but alter for each area
 - e.g. Virgin has one logo but adds 'Virgin Money', etc. to distinguish each area

Groups 4,5 & 6 – FEEDBACK ON ARRIVAL

- Groups 4, 5 & 6 Summary of Positive Feedback

Signage, directions, getting here

- Great location just off the A82
- Key tourist area, always busy with plenty of tourists visiting the area
- Got the views to go with it – stunning scenery for a 'get away holiday'

Look & feel

- Very much a working farm which is very authentic
- Tidy

- Traditional 'hill farm'
- Family business, everyone works together

Tidiness

- Great set up within the lambing shed – good layout to show people
 - Sheep are clean and look in good condition which is key for showing the public
- Around both cottages are clean and tidy and have parking

Service/welcome

- Rustic but very warm and friendly
 - People generally will not expect to visit a farm business to find an immaculate layout
- The family are key to selling the service and do it brilliantly
 - Kind, pleasant and willing to communicate with the public
 - No ask/job is too much for any family member

Use of local produce

- Buy as much as local as they can when providing lunch for the people attending the full day 'Lambing on Loch Lomond' experience

Pricing

- Very good pricing strategy for the 'Lambing on Loch Lomond' split into different categories and limiting numbers
 - 2hr after school session - £15 pp
 - 1.5hr weekend session - £10pp
 - Full day session – £90pp which includes lunch with the Lennox family

Toilets

- Designated toilet for visitors coming to the 'Lambing on Loch Lomond' experience at Shantron but no facilities at Shemore

Information

- Information board in lambing shed was good – explained to the public the basics

– Groups 4, 5 & 6 Summary of Suggested Improvements

Signage, directions, getting here

- Signage not great – not very big for being on a busy road
 - Look to put signs further away from the turn off to the farms to make people more aware (this will depend of whether they are allowed to do so)
 - Putting a sign on something that is 'moveable' i.e. trailer could allow for this to be achieved but will need to be doubled checked.
- Change the signage to 'self-catering' not 'B&B' at Shantron
- Postcode doesn't take you to the farm if using Satnav (takes you to the village of Luss)
- You can get a 'What3Words' sign that will help find the location if the postcode is for numerous addresses (download the What3Word app for more info on how it works)

Look, feel/tidiness

- Quite a lot of old agricultural machinery about which is fine for some people but other people may feel it looks a little cluttered
- Dogs tied up in the shed as you arrive at Shantron – again may not bother some people and is very normal on working farms, but could be a concern to members of the public who don't understand the amount of exercise and the purpose of working dogs
 - Perhaps get a door to shield the dogs or bring the public in another way so they don't see them
- Quite 'workmen' like. Health & safety could be a concern with the volume of people that are not from farming backgrounds who come to the lambing experience days with limited knowledge of the dangers
 - For the 'Lambing on Loch Lomond' experiences visitors may not mind the rustic format as they want the raw experience of a working farm. However, visitors coming to stay in the self-catering may feel the farms could look a little more presentable (differences in opinions will vary on this subject)

Use of local produce

- Hard to distinguish local (e.g. you can have local eggs but from a large chicken farm)
 - Try to promote 'local produce' as 'high welfare products' – e.g. free-range eggs, local farm shops ***FUTURE MEETING DISCUSSION***

Pricing

- Pricing for accommodation could be slightly over priced for the type of accommodation that's there
- Re-assess the pricing for all the branches of the business (e.g. self-catering, farm experience etc.)
- Pricing for Lambing experience noted above, and many individuals thought it was great value for money

BUSINESS FEEDBACK

What knowledge/ideas will you take home to your own business	What did you enjoy about the meeting?	Anything we need to improve for the next time?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make the farm authentic • The people are the front of the business are key if sharing promoting a family/small business • What3Words signs great for businesses that share are in a precise location and often have issues with visitors not finding the location • Key times to post content on social media • Different booking platforms and which ones work best e.g. booking.com, Trip Advisor • Ensure you have the Google ownership of your website • Use more short blogs on website/social 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meeting interesting people • Swapping experiences/ideas • Networking • Truthful feedback • Lots of practicalities shared about bringing public onto the farm • Hearing ideas from other agritourism businesses • Tour of the farm first before the getting into the meeting. Helped break it up and gave the opportunity for people to network • Building on community experiences • Beautiful setting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get straight in to the meeting and make tour, etc. optional at end (**TOUR WAS ESSENTIAL AS MEETING REQUIRED FEEDBACK ON AGRITOURISM LOCATIONS ON FARM**) • Perhaps get the monitor farmers to listen more and talk less. They are not on show (not in a negative way) and the people attending are there to help give feedback • More information with regards to planning permission within the National Park • Disinfectant for shoes, etc. if doing farm tour

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pricing options for farm tours – what is the going price people are willing to pay • Ideas to change/progress farm tours • Lots of ideas based on perceptions & experiences shared • Lots of potential with on-farm experiences • Discussion on ‘how tidy is tidy’ and welcoming people onto your farm • Social media, Trip Advisor, booking.com discussions *Discuss further at future meeting* • The importance of having a brand • Tips on what accommodation websites to use • A new business venture on the farm can be launched quickly (the Lennox’s setup ‘Lambing on Loch Lomond’ within a couple of weeks) • Benefits of teaming up with other local businesses • Thinking about the tidiness/setup of your farm more (old scrap, etc.) • Health & safety on bringing public out on to the farm • Agritourism isn’t so scary after all. Can start something simple and build on it • All businesses face challenges • Selling farm experiences • Prioritising what is best established/set up first for a new business (social media, or website?) • Regularly checking/reassessing the online presence of your business and updating the information • The huge variety of ideas/business opportunities you can create from a working farm, you just need a strong imagination and enthusiasm! 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘Lambing Experience’ – very innovative & brave, well done the Lennox family! • The openness of the Lennox family • Anne’s home baking!! • Mix of people and interaction without businesses • Variety of agritourism businesses present all doing different things 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agenda prior to the meeting (**THIS WAS SENT ALL AHEAD OF MEETING WITH OPTION FOR BBQ**) • Don’t need all the feedback from all the groups after a team exercise as it can be quite repetitive. Perhaps each group to discuss one or two topics to speed things up. It’s all included in report after the meeting for people to look at further. • Better setup for parking • More space for group work (tables) • Have a central meeting point for people traveling to limit cars on the farm (due to limited space)
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SUMMARY

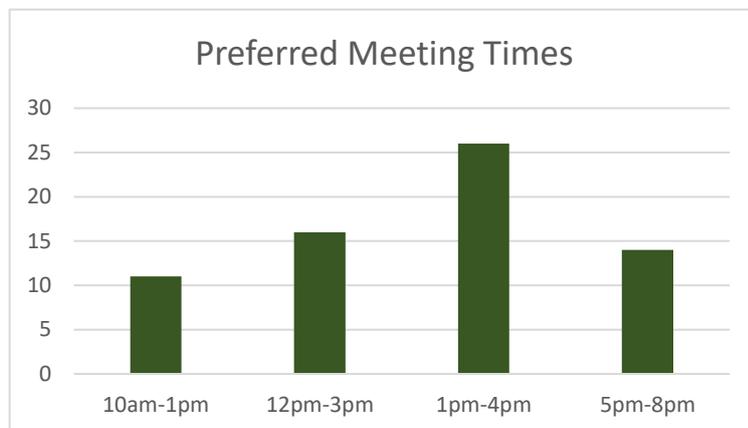
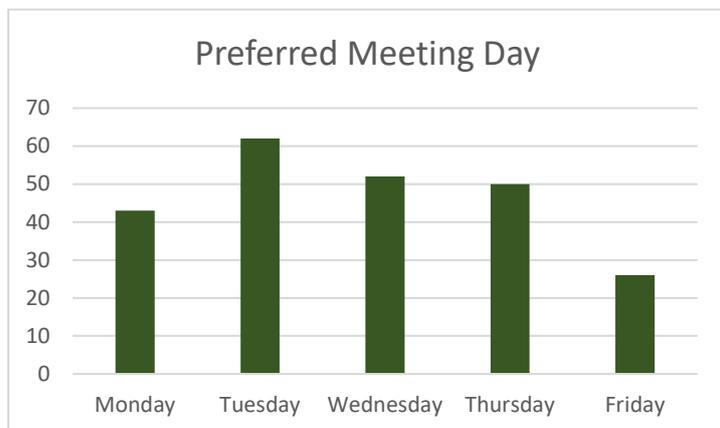
5 Quick Actions for West Central Monitor Farm to take forward;

1. **Update website(s) with new content/photos, especially Shantron Self-catering (no longer B&B)**
2. **Streamline Brand and offering (with support from programme)**
3. **Review pricing of self-catering**
4. **New signage when Brand decision made**
5. **Evaluate Lambing on Loch Lomond**

FEEDBACK FOR FUTURE MEETINGS

Those attending were asked for their preference on the best day of the week and time to meet.

They were also asked which topics, identified as important topics in the monitor farm business review, were of most importance to them.



Feedback on Topics for Future Meetings (based on a 1-10 scoring system)

Topics	Score
Succession of the family business/most efficient tax structure for a business with Agritourism	228
Developing paid farm experiences	265
Selling beef/lamb to guests	164
Access to finance	192
Developing one brand	224
Paid versus free marketing	226
Website	250
Developing agritourism as a farming tenant	114

During a recent business review, Bobby, Anne, Kay and Dougie identified critical areas for their business. These topics would be the suggested focus of upcoming meetings. At the monitor farm meeting, delegates were asked to vote on which topics they would like to see discussed at future meetings.

The topics the Lennox/Wilson family selected as their top 5 priorities were –

1. Succession
2. Developing paid farm experiences
3. Selling beef/lamb to guests
4. Access to finance
5. Developing one brand

This information will now be used to plan for future meetings in 2019/20.

ENDS BR/CAM 13.5.19