BREEDPLAN In Action: Fearn Farm





The Scott Family
Location: Easter Ross, Scotland
Breed: Beef Shorthorn & Angus
Herd Size: 200 stud breeders

Located on the Easter Ross Peninsula, approximately 40 minutes north of Inverness in northern Scotland, Fearn Farm is home to the Scott family, a fifth-generation farming business committed to producing profitable, functional livestock.

The enterprise comprises 200 breeding cows across Angus and Beef Shorthorn seedstock herds, and 4,000 breeding ewes across Texel, Aberfield, Romney, Suffolk and Beltex sheep flocks. Alongside livestock production, the Scotts grow spring barley, oats and forage crops, while diversifying into agritourism through the development of a boutique hotel and hospitality business.

John Scott works alongside the next generation, including his son James, who now leads much of the breeding direction for the cattle herd. Together, they have built a breeding program firmly grounded in commercial relevance and supported by more than three decades of BREEDPLAN performance recording.

Breeding for Functionality and Profitability
For the Scott family, successful cattle must do far more than look good in the show ring. Their breeding objective centres on producing cows that are:

- Structurally sound and functional
- Fertile and easy breeding
- Efficient converters of grass into beef
- Easy fleshing and able to maintain condition
- Capable of thriving within an outwintering system

The family places particular emphasis on breeding cows that work in real-world commercial environments. “We've got to be careful we don't go for too much growth. You can end up with big, stretchy animals that don't flesh out.”

Rather than chasing extremes, the Scotts focus on balanced cattle that deliver maternal performance, longevity and profitability. This practical approach has helped establish a Beef Shorthorn herd that showcases the breed's strengths while remaining closely aligned with commercial production requirements.

Producing Beef from Grass
The challenging climate of northern Scotland has helped shaped the Scott family's breeding objectives. Rainfall averages around 30 inches annually and cattle must perform across a range of soil types, from light sands to heavy clays. Their cows are wintered outdoors through a bale-grazing system, making resilience and efficiency essential traits.

The family's goal is clear:
“To breed cows capable of producing steers that can finish primarily from grass at 18 months of age and heifers that conceive at 15 months over a 6 week bulling period.”

Although market conditions have recently encouraged greater use of bull beef systems, their breeding direction has remained unchanged. “We can’t come away from our objective. We need genetics that will produce a steer that finishes on grass.” By selecting animals suited to forage-based production, the Scotts are breeding cattle that can thrive with minimal inputs while maintaining profitability.

Thirty Years of BREEDPLAN Performance Recording
Performance recording has been a cornerstone of the Scott family's breeding program for more than 30 years. What began as a commitment to collecting data has evolved into a management system that underpins virtually every breeding decision made within the herd.

Performance recording with BREEDPLAN is integrated into everyday farm management practices. Whenever cattle pass through the yards, weights and performance data are collected and submitted through farm management software.

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For James Scott, who has grown up with recording as a normal part of farming, data collection is simply part of the job.

The family currently places significant emphasis on:

- Calving performance
- Milk
- Positive fat traits
- Intramuscular fat (IMF)
- Eye muscle area (EMA)
- Moderate growth
- Overall cow functionality

"Performance recording has helped us shape our herd."

Why BREEDPLAN Matters

The Scott family views BREEDPLAN as an essential decision-making tool that complements visual assessment and stockmanship. While phenotype remains important, they believe BREEDPLAN performance data provides the confidence needed to identify animals that truly perform.

Over time, BREEDPLAN information has helped them:

- Build a more productive cow herd
- Improve maternal performance
- Focus on cattle better suited to grass-based systems
- Select for improved carcass quality traits
- Make more informed breeding decisions
- Provide commercial customers with greater confidence when purchasing bulls

John believes BREEDPLAN data helps separate perception from reality.

"You might be a superhero judge of cattle, but are they actually doing what you think they're doing?"

By combining visual assessment with objective performance information, the Scotts have been able to make more consistent and profitable breeding decisions over multiple generations.

Creating Commercial Value Through Data

The Scotts believe one of the greatest strengths of BREEDPLAN is its ability to help breeders align their herds with market requirements. In an increasingly competitive and uncertain marketplace, data provides an additional layer of confidence for both seedstock and commercial producers.

"If by having the data available, you can increase the options for where the stock are going, it's just a no-brainer."

For Fearn Farm, BREEDPLAN is not simply about generating figures. It is about creating cattle that work better within their production system and deliver value to their customers. The result has been a herd that consistently produces commercially relevant, functional cattle capable of performing under northern Scottish conditions.

Looking Ahead

After more than three decades of performance recording, the Scott family remains committed to using BREEDPLAN as a central part of their breeding strategy. Their experience demonstrates that genetic information is most powerful when combined with clear breeding objectives and practical commercial experience. By focusing on functionality, fertility, meat quality and grass-based performance, Fearn Farm has developed a breeding program that consistently delivers for both their business and their clients.

For the Scotts, BREEDPLAN has not replaced good stockmanship. Instead, it has strengthened it by providing the objective information needed to make better decisions, faster genetic progress and build a herd designed for the future of profitable beef production.

Today, Fearn Farm stands as an example of how long-term commitment to perfomance recording can translate into real-world outcomes. Through BREEDPLAN, the Scott family has built a herd that matches their production environment, supports their commercial objectives and provides confidence to the clients who invest in their genetics.

