Mill of Inverarity Farm is run by Rob and Alison Stodart, with their two sons Rory and Tom. In total the business farms 358 hectares. The farm is a traditional mixed unit currently growing 130 hectares of cereals, with a herd of 200 suckler cows and a flock of 440 breeding ewes. The business also annually buys in store cattle and lambs for finishing.

The business currently has a varied mix of enterprises which will be under review going forward to see if this is the best policy or whether there are too many enterprises to focus on for efficient productivity. The Stodart family are keen to assess how the livestock enterprises can be made more efficient.


KEY MESSAGES

- Bull health testing is vital pre-turnout. Tests should include; semen testing, disease screening, locomotion and general soundness.
- Pregnancy detection as soon after the bulls have been removed and good record keeping is vital to managing herd fertility. Take time to review records to pick up on any potential issues as soon as possible.
- Farmbench will provide a benchmarking platform top allow farmers the ability to budget forward as well as review past production costs.
- When undersowing barley crops think about what your aim is; Good grass sward? Maintain barley yields? The long term purpose of the sward?
AREAS OF DISCUSSION

- Over 75 farmers turned out to the 2nd meeting of the Angus Monitor Farm. There was a lot of lively discussion surrounding the suckler herd at Mill of Inverarity and its current fertility issues. Other points of good discussion focussed on the arable crops and discussing their agronomy policy.

- Tim Geraghty, a SAC Consulting vet has been working with the business to improve the management of the suckler herd. He gave the group an overview of the work and testing done on farm so far and outlined the future herd policy. This included improving the herd health status by clearing the herd of Campylobacter, tightening the calving period and increasing the overall performance of the herd.

- David Ross from SAC Consulting gave the group an introduction to benchmarking and ran through some of figures for production for Mill of Inverarity. This included the 2016 variable costs for producing the arable enterprises.

- Sam Ruddell, the farms agronomist from Agrii gave the groups an overview of the agronomy policy on farm and sparked discussion over varieties and treatments on oilseed rape, winter wheat and spring barley.

- Charlie Murray, from seed merchants Clyde Agriculture discussed the undersown spring barley trials on site and the importance of getting the seed mixture right for the requirements of the business.

FARMERS UPDATE

- All spring crops are now in the ground with a new variety of spring barley (Laureate) being trialled on farm this year. Crops are generally looking well considering the lack of rain.

- Spring calving almost over with 3 cows left to calve. Overall calving was a success with 3 dead calves out of 92; 2 abortions and a caesarean.

- Lambing has now finished. There were 395 ewes lambed over a 6 week period with 680 live lambs born.

- This years batch of bulling heifers (45 in total) have all been served using AI as opposed to natural service to combat the health issues within the herd. The majority of the group have been put to on a synchronisation programme with a smaller group AI’d to a natural heat. Results of this trial will be looked at a future meeting.

- New laying hen enterprise is underway and the shed conversion is almost complete for housing 4,500 free range laying hens.
FACTS & FIGURES DISCUSSED

- Campylobacter has been diagnosed within the suckler herd at Mill of Inverarity so a main aim of the business is to combat this. A new “clean herd” has been introduced on farm containing 45 bulling heifers which have all been put in calf via AI this year to calve early spring 2017. Out of the 45 heifers, 26% returned to bulling 3 weeks after 1st service and so were served with another straw to try and ensure high percentage in calf.

- Lambing figures were positive for the season with 723 lambs born in total. Live lambs born were 680 and 43 were born dead. There after 21 died within the first 48 hours and 15 died after 48 hours. All things taken into account the mortality rate over lambing was 10.9% of lambs.

- 2016 Variable cost figures for the arable enterprises were as follows; Winter Wheat £558/ha, Winter Oilseed Rape £493/ha, Spring Barley £285/ha and Winter Barley £421/ha

- Undersown spring barley trials are ongoing on farm this year with 4 different grass varieties being sown under Chronicle spring barley. The aim of this trial is to produce good sward of grass for winter grazing that does not have a detrimental affect on the barley yield. At the same time it also helps the farm meets its greening requirements as the Stodarts would like to get away from leaving land lying fallow.

OPPORTUNITIES/CHALLENGES

- Undersowing barley without affecting yields
  Members of the community group discussed the undersown trials and it was a major point of discussion that getting a good sward without impacting on yields will be very difficult. Weather conditions and varieties play a huge part so the group are keen to see how the trials yield.

- Closed suckler herd?
  Recommendations from Tim Geraghty and the community group involve the family looking at running a closed herd to prevent any further disease being brought on farm. Should this be a priority?
ACTIONS FROM MEETING  
Bullet points outlining what will be done between now and the next meeting

- Review autumn PD results to identify any fertility issues.
- PD bulling heifers that have been served via AI and spring calving cows and review results.
- Monitor undersown grass trials for any differences between varieties.
- Review spring calving results and make changes where deemed necessary.
- Benchmarking group to have their first meeting and start inputting figures into Farmbench.

FACILITATOR CONTACT DETAILS
David Ross & Stacey Hamilton
SAC Consulting
Arduthie Business Centre, Kirkton Road, Stonehaven, AB39 2NQ
Tel: 01569 762305
Email: fbsstonehaven@sac.co.uk