

ABOUT ANGUS MONITOR FARM

Farm name	Mill of Inverarity, Inverarity, Forfar, Angus, DD8 2JN
Meeting Number	09 – Machinery Review, Fodder Beet Results, Beef Monitor.
Meeting Date	Thursday 13 th December 2018
Next Meeting	Thursday 10 th January 2019

Mill of Inverarity Farm is run by The Stodarts and in total, the business farms 358 hectares. The farm is a traditional mixed unit growing 130 hectares of cereals, with 160 spring calving suckler cows and an increasing breeding flock of 860 ewes. The business also annually buys in store cattle and lambs for finishing and has an operational laying hen enterprise on farm of 4,500 hens.

This meeting looked at the power and machinery review carried out by Strutt and Parker, the results of the fodder beet crop grown by three members of the management team, a review of the program so far and a presentation from Iain Green about the Beef Monitor system installed at Corskie Monitor Farm.



Management Group: Graeme Mather, Fiona Lawson, Ian Pattullo, Neil McGowan, Stuart Lawrie, Duncan Wilson, Graeme Neill, John Kidd, Robin Norrie, Sam Ruddell.

KEY MESSAGES

- Reviewing the machinery is a good place to start when analysing costs. Think carefully about how labour and equipment is divided between enterprises.
- Yield is not everything when it comes to fodder beet. The crop's dry matter, energy and protein varies greatly, as does the ability to graze different varieties with different livestock classes.
- The Beef Monitor system has reduced livestock stress and labour costs at Corskie Farm, highlighting the effectiveness technology can have in the right system.
- The rotational grazing system has not only increased stock capacity but it has helped the Stodarts build resilience to the extreme weather experienced this summer.

AREAS OF DISCUSSION

- There was keen discussion about the monitor farm's machinery and labour costs. Labour cost is very low at the Mill, however, sprayer and combine costs are above average due to the purchase of a new sprayer and the larger combine to accommodate for shorter harvest windows. The group was asked for suggestions as to what the Stodarts should do and the general consensus was keep doing what they are doing! Minor changes such as fuel buying policy and rolling costs should however be addressed.

- The fodder beet varieties, Blaze and Brick, grown at the monitor farm this year have performed extremely well yielding 136t/ha and 124t/ha respectively. Kirsten Williams, SAC Sheep Specialist, discussed the fodder analyses highlighting the difference in protein and energy between the leaves and the bulbs and bulb dry matter ranged from 7% to 26% across the group. Best practice for feeding and which stock class would utilise this feed best was also discussed.
- The MF project was also discussed and attendees highlighted that they enjoyed hearing about a wide range of topics, they thought group discussions were beneficial and the use of figures and financial data was particularly helpful for their businesses. It was also noted that the group wish to revisit topics to check for updates from the Mill as to how implemented changes have worked out.

FARMERS UPDATE

- The arable enterprises have had mixed performance in 2018 due to the unusual season and severe lack of rainfall. Yields are as follows: OSR 4.69t/ha; Winter Wheat - Leeds 7.41t/ha, Zulu 11.12t/ha; Spring Barley – Laureate 6.55t/ha, Chronicle 5.93t/ha. The 2019 OSR has been established this year using a Sumo sub soiler and hopper and the winter crops in the ground are looking well.
- The suckler cows have been scanned and 75 out of 83 are in calf, giving a scanning rate of 90%. Although there is some progress still to be made to achieve the 5% barren target this is a significant improvement from last year and suggests that the Campylobacter vaccine is working. There are 25 heifers due to calve in the spring and the Stodarts have purchased 232 store cattle to finish. However the finished beef price seems to be falling, causing concern.
- Sheep numbers have been increased from 700, and 860 have been tuppied this year, this has been achieved by retaining 160 hogs. Additionally, 150 Aberfield gimmers have been purchased to create a new closed flock. Rory plans to extend the lambing with the hogs and Aberfield flock lambing later. 530 store lambs were also purchased for finishing.
- There is little to report on the hen enterprise other than they have been mucked out. The muck was applied on the OSR in the autumn.

FACTS & FIGURES DISCUSSED

- The Mill has identified that their total power and labour costs are £253/ha which is below the monitor farm average of £410/ha. Although this is good, it is due to the relatively low allocation of labour (0.8SLU), and masks the fact that almost all of their operations are above average. This is due to the purchase of machinery such as the sprayer and the relatively new John Deere tractor.
- The cost of fodder beet was also discussed, the Mill spent £978.80/ha on seed, fertiliser, sprays and cultivations compared to the groups lowest spend of £714/ha. This is due to the higher spray cost of £250/ha compared with the lowest cost of £67/ha. The Stodarts opted to adapt a modern spray programme, passing over the crop 6 times compared to the groups lowest of just once. When broken into cost per tonne of dry matter, the monitor farm was £99.96/t/DM and £99.27/t/DM for the two varieties compared with the groups lowest of just £41.03/t/DM.



Figure 1 Brick at Mill of Inverarity



Figure 2 Geronimo + Lactimo at Shandford



Figure 3 Bangor at Hillhead of Careston



Figure 4 Munro at Hillhead of Careston

OPPORTUNITIES/CHALLENGES

- Brexit is a particular concern for Rob and Rory Stodart. Their business has a heavy reliance on finishing livestock, many of which are exported – particularly the lambs. The uncertainty is having a negative effect on many of the management group as well.
- The positive results from the Beef Monitor weigh crate implemented at Corskie Farm could be seen as an opportunity for the Stodarts. The reduction in animal stress and labour required to weigh cattle could be removed and should be investigated further. The Stodarts have had issues with cattle being hurt during weighing and they are open to alternative methods of monitoring growth.
- The Stodarts have expressed an interest in obtaining more information back from the abattoir so that they can use this data in their selection and retention policies. This should be explored further.
- There is an opportunity to compare the monitor farm with other businesses such as contract farming agreements or 'bed and breakfast' cattle. Although the current set up works for the Stodarts, comparison with other business structures could identify points of improvement for their business.

ACTIONS FROM LAST MEETING

- Plan grazing of fodder beet, neeps and stubble turnips to get most out of these crops.
- Investigate the most effective way of performance recording the ewe flock at lambing.

FACILITATOR CONTACT DETAILS

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