

ABOUT THIS MONITOR FARM

Farm name	Mill of Inverarity, Inverarity, Forfar, Angus, DD8 2JN
Meeting Number	14 – Harvest Review
Meeting Date	Thursday 31 st October 2019
Next Meeting	19 th November 2019
Report date	7 th November 2019

Mill of Inverarity Farm is run by The Stodart family 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 monitor farm meeting gave a review of the 2019 harvest, taking a closer look at yields from across a range of crops including the Yield Enhancement Network (YEN) trials. Agronomy costs from two separate agronomy businesses were also compared, including chemical, crop walking and application fees. An overview of a new mix of oilseed rape, clover and buckwheat which has recently been planted was given by Chris Leslie (AHDB). Furthermore, Peter Collier from AHDB gave an insight on future markets of grain for the 2020 season and there was a presentation from Ross Robertson from Ritchies about the Beef Monitoring system that has been installed at Mill of Inverarity. This meeting had a lot of lively discussion detailed below.

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

KEY MESSAGES

- Highest yield is not necessarily the biggest money maker, reducing establishment costs can increase profitability
- There is a fine line between an 'insurance policy' and unnecessary expenditure in regards to chemical applications
- The deals which are to come from BREXIT negotiations are key to the future of all agricultural markets
- The Beef Monitor system has been proven to reduce stress and labour costs when selecting cattle

AREAS OF DISCUSSION Expand on two of the key messages discussed and what were the key concerns or innovations

- The YEN trial was discussed, with two different approaches used to grow winter wheat. Mill of Inverarity farm used a traditional plough and one pass system to grow Zulu which was sown at 185kg/ha. However, Strathmore farms used a homemade ‘topdrill’ direct drill and grew Beluga which was sown at 270kg/ha. The biggest difference between the two systems was the establishment costs. The plough system costs £126/ha whereas the direct drill system was only £54/ha. The yields were very similar with the traditional system yielding 11.8T/ha and the direct drill yielding 11.44T/ha. However, the gross margin was £121.85/ha higher using the direct drill (Table 1). Although costs are not included in YEN trials, this comparison shows that maximising yield only goes so far to increase profitability. It was discussed whether direct drilling this far north is feasible or whether this trial was just a one off. Sowing conditions for this crop were ideal in a very dry autumn of 2018. However, the question was asked, would this method of sowing work in a year like this where it is very wet?
- The agronomic costs of growing a crop of winter wheat was also discussed. Two agronomists were trialed, one from the trade the other from an independent company. Each had two fields of wheat to look after over the growing season. The results from this found that there were many differences in timings, rates and chemicals used. The agronomist from the trade was £66.1/ha higher for chemicals alone, with the biggest different coming from an increased use of fungicides and trace elements. The other interesting result was the agronomist from the trade had six applications applied compared to the independent agronomist who only had four. The independent agronomist also included an agronomy fee which

	Mill of Inverarity	Strathmore Farms
Grain Yield: t/ha	11.8	11.44
Grain price: £/t	150	150
Output £/ha	1,770	1,716

Seed: £/ha	64.75	89.10
Fertiliser: £/ha	319.08	209.30
Sprays: £/ha	283.69	193.27

Gross Margin: £/ha	1,102.48	1,224.33
Variable costs: £/t	56.57	42.98
Establishment Cost /ha	126	54.09
Gross margin - establishment	976.48	1,170.24

	Agronomist 1	Agronomist 2	
Herbicide	21.26	21.38	+0.12
Fungicide	172.34	130.73	-41.61
Insecticide	3.36	-	-3.36
PGR	19.70	12.50	-7.20
Trace	18.63	1.80	-16.83
Adjuvant	-	2.78	+2.78
Total	£235.29/ha	£169.19/ha	-£66.10/ha
Application Cost	(6x £12.50) £75/ha	(4x £12.50) £50/ha	-25.00
Agronomy Fee	-	£12.50/ha	+12.50
Total	£75/ha	£62.50/ha	-£12.50/ha
Grand Total	£310.29/ha	£231.69/ha	-£78.60/ha

the trade did not. However, the independent agronomist came in £78.60 per hectare cheaper than the agronomist from the trade (Table 2) when all costs were considered. This led to a lot of discussion from the group, some not realising that they were paying so much for their agronomy when they could get the same service for much cheaper. Furthermore, the cost of chemicals could be reduced further through the use of a buying group. Some participants expressed that they pay the extra cost per hectare as an 'insurance' in case the crop was to fail. It was then explained that £78.60/ha would get a very robust T2 spray programme which is the most important spray for winter wheat to keep the flag leaf free from disease to protect the yield of the crop.

- Peter Collier from the AHDB gave an insight on the future grain markets. The market for November 2020 does not look promising. At the current time, merchants are not exporting any grain due to uncertainties with BREXIT and limitations in export capacity. It was stated that ports and grain merchants are now at their limit with some farmers still sitting with sheds full of grain. Additionally, the current weather the UK has been experiencing means farmers across the UK are struggling to sow winter wheat. Many farmers are abandoning this idea and looking to sow more Spring Barley in 2020. This increase in area may result in a low price for spring barley come September 2020 as the market may be flooded with grain as there will still be a surplus sitting from the 2019 harvest. The general consensus from the group was that they were concerned about future prices and where they will be able to sell their grain.
- Ross Robertson from Ritchies gave a presentation on the Beef Monitor weighing system. Since the last meeting it has been moved inside so the cattle can continue to be weighed. Since it has come in there has been some issues with phone reception. The main O2 mast went down in the area which meant no data was being recorded into the cloud. However, Ritchies have now sorted the problem by changing the sim card in the device to an EE card. The group were very interested in how the system worked and how much it cost and if it was worthwhile having on their farm to help increase DLWG by putting no stress on the animal to weigh them. As well as seeing if the equipment can pick cattle at the right weight for slaughter. It was mentioned that the Stodart's had one problem with the equipment, which was when they were moving it between fields within the rotational grazing system the solar panel was very tricky to move. It was confirmed by Ross that Ritchies are working on this problem at the present time.

FARMERS UPDATE Summarise the development of the initiatives on the farm

- Since the last meeting the Stodart's have managed to sow their 2020 crop of winter wheat, growing Elation, Zulu and Barrel.
- The Stodart's have put 930 sheep to the tup, leaving out a selection of ewe lambs for gimmering
- Rory has had the cattle scanned at 93% - a significant increase from previous years.

ACTIONS FROM LAST MEETING Bullet points outlining what will be done between now and the next meeting

- Benchmarking data collection for the business group has started
- The Beef Monitor Weighing system will be put in with the Aberdeen Angus cattle which are near to finishing, making it easier to select when they may sell them.
- The next meeting on the 19th November 2019 will be advertised.

FACILITATOR CONTACT DETAILS

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

Zach Reilly
SAC Consulting
77 North Street,
Forfar,
DD8 3BL
Tel: 01307 464033
Email: fbsforfar@sac.co.uk

