

ABOUT BORDERS MONITOR FARM

Farm name	Whitriggs, Denholm, TD9 8QR
Meeting Number	16 – Data & Technology, Technograzing & Encouraging Young People into Agriculture.
Meeting Date	Wednesday 2nd May 2019
Next Meeting	Wednesday 27th July 2019

Whitriggs Farm, near Denholm, is run by Robert and Lesley Mitchell and their son Stuart, with support from Stuart's brother, Alistair, during busy periods.

The Mitchells currently farm 442 hectares of mainly semi-permanent and permanent grassland.

Cattle; 140 Shorthorn X and AAX, with all calves not required as replacements finished on the farm.

Sheep; Currently 1000 Easy Care and Blackface lambs on a B&B basis. Future flock is under review.

Arable; 28ha of Wheat & Oats fed to cattle, 30ha of spring barley to be sown 2019

Deere; 125 Red Hinds due to calf in 2019, with a further 30 calves which will calf in 2020. Currently planning on building to 215 hinds, close herd and breed own replacements.

Chairman Andrew Tullie welcomed around 45 farmers and trade to Whitriggs to discuss a range of topics looking at what is changing in livestock farming. The aim of the meeting was to look at the positive image of farming including innovative techniques such as technograzing, use of data and technology which are likely to make a career in farming more attractive to the younger generation.

Management Group:

Andrew Tullie (Chair), Robert Catlin, Scott Girvan, Giles Henry, Megan Mabon, Andrew Robinson(Vet), Jonny Williams

KEY MESSAGES

- Look for farming system which suits your situation and what you want from your farm. Technograzing is one such system but it is not a silver bullet
- Understand your costs and your assets to help you make decisions.
- Young people can be a huge asset to your business
- Staff are like a bank account, you can only take out what you put in.
- Technology can be a huge benefit if it is used correctly and adds value.
- Look for ways to automate jobs which take time and can be replaced by technology

AREAS OF DISCUSSION

Thomas Stobart – Farmer, Technograzer, GrasscheckGB farm

Thomas Stobart farms in the hills of Cumbria in partnership with his brother Jimmy, running 800 Ewes with all lambs finished on a Tesco cost of production contract, 210 Wagyu cattle are also reared on contract across 730ha of which 60ha is owned and 670ha is rented. The brothers also run a contract shearing business to generate some off farm income.

The Stobarts run a 93ha paddock and a technograzing system on their best land. In the technograzing system, the fields are split into cells within lanes where a lead and chase wire are used to allow the correct allocation of grass and to maximise grass utilisation.



Since implementing the grazing system and utilizing grass more efficiently, the business performance has improved significantly. The fertiliser costs have come down by £7k, Purchased feeds by £22k and output has increased by £48k.

The table below shows the costs savings and increased output since 2013.

Year	2013	2014	2018	2013- 2018 £ Change	% Change
Fertiliser Costs	£11,512	£11,237	£4,567	-£6,855	-60%
Purchased Feed Costs	£37,572	£19,150	£15,160	-£22,412	-40%
Total Livestock Income	£139,885	£147,818	£188,105	+£48,220	+34%

David Owen – Owen Farm Services.

David covered the very broad topic of technology in agriculture. He explained that technology can be split into 3 areas Equipment (drones/satellite), Data (the information we produce and receive) & Systems (making sense of the data).

With all technology it is important that they add value to your business and are not just expensive toys. David gave a demonstration of a drone flight, which is starting to move into the useful category with the ability to produce accurate and even 3D mapping as well as crop health information. The key to making sense of data is having the correct systems which allow useful information to be gleaned, this may involve linking different systems together to save time and money. David's full presentation is available on the hub.



Encouraging Young People into Agriculture.

An interesting discussion session, with Sion Williams Buccleuch Estates with Ross McFadyen who is in his first year as a Modern apprenticeship through Borders College at Buccleuch.

Sion highlighted the benefits of employing modern apprentices for his business;

- 15 staff on the farm, there is a constant need to think about succession
- Ability to take someone on for a day a week for a year to judge how they work, then as an apprentice and hopefully they will then come into the team full time.
- Youngsters help develop the older team members to use technology
- By learning on the job they are constantly questioning how things are done and allow to evaluate practices.
- Borders College are good to work with and help to mentor the youngsters
- Some training costs are paid for and instil a culture of learning and skills development
- It allows a steady build-up of responsibility

It does not come without its challenges however, health and safety is very important and needs to be kept on top of, also there are legalities around which machinery they can drive on the road e.g. Under 21 cannot drive a telehandler on the road legally.

Ross Mcfadyen also shared why he wanted to work in agriculture and what he had learnt. Although there was farming in his family he did not have a farm at home and wanted to have a career with a range of work and skills. He also wanted to work outside and as part of a team, he can see himself developing in different ways and has not decided yet where he would like to be in the long term. He also stated that his opinion of farming had changed since he started his apprenticeship, in that there is more technology being used and the job is more varied. His friends do not have a particularly high opinion of agriculture, but he enjoys it and has no plans to change what he does currently.



Jill Dickson from BMR also updated the group on a new “Pre-Apprenticeship” program which is being rolled out in the Borders alongside Borders College and other co-ops throughout Scotland.

This differs from the standard Modern Apprenticeship in the following ways:

- 6 month program rather than 1 or 2 years
- Pre-apprentice is employed by BMR rather than the mentor reducing risk
- Training is carried out prior to stepping on farm reducing induction period
- Support given by both BMR & college to ensure mentors are happy with program
- Pre-apprentice receives a 2 week residential induction program prior to starting work

FARMERS UPDATE

Stuart gave a comprehensive update on progress recently as the group had a tour of the cattle and arable land. A full version of the update is on the hub.

Given the good weather all sowing, fertiliser and crop protection work is up to date and things are looking good. Silage was cut on the 12th May, and acceptable crop without being brilliant.

Calving is underway and going well so farm with the tighter block keeping focus, as well as not having done a lambing means the team is fresher.

The deer are about to start calving and ongoing fencing work has been done as well as making use of the new handling system for the first time.

Stuart also attended a Scottish Land & Estates dinner with Fergus Ewing where he feels he has now sorted out Brexit and future agricultural support!

OPPORTUNITIES/CHALLENGES

- Application has been submitted for organic conversion, which has been accepted and could begin in January 2020
- Managing grass without sheep is harder but means that cows are getting more and better quality

ACTIONS FOR NEXT MEETING

- Investigate what can be done to build fertility in soils etc. before organic conversion

FACTS & FIGURES DISCUSSED

- 21st day we had 90 calved. (59%)
- We are now 4 weeks in and have 120 (40 left (10 heifers and 30 cows)) overall pleased with calving so far. 5 sets of twins has helped so every cow has a calf and we still have spare. All to be finished in 6 weeks.

FACILITATOR CONTACT DETAILS

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