

ABOUT LOCHABER MONITOR FARM

Farm name **Strone Farm, Banavie, Fort William, PH33 7PB**

Meeting Number **03 – Grassland Management**

Meeting Date **Tuesday 23rd May 2017**

Next Meeting **Thursday 29th June 2017**

Strone Farm is run by Chris and Malcolm Cameron as a family partnership and in total the business farms 1,788 hectares.

Cattle: 40 Limousin cows producing store calves. Cows are in-wintered.

Sheep: 500 Cheviot ewes, producing store lambs. Mainly Lleyn tups and hoggs kept as replacements. Ewes lambed away.



The Group admiring the silage field below the canal

KEY MESSAGES

- Lime- the most important tool for grassland management. Getting the soil to target pH ensures soil bacteria work harder for you, releasing more N and P from the soils natural resources. Liming to hit target pH should be the top priority for any grassland farmer and is the most important key message from this meeting.
- Phosphate is also important for grass and vital for clover establishment. Different soil types absorb Phosphate at different rates. You need to understand your soil type before applying P. More information can be obtained on the Annex.
- Use fertiliser with added Sulphur if available (usually no added cost). Sulphur improves the productivity in grass. Trials are currently being undertaken to see if low sulphur levels is having an impact on low protein silages.
Sulphur does not remain in the soil. If not utilised by the plant, it will wash out.
- Aerator- this is a useful tool to alleviate soil compaction if used correctly. If used on wet soils or in wet weather conditions, it can cause more harm than good.

AREAS OF DISCUSSION

- 40 attended and enjoyed a lively discussion with a grassland focus at Strone farm for the 3rd meeting of this Monitor Farm project.
- David Lawson, SRUC provided a summary of the importance of soil nutrients, soil compaction issues and general grass and soil management.
 - Important to match Phosphate offtake in silage fields, as the phosphate will be removed with the crop, to ensure you do not deplete of the soil of this nutrient
 - Granular lime has its place in the market to provide a quick short term fix to pH levels. But it is expensive and should not be used where normal ground limestone is available.
 - When over sowing, the field should be grazed immediately after seed is sown. This will ensure the existing grass does not outcompete and shade the young seedlings when they begin to establish.
- Group visited the Wall Park, which is part of a grass seed mix trial. Johnny Watson (Watson Seeds) provided an overview of the management and seed mixes used.
- In the afternoon, the fields below the canal were looked at. These fields are currently cut twice for silage. With the ewes having lambed in Inverness this year, these fields are noticeable further on in grass growth than the norm. This will allow them to be cut earlier for both cuts.
- Overall a very positive meeting with good interaction from the community group and lots of technical information provided.



FARMERS UPDATE

- Brilliant Spring at Strone Farm.
- Major change in policy for lambing with all sheep going to Inverness on 10th April to lamb away
- This has resulted in being a month further forward with grass growth in the inbye fields
- Seasonal land at Clunes has been ploughed and all dung has been spread on this field (in total over 400 miles travelled).
- Wall Park was over-sown
- 70 tonnes of lime has been applied across the farm

FACTS & FIGURES DISCUSSED

- **Wall Park - Oversow Trial**

The field was fertilised with 0-20-30 at a rate of 2cwt/acre
 The field was then passed three times with the Opico harrow to blacken the ground.
 On the fourth pass, seed was drilled using the Opico harrow.
 The field was then rolled with the aerator.

Seed mixes used for the trial were 'Mingary' (20% Intermediate PRG, 65% Late PRG, 8% Timothy, 6% White Clover), 'Greenan' (13% Intermediate PRG, 80% Late PRG, 6% White Clover) and two mixtures that Watson Seeds designed specifically for Strone.
 The 'Overseeding Mixture' is 20% Intermediate PRG, 60% Late PRG and 10% White Clover. The 'Castle Special Mix' is 33% Italian Ryegrass, 33% Late PRG, 26% Westerwolds and 6% Red Clover.

We will track the progress of the trial over the coming meetings.

The plan is to apply 4cwt/acre of 21-8-12 and take one silage cut from this field.

- The actual cost of the oversow (fuel, fertiliser and seed) was £89/acre. If an estimate for own labour was included then the cost was £105/acre.
- In hindsight, the field should have been grazed after sowing to keep the existing grass (the competition for the new grass) down. The dry weather after sowing, then sudden warmth and moisture have not proved ideal conditions to establish the new grass in this field.
 A soil sample was undertaken to compare the pH in the top inches vs the lower inches of soil in a field where lime had been applied last year. The results showed that the top inches had a higher pH of 6 compared to 5.7 for the lower sample. This helped demonstrate that ground lime does take time to work through the soil profile



OPPORTUNITIES/CHALLENGES

Through the discussions over the course of the day, there were some challenges raised. These were:

- Weed control- When do docks, buttercups etc. become enough of a problem to be treated and what is the best way to treat these.
- Are Leatherjackets a threat in the area? A Leatherjacket grub was found while digging to look at the soil profile. It has been agreed to test for leatherjackets, especially in the newly ploughed field at Clunes.

ACTIONS FROM MEETING

- **Wall Park:**
Apply Nitrogen Fertiliser ASAP.
Don't graze field until after cut for silage but top if possible to allow light to new seeds
Cut for silage as early as possible to allow young seedlings more opportunity to grow in autumn.
Count number of bales made per plot
- **Clunes Lodge Field:**
Malcolm & Chris to consider various options for this field regarding seed mix used.
Use fine ground lime to help correct pH quicker.
- When next using aerator, leave part of field untreated to allow comparison of soil structures

FACILITATOR CONTACT DETAILS

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