

LOTHIANS MONITOR FARM

Farm name	Prestonhall & Saughland, Pathhead, Midlothian
Meeting Number	16 –
Meeting Date	Friday 19th July 2019
Next Meeting	TBC
Report date	23th July 2019

Preston Hall Farm and Saughland Farm independently run arable and livestock enterprises at Pathhead Midlothian. Pete Eccles is farm manager at Saughland and Bill Gray at Prestonhall. The businesses work collaboratively on arable operations. Livestock at Saughland; 65 AAX suckler cows running with Lim & Hereford bull plus 2,300 Chev, Lley, Aberfield, Mule ewes with Tex, NZsuff, Abermax lambs at foot on rotational grazing system. Arable at Preston Hall; Combinable Crops, WW 175ha, WB 80ha, SB 160ha, WOSR 65ha, WO 20ha, Grass 75ha

Community Group Chairman, Willie Thomson, welcomed 40 farmers to the Monitor Farm Summer meeting at Preston Hall. Willie explained that, the management group had decided to hold a Friday afternoon meeting which will finish with a BBQ at Saughland. Willie ran through the agenda for the day and thanked Peter for supplying the BBQ meat from his new “Native and Wild” Meat business. He also thanked Stephen for all his input over the last two years as Stephen is leaving SAOS at the end of the month for pastures new. Unfortunately, Jim Beary had to call off at short notice so Stephen has stepped in to run a group session on testing the audience knowledge of food costs and how we relate to consumers.

KEY MESSAGES

Stephen Young - (SAOS)

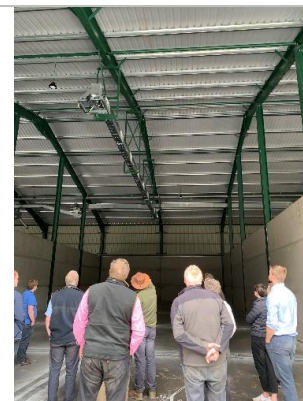
- The Group under estimated the price of food by 15% on average
- The amount spent on food by consumers is unlikely to rise and government would not support a rise
- The share of the retail price returned to farm has more potential to be influenced
- We need to state positive reasons why our produce is worth buying, not moans and groans.

Bill Gray - (Grain Store Project)

- Old System installed in 1965 and modified since
- Health and Safety Issues – Not fit for purpose
- Designed to Future Proof the Business
- Bill visited 6 different stores before the Project started
- Capacity 4,000t Wheat
- Compartments holding up to 1,200t
- Strategically place doors to utilise floor space



- 16t/hr Allmet Drier 5% Wheat
- Barn Owl Wireless control and monitoring system installed
- Probably the biggest single Capex project any arable farmer will make
- Due to Capex – we must get this right



Salome Barley Trial

- Virtual Agronomy was very useful

Stephen Young - (SAOS)

Stephen led an interactive group session on the current price of food. The majority of the group initially felt that food in the UK was too cheap. In order to test the validity of this view, Stephen presented the group with a bag of shopping and asked them to price the contents. The total price of the contents came to £46.38, however the closest group was 10% lower with their estimation, while on average, each group underestimated the cost of the shop by 15%. Office for National Statistics show that the average household spend on food in the UK is around £56/wk. ([Source](#)). The group concluded the following from the session.



Bill Gray – Prestonhall Grain Store

Bill gave some background to the grain store project and provided a comprehensive run through the thought processes and discussions he had held with the management group, community group and Will Callander with regard to addressing the grain store issues at Preston Hall. Ultimately this project is one of the biggest any farmer will make in his career and it has to be right to future proof the arable enterprise for the next 30 years.

Health and Safety issues associated with the dust and general working conditions within the old system were a primary driver for change. The existing grain store had been erected in 1965 and with some modification along the way has served the business well but the time had come to make a decision on building a new grain store



When the decision to invest in a new grain store was taken, Bill visited six different farms to see recently erected grain storage systems. The management group accompanied Bill on some of the visits. This exercise proved invaluable as all visits highlighted things which on reflection, the farmers would have changed or done differently.

Bill then led the group into the grain store and talk through the various design features and they openly discussed some of the challenges with the project. He explained how the roof conveyor system was designed to reach every part of the shed and how he had spent considerable time with Will analysing various harvest logistics/scenarios to ensure the shed could deliver in all circumstances.

The floor space is maximised with four main compartments which can all be accessed and then split with movable walls if required. Each door has shutters which ensures the shed can be filled to capacity.

The group discussed the layout and looked at the double intake pits before moving round to look at the drier. There was great interest in the Barn Owl Wireless Control System which is to be installed with some help from the Monitor Farm Innovation Fund. The system will allow remote monitoring of the grain store with extensive benefits which can be shared with the wider community group.

Bill finished by pointing out all the remaining work to be complete and showed the group where the new road access will be and what the final layout will look like.



There will be a podcast on the Grain Store Project after harvest and hopefully a time-lapse film of the build will be available to view.

Bill Gray – Salome Barley Trial

Bill took the group to see the Salome Barley trial which is a Swedish Spring Barley variety, also being grown at the Morayshire, Shetland and Angus Monitor Farms. The group have held a virtual agronomy session on Skype which worked well, as all participants were able to see and discuss each crop in the field via the video link. The project is funded through the Monitor Farm innovation fund and further reporting will be available post-harvest.

The group then visited a wheat field where there was extensive discussion on varieties and some valuable input from the agronomist and grain merchant in the group. The rain forced an early exit from the field but varieties will be back on the agenda for the October meeting.



FARMERS UPDATE

Bill updated the group on farm operations since the last meeting. The grain store has taken up some time but in general things are up to date. The spray programme is complete and Winter Barley is ready to spray off with harvest potential looking good. The recent arable event was good with lots to see and good discussion on varieties and Bill had an interesting talk with Soyl on Tera Maps. Bill also revealed that despite very vigorous and thorough hygiene measures he has found four Black grass plants recently which indicates that it is around. He then spoke about staffing concerns for harvest and about the collaborative outwintering of cattle project at the Pitscave and neighbouring field.

Peter gave the group a very different update compared to this time last year when he was short of grass. This year there is an abundance and he has made 1000 bales of silage and 600 of hay with more still to cut. This compares to 750 silage bales in 2018. The ewes are skimming across the fields to keep on top of grass but it is a challenge to keep ahead of the growth. Peter will also discuss the option of bringing more grass into arable with Bill but the difference with this year and last demonstrates the uncertainty in the weather patterns. The bulls are out with the cows and this year some Home Bred bulls have been used. The first lambs are away at £80 for 20kg deadweight. The Agri-environment hedges, water systems and lane ways are now in place. There has been a significant change in staff since the last meeting with David and Niall moving on. Peter has been interviewing and a new Stock Manager is starting in August. In the meantime, Peter has relied on contractors and neighbours who have been brilliant for which he is very thankful. He said the recent weeks had been very valuable as it has tested his resilience and he had taken a lot from the situation and could now see various staffing structures going forward. Unfortunately, being short staffed will limit his ability to provide harvest help to Bill.

FACTS & FIGURES DISCUSSED

- All facts and figures are on the Monitor Farm Hub

OPPORTUNITIES/CHALLENGES

- Grass Growth, Excess Forage, Outwintering cattle, Staff (Livestock & Harvest)

ACTIONS

Next Meeting – TBC

FACILITATOR CONTACT DETAILS

Colin MacPhail 07747 046461 colin@macphailconsulting.co.uk

Stephen Young 07502 339613 stephen.young@saos.coop

Fergus Younger 07771 966649 Fergus.younger@saos.coop

