

## LOTHIANS MONITOR FARM

**Farm name** Prestonhall & Saughland, Pathhead, Midlothian

**Meeting Number** 05 – Value of cover crops, diversification opportunities

**Meeting Date** Thursday 9<sup>th</sup> November 2017

**Next Meeting** 19<sup>th</sup> December 2017

Prestonhall Farms and Saughland Farm run independent 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; 50 AAX suckler cows running with Lim & Hereford bull plus 1,900 Cheviot, Lleyn, Aberfield, Mule ewes with Tex, NZSuffolk, Abermax lambs at foot on rotational grazing system. Arable at Prestonhall; Combinable Crops, WW 175ha, WB 80ha, SB 160ha, WOSR 65ha, WO 20ha, Grass 75ha

**The management group** is chaired by Willie Thomson and includes Jill Bathgate, Russell Calder, Andrew Clark, Rob Forrest, James Hamilton, Ross King, Graham Lofthouse, James Logan and David Paul

The Monitor Farm Community Group travelled to Cuplahills Farm in Fife where Stephen Mellville kindly hosted the meeting. Stephen runs his diversified farming enterprises along with his wife whilst holding down a senior consultant post with Laurence Gould. The farm is an arable unit with diversified horse livery and self-catering holiday lodge enterprises. David Aglen, farm manager at Balbirnie Home Farms came along to talk about the benefits of integrating livestock and arable on his larger scale units.

## KEY MESSAGES

### Cover Crops

- Earlier sown the better
- Oil Radish & Tillage Radish have given the best results
- Green cover crops in the trials did not like any kind of compaction
- Financial Benefit of Using EFA green Cover £70/ha

### Diversification

- Alternative incomes streams, Less exposed to one sector
- Farming can be lonely, brings public onto farms and provides opportunity to educate/inform
- Makes use of land and resources available



### Integrated Farming Practices

- More diversity required with individual farms

- Can cover crops contribute to lower growing costs in following crop?
- Cleaner land and less sprays
- Collaboration needs some come and go
- Do not get too focussed on the pure financials
- Non- Quantifiable Benefits difficult to measure but more important than cash
- We need to look backwards to move forwards

## AREAS OF DISCUSSION

Stephen Melville has been growing cover crops for the last four years and has trialled many different species/ mixes to establish which perform best. Stephen has attempted to measure the quantifiable (financial) and non-quantifiable benefits of growing cover crops.

Reasons for growing Cover Crops

- To introduce more organic matter into the soil – no FYM available
- To reduce risk of water erosion by providing a green cover
- To scavenge soil nitrogen
- To reduce bagged nitrogen input in next crop
- To reduce risk of nitrogen leaching into drains and water courses
- To provide wildlife cover & feed in winter (partridge, pheasant, deer)
- EFA cover crop requirement

6 Species Grown at Cuplahills: 8<sup>th</sup> Dec 14 = 93 days



Oil radish

Tillage radish

Forage Rye

Phacelia

Vetch

Berseem clover

The Melville family have diversified and made use of the farm's location and available resources to establish a horse livery business and self-catering holiday lodges. There are many reasons to diversify but alternative incomes streams and making the farm business more resilient are key.

## Why Diversify?

- Alternative Income Stream
- Chance to pursue interests / Improve quality of life
- Interaction and Communication "farming can be lonely"
- Succession Planning
- Rural Building rejuvenation
- Create local employment
- Vibrant Rural economy with new opportunities



David Aglen gave a presentation on how he is taking a more integrated approach on a large scale mixed farming operation by growing more forage crops on arable fields and having less polarisation of land use. David's talk was thought provoking for the group and challenged them to look at more sustainable traditional/alternative farming practices.

## Balbirnie Home Farm

- Crop Establishment - As little as we can get away with
- Looking at Using summer cover crops, harvesting with livestock
- Companion Cropping
- More Diversity of Livestock
- Replacing current "bagged and bottle" technology with alternatives
- Sheep Grazing forage rye and combinable crops late winter/early spring before veg crop
- Can cover crops attribute to lower growing costs in following crop
- Cleaner Land and less sprays
- We need more diversity within the farm
- Collaboration needs come and go
- Don't get too focussed on pure financials



Please see David's presentation attached



## FARMERS UPDATE

Peter gave a brief update on the livestock activities since the last meeting. There were still 1,100 lambs still on farm between Saughland and stubble turnips at Rose mains. At the previous meeting the group visited the stubble turnips and provided input to the best way to utilise the crop. Since then 160 lambs had been taken off and the fence is moved twice per week to give 25m blocks and the lambs are supplemented with 10 bales of haylage per week. Target is to get 50-80 lambs away per week. Ewes have been mobbed in 3 groups (1000, 1000, 500) for tugging and are part of 45 day paddock grazing circuit. Grass has shown good response to 30kg/ha N Autumn application. Calves have been doing 0.78kg/day since weaning.

Bill presented a similar overview of activities at Prestonhall since the last meeting. In general, it had been a challenge but there were only 24ha still to sow. Winter Oats went in well but more land has been ploughed than envisaged and WW was min-tilled at Turnydykes. Cover crops sown on 5<sup>th</sup> September are well established, cover crops sown late September are not so good.

## FACTS & FIGURES DISCUSSED

### Diversified Enterprises

**Eco Cabin 1 & 2** - Investment £280k, Grant assisted Turnover £60k

**Eco Cabin 3 & 4** - Investment £250k, Turnover £50k

**Livery** - Turnover £15k

**Farmhouse B & B** - Turnover £2.5k

**Agri-Environment Scheme** - Income on Poorest land £10k

Self-catering Occupancy rate 63-68% average income per holiday c£600



## OPPORTUNITIES/CHALLENGES

- Cover Crops - reduce bagged nitrogen input in next crop
- Cover crops introduce more organic matter into the soil
- Opportunity to replace current “bagged and bottle” technology with alternatives
- David Aglen “We need to look backwards to move forwards”
- Diversification - Alternative incomes streams

## ACTIONS

### FACILITATOR CONTACT DETAILS

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