

LOTHIANS MONITOR FARM

Farm name	Prestonhall & Saughland, Pathhead, Midlothian
Meeting Number	07 – To drain or not to drain, Liver Fluke, More from Grass
Meeting Date	Thursday 25 th January 2018
Next Meeting	8 th March 2018

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 Chev, Lley, 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

Community Group Chairman Willie Thomson welcomed 40 farmers and industry representatives to the first monitor farm meeting of 2018 at the Juniperlea Inn. Willie explained that the aim of the meeting was to look at putting figures against the costs and benefits of drainage and to talk through the process of working this out. The afternoon session was livestock focussed looking at the risk of fluke and how to get more from grass.

KEY MESSAGES

Mark Hodkinson – to drain or not to drain

- Drainage is the biggest limiting factor to yield
- Scotland has 40% more output by investing in Drainage
- Potential Yield 15t/ha in a good year
- Limiting factors - Sulphur, Potash, Drainage current yield 7.5t/ha
- Cost of drainage - £3000-£5000/ha
- Payback on £5k/ha drainage Investment 5.5 years
- Potential to reduce cost of production by £81/t
- Drainage will keep working for at least 20 years



Catriona Dykes - SRUC

- Fluke Risk higher this winter – have farmers forgotten 2012?
- Effective Testing Programme - diagnosis
- Use most appropriate product for time of year and individual farm
- Treatment protocol needs adjustment depending on conditions and prevalence of fluke
- Pre-lambing management - blood profiling 3 weeks before lambing

Emily Grant

- Key Rules of Grazing – Give it a Rest – Don't graze Regrowth – Use what you grow
- Yield (kg/LWT Sold) + Price (£/kg) + Cost (£/kg LWT) + Profit
- Significant opportunity in grazing – Grow more grass + Use more Grass
- Need to know how much grass you have – Need to understand how much grass you need

AREAS OF DISCUSSION

Mark Hodkinson – SOILS4LIFE

Mark Hodkinson took the group through the process of deciding whether to drain or not to drain and used the cottage field at Prestonhall as an example. At a previous meeting, the group had visited the field and excavated a soil pit to examine the soil structure. The field is currently yielding 7.5t/ha but has potential for 12-15t/ha if all the limiting factors such as Sulphur, Potash and drainage were addressed.

Mark calculated £245/ha of potential loss on the cropped acres from reduced production and increased cultivation, seed rates and chemicals. The cottage field is 8ha in total and potential loss in production is £1,785 for that field.

Mark asked the cost of drainage and the group agreed on £5,000/ha which Mark believes could have a pay back in 5.5 years with savings and increased production. With this scenario and the field fulfilling its potential post drainage, the cost of production reduced by £81/t increased crop yield by 90% with lower input costs. Mark stated that we have effectively bought 90% more land for the cost of £5,000/ha (£2,000/acre) and the "extra land" is incurring additional input except for drainage costs.

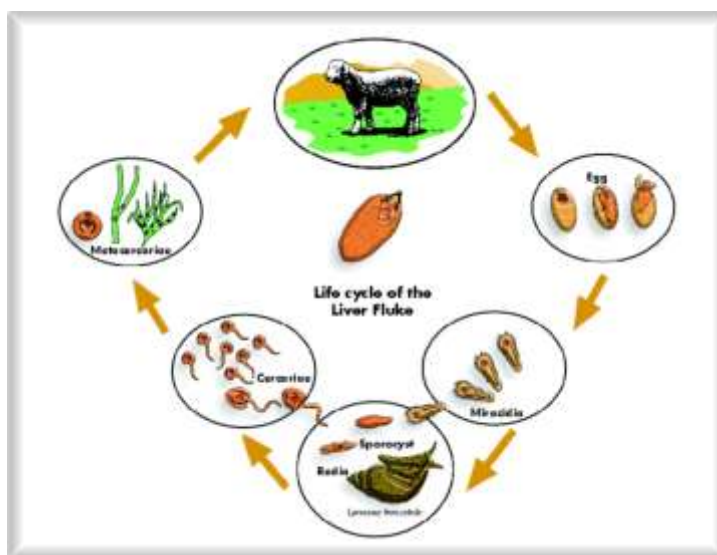


The group were asked if drainage was worth the investment and Mark pointed out that a well established and maintained drainage system will pay back in 5.5 years and keep working for at least another 20 years.

Catriona Dykes – SRUC – Liver Fluke

Catriona Dykes from SRUC Veterinary Investigation Unit in St Boswells gave a very interesting presentation on Liver fluke which given the recent wet winter is likely to cause significant issues across the country. Catriona asked if the group remembered 2012 when many farmers were caught out with fluke in ewes.

Catriona discussed the treatment considerations associated with fluke and touched on the wider factors such as time of year, weather, grazing history, timing of housing, withdrawal periods and quarantine treatments.



The treatment options depend on the stages of fluke and the importance of getting the correct protocol in place was explained. The different products available and the dangers resistance build up to the current products was highlighted by Catriona. The presentation also covered pre-calving and lambing vaccination protocols which discussed clostridial vaccines plus Rotavirus, Coronavirus and E.coli protection for calves.



Information on liver fluke is available on the SCOP and COWS websites

Emily Grant - QMS – Making More from Grass

Emily Grant from QMS gave a comprehensive presentation on the benefits of better grassland management and provided examples of how participants in the QMS grazing groups have improved the physical and financial performance.

It was interesting to hear Emily talk in Kg/Liveweight/hectare and how members of her group had increased livestock numbers by growing and making better use of grass. In one example the output has risen from 280kg lwt/ha to 403kg lwt/ha over 3 years.



FARMERS UPDATE

Bill gave an overview of activities at Prestonhall since the last meeting. In general, the crops were looking well, early sown wheat and rape looking okay but pigeons are a problem. The grain store project is on-going but caution may be prudent as the planning process is worked through. Dust and noise seem to be a concern for the planners. Bill is also working on the budget for next year, year-end is April.

Peter gave a brief update on the livestock activities since the last meeting. Linking with Prestonhall has been beneficial and Peter thanked Bill and his staff for their advice and guidance. There are 744 lambs left and they have averaged £74 so far. Decisions are needed on whether to 'hopper' lambs outside or inside and to keep the turnips for the ewes. Peter took the group through his feed budget spreadsheet which is helping to work out daily demand. He also mentioned that he had taken fluke samples and no eggs were found. The cattle averaged £1,257 at 18 months with 30 sold finished and 8 stores.

FACTS & FIGURES DISCUSSED

- Drainage payback in 5.5 years
- Calves sales averaged £1,257 & Lambs average £74 so far

OPPORTUNITIES/CHALLENGES

- Resistance to drugs (anthelmintics)

ACTIONS

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

