

ABOUT LOTHIANS MONITOR FARM

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

Meeting Number **10 – Open day**

Meeting Date **Wednesday 25th July 2018**

Next Meeting **10th October 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; 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 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 management group Chairman Willie Thomson welcomed 50 farmers and industry representatives to the Monitor Farm Open day at Prestonhall and Saughland. Willie explained that the aim of the meeting was review the progress so far and formulate plans for the year ahead.

KEY MESSAGES

Bill Gray & David Paul – Machinery, Grain Store, Pollinators Glyphosate

- The decision-making process is the most important part
- Machinery replacements calculations are very useful
- The Simba SL offered value
- Grain Store – planning and building takes longer than anticipated
- Pollinators - on-going monitoring and results will be invaluable
- Trial – ensure there is a crop in the ground all year round
- Glyphosate’s primary use is to control couch
- Trial – non-use of Glyphosate – see what happens



The collaborative Agri-environment Scheme (AECS) application has presented many challenges. This must be measured and reported as part of the overall project – currently waiting on the outcome

Willie Thomson & Stephen Young – Benchmarking Results

- Benchmarking has been invaluable
- It challenges your thinking and identifies incremental gains
- Important to understand both your own figures and those you are comparing with – only useful if you can use them to improve your business.
- Lots of different methods to use, the more detailed and work you put in the more you will get out.



Pete Eccles & Fergus Younger – drought issues carrying capacity

- With lower levels of winter feed made and predictions that straw will be tight - do a feed budget now to assess what stock numbers you can carry through the winter.
- Wean lambs early to focus them on best grass
- Put ewes in large mobs to clear stalky pastures and allow other pastures to regenerate
- Get rid of cull stock quickly to reduce grazing pressure
- Remove any other questionable ewes to reduce grazing pressure
- Sell lambs as soon as they achieve weight



Fi Kenyon & Beth Wells – Moredun

- Do not dose lambs straight onto clean pasture
- Target Selective treatment TST – treats only lambs not hitting their predicted weight
- Scab is still endemic in the UK sheep flock
- Work – test tups with pen side test after purchase
- Test 12 Ewes per group pre tugging -Test Tups pre and post tugging
- Important to find a technology to mother up ewes and lambs in the field



AREAS OF DISCUSSION

Bill Gray & David Paul– Machinery, Grain Store, Pollinators and Glyphosate

Bill reminded the group of the the October meeting when the concensus was to scale up and buy a 6m cultivator and 370hp tratcor. After the meeting he had concerns with the weight, if 6m could be justified and whether it would have the felxibility required. Bill then talked the group through the decision process he had followed with the help of the machinery replacement calculator. He emphasised the importance of the process and that it would generally take you to the correct decision. Following a field comparison with a Horsch Terrano MT, Lemken Karat and Simba SL, it was decided the Lemken was similar to what he already has and a second-hand Horsch was difficult to source. Bill sourced a used (2012) 4m Simba SL costing £22k and a new 300hp Case Tractor.



The grain store project is progressing and again the group have gone through a decision-making process which researched different systems/options, visited 6 farms and investigated the planning process. This all takes longer than envisaged. The group discussed the timeline handout and harvest 2018 is the new target.

Bill and David talked through the challenges of establishing the pollinators this year and explained how they had sown out some failed headlands. Watson seeds had kindly supplied some seed mixes to compare which included a bee mix, hoverfly mix and phacelia.

David then talked through the impact of losing Glyphosate and the implications in terms of controlling couch grass which was the primary use for Glyphosate when it came in. Bill and David would like us to try and demonstrate how non-use of Glyphosate on couch will look. We will also introduce more sustainable cropping practices in the next year with input from JHI. There are also opportunities to ensure the land is always active and growing a crop all year round and an example of under sowing spring barley with clover was suggested. The group will also look at early harvest cover crop options.

Willie Thomson & Stephen Young – Benchmarking Results

Willie Thomson talked through his experience of benchmarking which he feels has been invaluable to his business to gauge where he can make incremental gains. He also talked through the value of sitting with like-minded and progressive farmers which challenges your thinking and helps move your business forward. Stephen explained further about the benchmarking process and then smaller groups discussed the results for the Spring Barley crop and the Breeding Ewes.

Fi Kenyon & Beth Wells Moredun – Resistance, TST, Scab and New Technology

The Lothians Monitor Farm project has recently linked with the Moredun Research Institute to investigate opportunities to try-out some research findings and new technologies at farm level. Fi spoke about worm resistance and how Pete will implement a Target Selective Treatment (TST) system. TST works by weighing the lambs at weaning and then measuring the feed available to these lambs to predict how they should perform. The lambs are weighed every 3-4 weeks and only the ones not achieving their predicted weight, are treated for worms. Any lambs meeting their target weight are let back to the field untreated as the worms are not influencing their performance. By only treating the non-performing ones, this reduces the use of wormer and helps fight worm resistance and saves costs.

Beth explained that sheep scab continues to be a huge issue across the UK and how Moredun have developed the pen-side diagnostic test which Stu Burgess spoke about at our winter meeting. At Saughland, the newly purchased tups will be tested with the pen-side test on arrival at the farm. Also, 12 ewes in each batch will be blood tested for scab prior to tupping to establish the scab status. The tups will also be tested pre and post tupping with a new technique which measures their levels of exposure to scab during the period they are with the ewes. It is hoped this technique of testing tups pre and post tupping can effectively screen the ewes for scab at tupping time. Lastly, the monitor farm group have tasked Moredun with finding a new technology which can mother the ewes to their lambs after they are tagged at marking time.



Pete Eccles & Fergus Younger – Feed Budget, Carrying Capacity

Pete took the group on a trailer tour to see some of the weaned lambs, cattle and fodder beat. He gave an overview of how the dry weather was affecting his paddock grazing and his thinking on what Saughlands carrying capacity was going to be going into the winter. Fodder production is of good quality but low volume: -2018 Silage/hay to date is 500/80 bales and 7ha fodder beet -2017 Silage/hay 750/200 bales- approx. Pete estimates that he is 370 bales short. He is unlikely to make more as needed for lamb grazing but has enough for approximately 1,840 ewes.

With this out-look, the mitigation plan discussed with the group is detailed below

- Current ewe numbers 2,424 with 350 to go away cull asap, followed by 225 of poorest B flock ewes
- Lambs weaned and on to better keep asap. Ewes can then be handled in bigger mobs and more ground rested and stalky stuff eaten down – freeing up ground to be rested.
- Sell any lambs over 38 kg and above before trade drops further as feedback on carcasses is good
- Sub 30 kg healthy lambs on to grazing collaboration trial ground
- Any small problem lambs ran along with pet lambs and supplemented with hopper feed.
- 1,000 35kg lambs and above on to new grass, 500 30-35kg lambs to go on to Tynehead silage field, another 500 30-35kg lambs to go into Drylands silage field.
- With the cattle it is looking like 74 cows for the winter needing 150t of straw at 2 t/cow.
- Not enough straw from own sources, purchase balance.

The group discussed the options for the ewe flock at Saughlands, and the majority concluded that he was better to reduce his flock size as quickly as possible. The group thought that by reducing the B flock and retaining good quality ewe lambs that Pete was just accelerating a process he would complete anyway over the next 2 years, but in a shorter time.

FARMERS UPDATE

Bill gave an overview of activities at Prestonhall since the last meeting. The WB has had about 20% less N, WW about 10-15% less N and less fungicides. The WB has been desiccated and harvest will be 30-31st July. The last 200t of WW sold at the end of May which brings the average to £149t. There is a little forward sold but currently watching the markets. The fields of haylage for horses yielded one third of the normal number of bales. The Pitscave collaborative field has been challenging with the dry weather making the reseed difficult to establish.

Bill left the group with the following question, “how much is straw worth”? The grain yield will be back so not the same return for the arable farmers but what is the fairest way to value straw given the current situation.



Pete gave a brief update on the livestock activities since the last meeting. feed budgeting and carrying capacity is the first priority alongside concerns over straw supplies plus silage yields are back 35%. Decisions need to be made on selling ewes as Pete said, “in these conditions it’s a sell them before you smell them scenario”. Although there is no grass, lambs seem to be performing okay. Lambs went away last week at 18.5kg and £77 against £85 last year. Pete has also sprayed off 25 acres for forage kale but has had to work the ground 3 times before sowing it today. He may require some arable input from the group later in the day to ensure he gets the seedbed compacted.

Both mentioned the importance/challenges of the recently submitted collaborative AECs scheme

FACTS & FIGURES DISCUSSED

- Average Wheat sale price £149/t
- First Lambs away 18.5kg at £77 against £85 last year

OPPORTUNITIES/CHALLENGES

- Target Selective Treatment,
- Glyphosate,
- Pollinators,
- Cover crops,
- Collaboration

ACTIONS

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