

LOTHIANS MONITOR FARM

Farm name	Prestonhall & Saughland, Pathhead, Midlothian
Meeting Number	09 – Onwards and upwards – facing the challenges
Meeting Date	Wednesday 23th May 2018
Next Meeting	25th July 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, 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 welcomed 32 farmers and industry representatives to our ninth monitor farm meeting at the Rosemains Farm. Colin MacPhail explained that the aim of the meeting was to allow farmers the chance to compare notes on an extremely challenging season, as well as finding out how the monitor farms have coped.

KEY MESSAGES

Arable

- Location, location, location is the key message with how winter crops established
- Winter Barley – poor crop – should it be ripped out – group answer probably not
- Winter crops will be challenging let’s hope spring barley can compensate
- Cut your cloth in terms of inputs to meet yield potential



Livestock

- The A flock performed at lambing
- All the hassles were with the B flock
- Calving percentage 97% at May 2018
- Census results still show cattle numbers declining
- Labour availability in abattoirs could prove to be an issue later in the Autumn
- Prepare of delays, book well in advance to avoid penalties with over spec livestock

AREAS OF DISCUSSION

Arable tour

The arable tour lead by Bill and David Paul included (as Bill said) the good, the bad and the ugly. There was much discussion on each crop and 3 fields have been listed below.

Field 5

Crop – Winter Wheat

Variety – Barrel

Sown - 25th October, after OSR, 1 pass min til followed with press

Issues – None – Looking good

Reason – Increased Seed rate by 10-15%, 420 seeds/m², 750-1000 heads/m²

Actions – Fertiliser N - 170Kg/Ha so far heading for N- 205Kg/Ha

Discussion – Seedbed preparation, level seedbed is key, Aphids- not decided yet

Field 1

Crop - Winter Barley

Variety – Cyprus

Sowing Date - 15th October

Issues – Poor Crop what do we do?

Reason - sown late, wet backend, Rynco can be it's weakness,

Actions – Cut cloth in terms of inputs to meet yield potential - Cut back N to meet potential 120kg/ha not getting anymore, No fungicide and low rate growth regulator

Discussion – How much would a livestock farmer give for it?

Field 2

Crop - Winter Wheat

Variety – Myriad

Sown - 29th October

Issues – Poor crop, what do we do?

Reason – Min-tilled into chopped straw after oats, did not start to grow until mid-March, took a long time to breakdown straw, wet weather and chopped straw retained moisture.

Actions – 160kg/N/ha so far possibly another 30kg/N/ha to follow, Early season PGR, No herbicide

Discussion – Consider removing straw in future, livestock guys would be interested?



For the Livestock farmers

The group returned to the OSR field which they had previously visited in October and had created much discussion and interest from the livestock farmers. On entering the field (in October) some group members asked if the crop had failed. The photos (taken in May) clearly demonstrates that their concerns were unfounded as the crop has performed well. The yield will be revealed in October



Livestock Update

David Coulthard and Neil Shaw (shepherds) took the group on a tour of the livestock and explained some of the issues they had encountered at lambing. Getting honest and first-hand feedback on the systems proved valuable for the group. The key message from 2017 & 2018 lambing is that all the lambing hassle was with the B flock. The A flock with the Romney, Aberfield and easy-care genetics coped significantly better with outdoor lambing system.



The twins are set-stocked at 6 ewes and lambs to the acre at present and depending on grass growth, the rotational grazing will start when there is a sufficient wedge built up in front of the mob.

The cows are all calved and there are 67 calves on the ground out of 69 cows which went to the bull in 2017. There have been three calf deaths of which there was one aborted, one died of an infection (sepsis) and one calf was injured. The staff were generally pleased with the cattle performance with all calves were born within 9 weeks and calving percentage at 97% at this stage.

Market updates

Stuart Ashworth from QMS gave the group a market update on the beef and lamb. The beef price was starting to fall but Stuart expected to see recovery and a degree of volatility through August and September depending on how the weather/grass growth and consumer demand influence the market. Stuart also gave an update on cattle slaughtering and cattle registrations across UK and Ireland which showed a decline in numbers.

Interestingly, the key message on what may influence the cattle and sheep market this back end is labour shortages in abattoirs. If the abattoirs are not able to recruit and/or retain staff there could be longer waiting lists with stock going over fat and out of spec come October.



FARMERS UPDATE

Bill gave an overview of activities at Prestonhall since the last meeting. There is a huge variation in the winter crops and much is down to location and soil conditions at sowing. Crops which went in under favourable conditions in better parts of the farm are okay but the crops on the more challenging land have struggled. Bill wants to discuss the state of some crops and get as much discussion and feedback from the community group on what actions should be taken.

Unfortunately, Peter was unable to attend the meeting. Colin had been briefed and gave an update on the livestock activities since the last meeting. Lambing had gone well following a very challenging winter and the A flock had performed well in the outdoor lambing system.

FACTS & FIGURES DISCUSSED

- Calving Percentage 97%

OPPORTUNITIES/CHALLENGES

- Actions to be taken for poorer winter crops
- Grass growth and manging stock to maximise utilisation
- Weather implications on spring crop establishment

ACTIONS

Next Meeting 25th July

FACILITATOR CONTACT DETAILS

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