

## ABOUT LOTHIAN'S MONITOR FARM

|                |   |
|----------------|---|
| Farm name      | <b>Prestonhall &amp; Saughland, Pathhead, Midlothian</b>                            |
| Meeting Number | <b>02 – Vision, Performance data, Paddock grazing, Lamb Mortality, Soil Mapping</b> |
| Meeting Date   | <b>Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> May 2017</b>  |
| Next Meeting   | <b>Wednesday 19<sup>th</sup> July 2017</b>  |

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 Texel, NZ suffolk, 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

William Thomson, the newly elected management group chairman welcomed 65 livestock and arable farmers to Saughland. William introduced the management group members and encouraged the community group to get involved and put their views and suggestions forward.



### Management Group

- Jill Bathgate
- Russell Calder
- Andrew Clark
- Rob Forrest
- James Hamilton
- Ross King
- James Logan
- Graham Lofthouse
- David Paul

## Management Group Vision

Graham Lofthouse and Russel Calder delivered the management groups' vision for the project. The livestock vision is to increase productivity in a profitable and sustainable system. The group will use kg of liveweight produced per ha to measure progress and want to establish the financial benefits of collaborative arrangements with arable farmers. **A copy of the diagram created with the livestock visions can be seen in Annex 1 of this report.**

Russel followed with arable vision which is based on a more established system built on six main pillars. The management team want to strengthen and integrate these to ensure the business is sustainable going forward whilst measuring the longer-term benefits of collaborating with livestock farms. **A copy of the diagram created with the arable visions can be seen in Annex 1 of this report.**

Colin MacPhail then introduced the agenda for the day. The meeting was made up of the following topics

- Farmer's update – Peter & Bill
- Farmbench & Business Performance
- Livestock Tour – System overview - Rotation Grazing, Paddocks, Grass Utilisation, Lamb Mortality
- Cattle Policy and Performance
- Arable Tour – Soil Scanning, Drone demonstration, Cover crops, Pollinator Project

## KEY MESSAGES

### Vision and Benchmarking

- The management group have established a vision for the project
- Management group is taking responsibility early in the project
- Community group must get opportunity to contribute
- Establishing mutual benefits from collaborative working
- Farmbench will provide real value for those using it within a business group
- Bill and Pete value the level of detail available in Farmbench
- Comparable livestock data is limited
- By looking at figures it is possible to identify areas of your business to improve or work on, benchmarking and using industry standard figures give a guide to performance but only by looking at the reasons for the figures being as they are can decisions be made to change.
- Get benchmarking early to gain full benefit from the project



## Livestock

- Recording lamb mortality in detail produces valuable data
- Paddock grazing – massive potential to increase utilisation but must have sufficient stock to utilise it
- Think about why you want more grass, what will you do with it?
- Use tools to measure grass e.g Sward Stick or Plate meter
- Should the cattle be sold store? What are they worth?
- Cost out introducing more cows, selling store and collaborating with arable farmers for sheds
- **Livestock Profit Drivers** - Kg/Ha Output, Cost Control, Grass Utilisation

## Arable

- Lime must be right before thinking about anything else, it is the cheapest and most yield responsive fertiliser
- 4 samples/ha provides best combination of accurate results while not being prohibitively expensive
- Offtake maps can be used to replace P & K but you have to start from a known base.
- Drone technology is improving all the time, with infra-red for weed and disease identification coming in the near future.
- Looking at micro nutrients and Albrecht soil testing can improve understanding of situation and allow greater uptake of nutrients once sorted out.
- **Arable Profit Drivers** – Yield, Marketing, Fixed Cost Control, Input Costs



## Cover Crops

- There is no single correct answer, it is important to assess the job you need done and then choose an appropriate mix
- Suitable mixes for each option; (longevity for grazing – flowering and seed return for longer term mixes)
- Cost /benefit– allied to seed rate, keep seed rates low
- Helping grassweed control?
- What effect on quality SB following crop?
- What effect on rotation (eg horses for courses on mixture choice)

## AREAS OF DISCUSSION

- 65 Livestock and Arable farmers enjoyed much active discussion in the glorious sunshine.
- Colin introduced the new farmbench programme in its pre-launch state which he is first to use. He explained that we are starting on the journey with this new exciting new programme which the business group will use.
- The group then looked at some performance data from 2016. The arable data was benchmarked against the AHDB all Scotland Arable Business group figures and the Livestock against the QMS Cattle and Sheep enterprise data.
- Bill and Peter both spoke about the value they see in the reports from farmbench and encouraged community group members to join the business group to benefit from benchmarking.



### Livestock

- In the afternoon, the livestock group saw first-hand the effects of rotation grazing and the abundance of grass which Peter is now having to control. Peter explained in detail his vision for Saughland and shared some of his concerns which he is looking for the group to help him with.
- Peter also went through the lamb mortality results which the group found very interesting. His lamb losses are 15% which group said were good for an outdoor lambing.
- The cattle were looking tremendous and possibly verging on being too fit. The group challenged Peter and Colin to cost out the option of increasing to 100 cows for the next meeting. **See Livestock handout in Annex 2 of this report and tour notes in Annex 3 of the report.**

### Arable

- The arable group travelled to Prestonhall and on the way visited a field of hybrid wheat, a group 3 soft variety, sown at 90kg/ha. Bill had tried hybrids 10yrs ago unsuccessfully but varieties have improved
- Agrovista provided a drone demonstration and discussed the various maps produced from this. **See arable handout and tour notes in Annex 4 of this report**
- Bill explained that he began soil sampling in 1997 for PH, 4 samples/ha and he had seen a definite benefit. In 2002 he started P & K sampling at 1 sample per ha due to increase cost. He then asked the question, how do we go about measuring the benefit of P& K sampling and variable rate applications given the extra costs involved?
- The group had a long discussion on the various cover crop options. The management group along with Bill and David Paul (agronomist) are to decide which options will provide most learning benefit for the group.

- Lorna Cole from SRUC then finished with details on the Pollinator Project. Which is a 3 year trial to monitor pollinators and predators. Year 1 is a control year while year 2 & 3 will see improvements made to conditions for them and the effect on crops monitored

## FARMERS UPDATE

Peter Eccles and Bill Gray spoke about the farming activities since the last meeting. The dry weather has benefitted Pete's lambing but Bill is concerned how crops yields will fair with the recent lack of moisture. Both have also found benchmarking their individual enterprises valuable and have already identified areas for improvement. Bill has the grain storage options to consider and Peter is still contemplating what sheep handling systems are required.

## FACTS & FIGURES DISCUSSED

- **Some key figures as highlighted by Colin are available in Annex 5 of this report**

## OPPORTUNITIES/CHALLENGES

Led by members of the management group smaller groups were formed to discuss farmbench data for each sector. The groups were challenged with identifying the Strengths and Weaknesses and the Main drivers of profitability?

| Arable Benchmarks   | Livestock   |
|---|---|
| <b>Strengths</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Cost/t</li> <li>● Low Fixed Costs &amp; depreciation</li> <li>● Profit Before Sub</li> <li>● Grain Marketing/Risk Management</li> <li>● Management</li> </ul>   | <b>Strengths</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Purchase concentrates</li> <li>● Cattle Replacement rate</li> <li>● Technical Performance</li> <li>● Lamb Mortality</li> <li>● Ewes to Ram Ration</li> <li>● Variable Cost Control</li> </ul> |
| <b>Weaknesses</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Figures Accuracy</li> <li>● FC Allocation/Comparable Data</li> <li>● Increased Repairs</li> <li>● Ageing Kit</li> <li>● WB Profitability</li> <li>● Locations – Season</li> <li>● Market Volatility</li> </ul> | <b>Weaknesses</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Fixed Costs – Too High</li> <li>● High level of lambs retained</li> <li>● Labour – high</li> <li>● Detail Forage costs/bedding</li> <li>● Reliance on purchased feed</li> </ul>              |

| Arable Benchmarks   | Livestock  |
|---|--|
| <p><b>Profit Drivers</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Yield</li> <li>● Price</li> <li>● Marketing</li> <li>● Cost Control</li> <li>● Input Costs</li> </ul> | <p><b>Profit Drivers</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Kg/Ha Output</li> <li>● Cost Control</li> <li>● Grass Utilisation</li> </ul> |

### FACILITATOR CONTACT DETAILS

Colin Macphail, 07747 046461 [colin@macphailconsulting.co.uk](mailto:colin@macphailconsulting.co.uk)  
 Stephen Young, 07502 339613 [stephen.young@saos.coop](mailto:stephen.young@saos.coop)  
 Fergus Younger 07771 966649 [Fergus.younger@saos.coop](mailto:Fergus.younger@saos.coop)

