

LOTHIANS MONITOR FARM

Farm name	Prestonhall & Saughland, Pathhead, Midlothian
Meeting Number	11 – Harvest Roundup – Livestock – TST- Forage Crops - Winter planning
Meeting Date	Wednesday 17th October 2018
Next Meeting	12th December 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

Community Group Chairman Willie Thomson welcomed 48 farmers to the Monitor Farm end of season harvest roundup meeting at Prestonhall and Saughland. Willie explained that the aim of the meeting was to review the arable and livestock performance post-harvest and weaning.

KEY MESSAGES

Bill Gray & David Paul – Harvest Performance

- Soil conditions at sowing and location determined how crops performed
- Winter Wheats were disappointing
- Winter Barley was very poor but has benefits with the rotation
- Spring Barley performed very well and saved the day
- Straw valued at £60-£65/t
- Although yields are down the price has compensated
- Livestock Farmers concerns with OSR establishment unfounded 4.49t/ha



Peter Eccles – Livestock Performance, Fodder Beet, Kale

- Fodder Beet varieties – Blaze and Blizzard, sown June
- Fodder Beet – Feed Budget 6.5ha @ 20t DM/ha estimated 100-120t DM?
- Group conclusion – Graze fodder beet in situ
- Kale – Mixture Pinfold & Bombardier – Sown 23rd July
- Target Selective Treatment – only 405 of lambs need dosed



AREAS OF DISCUSSION

Bill Gray & David Paul– Harvest Results

Bill took the group to the same field which had been visited in May and reminded the group of the May meeting when the conversation revolved around what to do with the Winter Barley (WB). In May the group decided to leave the crop and see how it performed. As a stand alone crop, it did not perform well and again raised the question “why should we grow Winter Barley?” Bill and David pointed out the need to look at the wider rotation. Given the early sown and well established OSR crop now in the field following the WB, is the wider benefit of winter barley justified. Some of the group have stopped growing WB and some continue to grow it with the consensus from the group, is that in certain circumstances there is definitely a place for WB in the rotation. Discussion continued around the height and difficulty of establishing good OSR crops after Spring Barley at Prestonhall. As we all know timing is everything!



Bill and David took the group newly established Winter Wheat which has been sown in good conditions and they talked through the influence last year’s conditions had on performance with first wheats dropping from 9.67t/ha to 7.60t/ha and 2nd Wheats down from 8.42t/ha to 6.68t/ha. Luckily sales prices at £171/t have helped first wheats recover but regardless gross output is down £100/ha (£1,277/ha). Straw sales have helped 2nd wheats perform on par with last year at £1,259/t. The individual varieties performance, is listed on the meeting handout but Bill did give a word of caution on the validity of these results due to the field size, soil type and drilling conditions.



The group travelled to the Laird’s Entry field to discuss the OSR crop which the group had seen just after establishment last October. At that point, the livestock farmers (with limited arable experience) had concerns regarding how few plants had established. The group revisited the field in May and David had talked through how the crop looked well and explained a bit more about growing OSR. The livestock farmers in group took great interest in following the crop through the growing season and were pleasantly surprised when Bill announced that it had performed above average at 4.49t/ha. The group then looked at the newly established OSR with the new Simba one pass cultivation system.

Bill also spoke about Spring Barley and how it had saved the day in terms of performance with Rosemains yielding 7.21t/ha against 6.63t/ha last year. The price (£220/t) and the straw sales (£65/t) were both favourable and should achieve a total output figure of £1,723/ha. There was good discussion around varieties and this year Laureate had consistently outperformed Concerto by over 1t/ha. Although there can be quality issues, its performance in terms of yield has to be considered.



Jonny Williams, Farmstock – Market Update

The beef and lamb markets are fairly steady and Jonny would expect to start seeing a slight rise going forward. Unfortunately, the biggest challenge at present is lack of labour in abattoirs with some running at 75% capacity. This has held up throughput with some farmers waiting three weeks to get lambs away, resulting in over fat and out of spec lambs incurring penalties.

Bill Gray - Arable Market Update

Bill spoke briefly in his farmer update about the current grain markets and disseminated some key messages sent through from James Bolesworth at CRM Agri-commodities. Given the world markets and various weather events there are likely to be short-term spikes as markets react. Bill will take advice on these and will hang off and look to sell when the next spike occurs.

Peter Eccles & Fergus Younger – Livestock Tour

Before lunch the group stopped at the picts cave field to discuss the collaboration project. After a very worrying time during the dry spell when the field was virtually all weeds, the ryegrass and red clover mix has come really well and the sward looks fantastic. Pete has made good use of the grazing, putting 385 lambs on Mid July, of which 300 have been sold with 85 remaining and more to be added. The lambs have performed better than expected. The quantifiable benefits are being monitored and less easily quantifiable benefits to both Pete and Bill being discussed. Again, there is much discussion on how long it should stay in a grass ley.



After lunch, the farm tour went to the Fodder Beet crop which Pete has grown for the first time at Saughland. The crop grew well in the dry conditions and the challenge for the group was to work out how best to utilise it. There are 2 varieties in the mix, Blaze and Blizzard and before the meeting the yield was estimated at 20t DM/ha. One of the varieties sits higher in the ground and may be more suited to grazing but on inspection and with some very valuable knowledge and experience in the group, the feeling was that it could all be grazed in situ. The plan would be to strip graze it with ewes, but the timing of access and size of feed face would need to be calculated. The crop has grown very well and is a very valuable feed bank for winter.



The group moved on to see the ewes in the paddock grazing system, with one group of 1000 ewes. Pete gave an overview of how the dry weather had affecting his paddock grazing and his thinking on what Saughlands carrying capacity was going to be heading into the winter. The cattle to sheep ratio was discussed again and the group think that the current 70 cow herd could be increased to 120 to complement/optimize the sheep grazing. The cattle to sheep ratio discussion, is a journey which the whole group have been on since the start of the project and hopefully the balance will be in place by the end of year 3.



The last stop on the tour was to the field of kale (mixture of Pinfold & Bombardier) sown in very dry conditions on 23rd July. Pete had followed the advice given by the arable farmers that day. The crop had established well in some parts of the field but there were some areas were not so good. Looking at the roots it was clear the plant had taken a set-back, but it wasn't clear what had caused this. Bill did point out that there were historically some challenging areas within the field which had yielded well when previously cropped and given the challenging conditions at sowing, the crop may just have struggled. After much discussion in the field, the advice was to treat half with trace elements to see if that made a difference.

The collaboration and fodder beet/ kale handouts are on the monitor farm hub



FARMERS UPDATE

Bill gave an overview of activities at Prestonhall since the last meeting. The harvest had gone well but the results were very mixed with Spring barley being the start performer.

Pete updated the group on the lamb performance at Saughland and the challenges he had faced during the dry period in July. The fodder beet looks like a success and there will be much discussion regarding how best to utilise the fodder crops. Pete also informed the group that the result from the first use of the Target Selective treatment showed that only 40% of the lambs required dosing.

FACTS & FIGURES DISCUSSED

- All harvest results can be seen on the monitor farm hub

OPPORTUNITIES/CHALLENGES

- Target Selective Treatment, Pollinators, Growing cattle project Collaboration

ACTIONS

- Plan winter feed
- Manage split field treatment for fodder beet

FACILITATOR CONTACT DETAILS

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