

ABOUT THIS MONITOR FARM

Farm Name **Corskie Farm, Garmouth, Fochabers, Moray, IV32 7NN**
Meeting Held at Fochabers Public Institute, High Street, Fochabers, IV32 7EP
Meeting Number **17**
Meeting Date **Tuesday 14th January 2020**
Next Meeting **Tuesday 11th February 2020**
Report Date **Wednesday 15th January (LH)**

Corskie Farm is run by Iain Green in partnership with his mother and father. The family have been farming in the area for over 60 years. Over 1,440 hectares (3,560 acres) in total is currently farmed by the business.

Arable: The main arable enterprise consists of growing Spring Barley (535ha) for malting. Winter Wheat (86ha), Winter barley (70ha) and Spring Oats (11ha) are also grown, with the majority being used on-farm as livestock feed.

Cattle: The family run 380 cross cow suckler herd, alongside a 200-cow pedigree Simmental herd. Simmental and shorthorn bulls as well as AI is used to spread out calving across the year.

Sheep: There are 600 Mules and Mule cross Texel sheep which are lambed in April.

Pigs: At Corskie there is an indoor breeding herd of 380 sows, producing breeding gilts for Rattlerow.

"The different farm enterprises are fairly well integrated," Iain says, "as well as growing our own feed through the cereals side, we also use the manure from the livestock on the arable fields and pasture. We apply it differently in different areas, using our soil and yield maps to make sure we are controlling our inputs and maintaining good soil fertility and nutrient balance."

Management Group

Andrew Anderson (Chair), Stewart Grant, Charlie Gray, Hugh Thomson, Robbie Newlands, Martin Birse, Robert Manson, Cameron MacIver, Ian McHattie, Stewart Stronach and Stewart Rothnie.

TAKE HOME MESSAGES

- Mark's take home message was that you need to be linking soil analysis, forage analysis, manure analysis and lime analysis. Good interpretation of these results is also essential as several interactions could be taking place that limit the availability of micronutrients.
- Lyn's take-home message was that it must be the right tree, in the right place, and at the right scale, to be beneficial for the farm system operated.

KEY MESSAGES

Soil fertility

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- Mark Tripney from iSoils gave a thought-provoking presentation on soil fertility.
- Most focus on soil nutrients has been on N, P and K, but there are several other trace elements that can be more important in some soils.
- Farmers are prone to putting too much lime, manure and fertiliser onto land.
- Sulphur is required in most cases, but P is unlikely to be limiting on most farms, especially livestock ones. Indeed, P toxicity is more of an issue on livestock farms.
- Mark gave an overview of the causes and effects of soil compaction and highlighted some of the machinery available to aid aeration of the soil, but the selection of the method depended on the depth of soil compaction present.
- Further information on soil compaction, ongoing soil research and guidance documents can be found here: <https://ahdb.org.uk/news/correcting-soil-compaction>
- Soil pits should be dug regularly to assess soil compaction levels.
- He recommended that aeration should be done when you can get on the land, but it should be early enough to allow the roots to grow downwards.
- Mark emphasised that grass leys do not run out due to age, but aeration; and often subsoiling can prove more cost effective than reseeding.
- Soil pH and its maintenance at target levels is a key management decision for any farmer and without information on current pH levels, no fertiliser should be applied as it will be wasteful.
- While calcium is the king of nutrients, as it helps aggregate the soil and can influence soil pH; magnesium, potassium and sodium also have an effect.
- Mark encouraged farmers to carry out more detailed soil analysis, including calcium and CEC (cation exchange capacity) . CEC enables the calculation of the base saturation targets for the major cation in the soil: calcium, magnesium, potassium, and sodium. These numbers vary considerably depending on soil type.
- Neutralising Value (NV) is misleading, so lime particle size (granulometry) is the most important factor to consider when selecting lime as this drives the reactivity.
- Mark recommended getting the lime reactivity tested, as the higher the reactivity value, the quicker it will work but this depends on the current soil pH.
- Mark showed the group data collected on lime quality and found that one third of lime being sold to farmers does not meet the legal standards for agricultural use. Such low-quality lime is of little use to the farmer.
- A new accreditation scheme, AgLime Quality Standard (AQS) has been launched and farmers should be asking for this every time they buy lime.

Farm Woodland Creation and Funding

- Lyn White from Scottish Forestry highlighted the opportunities and funding available to farmers considering integrating trees into their farm system.
- 11000 ha of trees were planted last year, meaning 19% of Scotland is forested. Forestry is a £1 billion industry and employs 25000 people.
- Integrating forestry into farmland has several benefits including:
 - Providing shelter & shade for livestock
 - Acting as windbreaks to protect crops
 - Landscape and biodiversity improvements
 - Adapting to climate change and reducing its effects
 - Amenity/sporting opportunities
 - Improvement of water courses
 - Providing saleable timber or wood fuel for a financial return
- Some elements to consider if thinking about planting trees are:
 - Infrastructure is vitally important
 - Knowing the value of the commodity you are selling is key, as different prices are quoted with wide ranges.
 - The availability of a local market is crucial. Luckily there are plenty markets in the area.
- Farmers planting trees still get BPS for a maximum of 20 years.
- Lyn outlined the Forestry Grant Scheme (FGS) which can be applied for at any time throughout the year, and its associated payments. These are:
 - Initial payments for ground preparation, cultivation and weed control
 - Annual maintenance for weeding and other associated costs, for the first 5 years.
 - Capital grant e.g. for deer and stock fencing and tree protection to ensure successful establishment
- Payment rates depend on:
 - Type of trees planted
 - Location
 - Density (number of trees in the ground)
- In addition to the basic payment rates under the FGS, target area payments are available for areas identified as preferred or priority locations by the local authorities, Cairngorms National Park Authority, SEPA or the Highlands and Islands.
- There are currently 9 grant options, each with specific requirements for stocking density. These should fit all farm systems, but new options are always being considered.
- Each of the options have minimum planting areas, but the smallest is 0.25ha.
- Lyn encouraged farmers to speak to their local forestry office for free advice and emphasised that they were under no obligation to follow that advice.

- Scottish Forestry has recently issued funding for a woodland creation assessment to 9 farmers in the Grampian area, but interest exceeded supply, so applications will reopen in the new financial year.

AREAS OF DISCUSSION

- Around 25 farmers enjoyed an interactive day discussing soil fertility and farm woodland creation.
- Robbie Newlands, a member of the Management Group, welcomed everyone to the Fochabers Public Institute and gave a rundown of the afternoon planned before handing over to Iain Green for his farm update (see below).
- The lamb trial stimulated a good discussion within the group on lamb finishing methods.
- Mark Tripney from iSoils gave a thought-provoking presentation on soil fertility, especially trace elements. This stimulated a lot of discussion within the community group on the quality of lime available locally.
- Lyn White from Scottish Forestry gave a presentation on farm woodland creation and funding.
- Overall the meeting was very positive with good interaction from the community group.

FARMERS UPDATE

Arable

- It has been dry until last weekend which has allowed 200 acres to be ploughed.
- Iain has sold 1700/4500t on contract under forward futures to average £152.91 but the price has risen to £165.
- Iain is still to decide which spring barley varieties will be grown. He will grow Laurette and Diablo but is not sure about Fairing, this will depend on market needs.
- Iain visited LAMMA and England will be planting lots of spring barley but there is uncertainty if this will all make malting quality, so the impact on Scottish growers may not be as bad as expected.
- Chivas are going to set up a growers group for farmers that supply Aberlour distillery, after the Monitor Farm project ends. They are seeking feedback from growers and some funding will be available to farmers to complete carbon audits. Stewart Rothnie from Agrovista will facilitate this.

Cattle

- January/February pedigree calving has started, and all is going well so far.
- After 2 years of breeding pedigree Shorthorns, the first bull calf has been born.

Sheep

- The lamb finishing trial has started. Half the lambs have been put on good aftermath and the other half on bare grass with ad lib Harbro lamb finisher nuts.

- Lambs have been weighed after the first 14 days of getting used to feeders, having only been on grass previously.
- Ewe and lamb prices continue to rise.

OPPORTUNITIES/CHALLENGES

- Opportunities exist to improve soil fertility through better use of nutrients.
- Farmers should challenge the lime suppliers about lime quality and particle size. They should look for suppliers with AQS accreditation.
- An opportunity exists to explore farm woodland creation. Additional funding is to be released for this in the new financial year.

ACTIONS FROM LAST MEETING

- More farmers are needed to join the business group for benchmarking with the FarmBench system.
- Gather and analyse data from lamb feeding trial with Clipex sheep handling system.
- Review lime quality, particularly the reactivity results.

FACILITATOR CONTACT DETAILS

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