

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 **18**
Meeting Date **Tuesday 11th February 2020**
Report Date **Wednesday 12th February (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.



The community group listening to Kate Rowell

TAKE HOME MESSAGES

- Stewart's take-home message was that three factors are most important to soil health: minimising tillage, crop diversity and cover crops.
- Kate's take-home messages were to keep challenging each other, to collaborate more as an industry and not to lose touch. Keeping elements of the project going is easier when a date is set in the diary.

KEY MESSAGES

Lamb Feeding Trial Results

- Laura Henderson from SAC Consulting gave a presentation on the results of the lamb feeding trial, conducted as part of the Monitor Farm Innovation Fund.
- Previously all lambs at Corskie were finished off grass, with concentrates only introduced in the final week but many lambs were out of spec.

- The aim of the trial was to determine if concentrates result in greater growth rates and better financial return than finishing on grass.
- Two hundred and fourteen Texel cross homebred lambs for finishing had been split into two groups – one fed a grass only diet in a lush grass field of TGRS 1 which had been cut for silage twice beforehand and the other fed Harbro lamb pellets in a bare TGRS 4 grass field, which had also been grazed by cattle beforehand after being cut for silage twice.
- Lambs were weighed approximately every two weeks to tie in with selecting fat lambs for market using the Clipex automatic sheep handling system.
- Liveweight, daily liveweight gain, quantity of concentrates fed, and the cost of the concentrates were measured along with feed analysis of the grass and pellets.
- The results from the analysis of the two grass fields the lambs were kept in were remarkably similar.
- Analysis of the liveweight of the two groups by Harbro demonstrated that the lambs on the grass only diet were heavier and more of them were sold finished than those on concentrates.
- For a two-week period in the middle of the trial both groups did not gain any weight. This may have been due to the weather or a problem with the Clipex weighing system.
- Over the 6-week period the lambs ate 6.64t of concentrate, costing 36p/hd/day.
- Further analysis is required to assess the full impact of the trial.
- Iain Green has committed to continuing to use the Clipex handling system and will explore the possibility of using it to identify the most efficient and productive sheep in the pedigree and commercial flocks at Corskie.

Soil Health Review



- Stewart Rothnie from Agrovista and a member of the management group reviewed the soil health topics covered over the three-year Monitor Farm project.
- Previously soil analysis was restricted to P, K, Mg and pH to determine what type of lime was required, but now soil health can be measured.
- Stewart highlighted that it takes a generation to improve soil health.
- His tool of choice as an agronomist, is a spade. This allows you to see what is happening underneath the surface.
- The ideal soil is a third air, third water and a final third of chemicals.
- Soil organisms are essential if ploughing in straw, otherwise it is just ploughed up again the following year.

- Biostimulants have been used as a fire-fighting tool in the face of problems in the past.
- Biostimulants help plants work, but underlying issues need to be resolved first.
- Cover crops, particularly when a range of different crops are grown, help with drainage and make it easier to work the ground but there is limited time to get them established in our area as we are so far north.

Management Group highlights

- Host farmer Iain Green, daughter Laura Beattie and two members of the management group (Ian McHattie and Martin Birse) provided the group with some of their personal highlights and topics or meetings with the greatest impact from the three-year project; including lime analysis, soil compaction tests, #soilmyundies trial, sheep handling systems, MooCall heat detector, pelvic measuring, succession planning and the business group.
- At one of the early meetings lime from various quarries was analysed and this topic was revisited at meeting 17, where attendees were encouraged to request Agricultural Lime Quality Standards (AQS) certification and since that meeting, many of the local lime suppliers had gained accreditation under this scheme.
- Following the soil compaction tests, Iain now adjusts the tyre pressure of all machinery before entering the fields and his latest tractor purchased has this installed automatically.
- The viral #soilmyundies trial highlighted the importance of soil health in a fun way.
- Demonstrating many of the automatic sheep handling systems available on the market, helped many in the group improve the efficiency of their sheep enterprises.
- Using the MooCall heat detector at Corskie has provided evidence to support EBVs relating to gestation length, and aids cattle fertility management so that repeat breeders are investigated at an earlier stage.
- Laura Beattie started pelvic measuring all heifers at Corskie following one of the meetings, which has resulted in all heifers with pelvises deemed too small for calving to be fattened instead. Although, the heifer with the largest pelvis is not always the easiest calving as managing condition is a big factor.
- After the succession planning meeting, Iain was able to make arrangements for Laura to formally join the business. Many others within the group used this meeting as a catalyst for discussion and making similar plans to allow the next generation to come into the farm business.
- Undertaking benchmarking with the FarmBench system was a particular highlight for the business group members, as it allowed them to identify areas for improvement and share ideas with each other to achieve this.

Beef Monitor Review

- Ross Robertson from Ritchie reviewed the use of the Ritchie beef monitor system at Corskie.
- Since the installation of the system, the average liveweight and deadweight of the bulls has increased.

- Less bulls are now penalised for being out of spec, resulting in increased profitability.

Close of final meeting

- Kate Rowell, QMS Chair, vet and hill farmer from the Borders gave a brief overview of her experience of being a Monitor Farm and how that has shaped her career.
- The Monitor Farm experience encouraged Kate to grow better quality silage which resulted in a £6k saving and feeding ewes differently led to improved scanning percentages.
- These changes were mirrored on several farms run by community group members, highlighting the reach and impact of the project.
- Kate also shared a few tips she had learnt over the years with the group to ensure that the legacy of the Morayshire Monitor Farm lives on.
- Finally, QMS plans for new red meat “sustainability” groups and indications that the format of future Monitor Farms will be orientated towards climate change were shared.



AREAS OF DISCUSSION

- Around 40 farmers enjoyed an interactive day reflecting on the three-year Monitor Farm Project.
- Ian McHattie, 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 feeding trial results were discussed, with many farmers questioning the value of concentrates in a mild winter and if there is any return on the investment, even when lamb prices are so high.
- Stewart Rothnie, a local agronomist with Agrovista and member of the Management Group, picked out the key points from all the soil health meetings covered throughout the Monitor Farm project and discussion followed on biostimulants and cover crops.
- Members of the management group shared their personal highlights of the project and areas they have made improvements to following meetings, which highlighted how much has been achieved over the last three years.
- After a short trip out to Corskie the group looked at the 11 bulls forward for Stirling Bull Sales next week and discussed their breeding and performance before going to see the current batch of young pedigree bulls on the Beef Monitor system.

- Future projects following on from the Monitor Farm project were highlighted, including a farmer led Aberlour Distillery Growers Group from Chivas Brothers, for the local farmers supplying Aberlour distillery with malting barley.
- The business group were also keen to attract new members, so the group could continue in the future.
- Overall the meeting was very positive with good interaction from the community group.

FARMERS UPDATE

Arable

- The weather has dried up over the last few weeks to allow around 50% of the spring barley area to be ploughed, but over 900 acres remains to be ploughed.
- No more grain has been forward sold under wheat futures since the last meeting.
- Iain Green has enquired about November 2021 wheat future prices and is now considering selling forward for then.
- Three spring barley varieties are to be sown this year: Laurette (82% of spring barley area), Diablo (8%) and Fairing (9%). This represents a decrease in the area of Fairing grown as it is a less viable option now that the customer is not subsidising haulage to central Scotland.
- Syngenta are to supply seed from 5 – 6 spring barley varieties, including some not on the current recommended list, for trial plots.
- An open day for assessing the winter barley and spring barley variety trial plots is planned.
- The winter barley is now starting to need the first application of nitrogen. Iain uses a 30%/50%/20% application rate programme which works well with the hybrid varieties.
- Iain issued a reminder on farm safety to the group following identification of a GPS fault in one of his combines being traced to electricity jumping from overhead power cables in one field, burning out the GPS unit.

Cattle

- Only four of the January calving pedigree cows are still to calve.
- All spring calvers are still outside on the turnip/kale mix, which is nearing the end for some groups.
- Cross cows are due to start calving mid-March.
- Current rations are costing 84p - £1.00 per day, depending on the group of cattle being fed.
- No additional feed has been required by the cows as the silage quality is very good.
- Freemartins, heifers not suitable for breeding and the last of the cross bulls have been sold deadweight.
- A batch of bulling heifers were sold last week.
- The next batch of pedigree bulls have started on the Beef Monitor system.

- Eleven bulls are being put forward for Stirling bull sales next week and two others for the Spring show on the 26th.
- Iain purchased a Shorthorn bull at Stirling last week.

Sheep

- Cross ewes have been scanned at 204% which is an increase from 2019 and the ewes are in fit condition.
- Ewes carrying triplets have started to receive ewe rolls once a day and hay.
- Lambing has just started in the pedigree Texel flock.
- Later lambers and repeats are still outside on grass with no supplementary feed.
- Fat lambs are being selected for sale every two weeks as the price remains high.

OPPORTUNITIES/CHALLENGES

- Opportunities exist to improve soil health through minimising tillage, considering soil compaction, utilising cover crops and integrating a diverse range of crops in the rotation.
- Cattle performance can be optimised by better recording of data.
- Similarly, combining EID and weight data can improve the productivity and efficiency of sheep enterprises.

ACTIONS FROM LAST MEETING

- More farmers are needed to join the business group for benchmarking with the FarmBench system.
- Continue with the lamb trial to see the full impact of feeding concentrates to finishing lambs.

FACILITATOR CONTACT DETAILS

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