

ABOUT NITHSDALE MONITOR FARM

Farm name - Clonhie Farm, Penpont, Thornhill, DG3 4NB

Meeting Number - 16

Meeting Date -26th September 2019

Next Monitor Farm Meeting – TBC

ABOUT CLONHIE

Clonhie is a tenanted farm on Buccleuch Estates run by Andrew and Aileen Marchant, new entrants to farming in 2012. Neighbouring Glengar was added to the farm business in 2016 taking the farmed area to 303ha (750ac), from 100m to 300m above sea level near Penpont in Nithsdale.

Sheep - numbers are up to 900 lambing ewes all lambing outside in April. Moving over to Aberfield and Highlander cross ewes and using Abertex, and Beltex cross terminal sires.

Cattle – Herd of Luing cattle is now up to 16 calving cows & heifers. However summer grazing heifers are also taken on and store cattle are wintered in the sheds on a B&B basis as well.

Red Deer – A herd of 150 breeding hinds is being established in collaboration with Buccleuch Estates, with plans to grow numbers to 250

Management Group is chaired by local farmer Colin Forsyth, Bennan, and includes Nithsdale Vet Alistair Padkin, David Wilson, Marwhirn; Robert Osborne, Castlehill; John Wildman, Glenkiln; Alisdair Davidson, Poldean; Colin Cuthbertson, Thripland and Andrew Best of Watsons Seeds



Red deer hinds in handling box for dosing. Sandra Stewart on farm wildlife



Farm tour discussions in the rain



Charley Walker

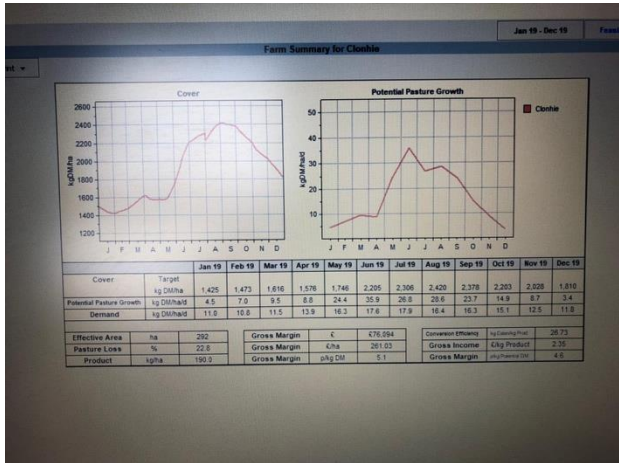
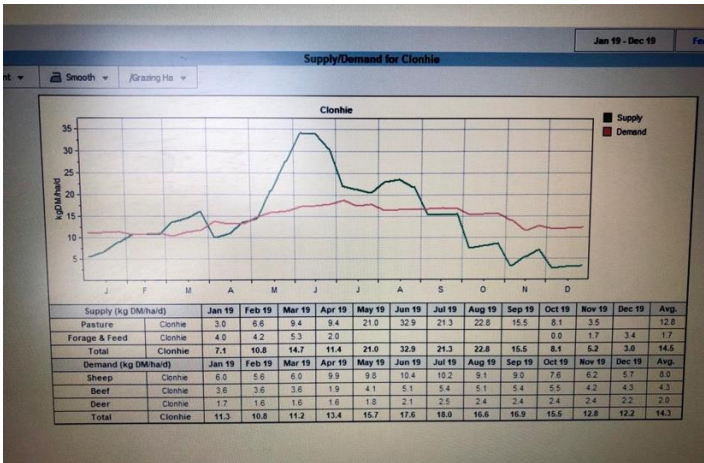
KEY MESSAGES

- There is already a lot of good environmental management going on at Clonhie, as there is on many livestock farms across Scotland. With a few additions we can make an important difference making things even better for the local wildlife.
- Whether we like it or not our future will include further new developments on environmental management in our countryside, we need to ensure these new schemes make sense for both our wildlife and our farmers.
- If you want to go fast go alone; if you want to go far go together
- The changes we have made have surpassed our hopes and we have built / continue to build a successful beef and sheep business and we feel we can face an uncertain future with more confidence [than if we had continued as we were].

ANDREW'S CLONHIE UPDATE

Andrew began his update discussing his accident on their family holiday, which led to an operation and over 6 weeks in plaster. This has highlighted the importance of both good holiday and health insurance cover as well as the incredible value of having so many good friends and neighbours who have been willing and able to help out. "I've also learned not to sweat the small stuff. Things maybe haven't been quite what we would have wanted had the accident not happened, but in the end of the day, thanks to all who helped Aileen do everything I should have been doing, nothing died as a result – some of them just grew a bit slower than planned".

- The deer handling pens are now complete and we have had the hinds through to check and dose and the stags have been de-antlered before they went out to the hinds. We have also had the yearlings through the pens and are looking forward to selling our first crop later next month. The second side of the cattle shed has been altered for this year's young stock for the winter.
- Sheep were weaned a bit later than planned and Andrew gave a breakdown of lamb sales to date – please see the farm update PowerPoint attached
- Ewes are in good condition and we are now looking at our options for pre-tupping management [and the golden 20 days] as to whether we should use supplements etc to ensure a good scanning % for next year's crop of lambs.
- Rhidian discussed the FARMAX programme and output graphs showing the supply of and demand for grazing on Clonhie to date in 2019. This needs a little more tweaking but has already proved useful in informing autumn and winter grazing / feeding plans



AREAS OF DISCUSSION

Sandra Stewart, from Farming and Conservation, has completed the Environmental review audit for Clonhie [for the Monitor Farm project] and has compared the changes over the last two and a half years. Sandra gave a very interesting discussion on various wildlife aspects as the farm tour visited different parts of Clonhie including the farm hedges, species rich grassland, woodlands and the farm ponds. Her main comments and discussions included :-

- Farm hedges are now cut every two years [half of the hedges one year and the other half the next year] leaving a good supply of berries as winter feed for birdlife.
- A deflector plate is now used by the contractor to prevent fertiliser getting into hedge bases, ditches and field margins.
- Clover is being incorporated into grass swards and included in reseed mixtures used
- Most field cultivations are now mainly stitched in rather than by ploughing and cultivating, which releases a lot of soil carbon into the atmosphere.
- Margins around silage fields are left uncut improving wildlife corridor links, especially where there are hedges around field margins.
- Bird boxes including and owl box and bird feeders have recently been installed in appropriate locations on farm and in the farmhouse garden.
- Field operations are avoided from mid-March to mid-June in fields where waders [Lapwing, Curlew and Oystercatchers] are nesting.
- Sheep are taken off Glengar hill over the winter months when there is the greatest risk of over grazing and damaging heather, heath and blaeberry. Cattle do not graze in the same [selective] way and so do much less damage.
- Selected areas of species rich grassland which are or were easily fenced off are now allowed to grow naturally over the spring and summer months and then after flowers set seed are grazed by livestock in late summer or autumn – preferably by cattle if possible. It would do little damage if these areas are grazed earlier in an occasional poor grazing year such as the 2018 drought.
- Growing forage crops is also valuable for overwintering of farmland birds including skylark, linnet, sparrow and yellowhammer.
- Andrew is planning to create more shelter along the access raceway to the deer handling system. Sandra suggested that early flowering pussy willow and cherry trees could be added to the native species mix proposed to provide early season forage sources for insect pollinators in spring.

Charley and Andrea Walker attended the meeting, contributing to the farm tour discussions in the morning. After lunch Charley gave his presentation on the development of their organic farm business at Barnside, near Duns in the Lammermuir hills – please see the attached PDF of Charley’s PowerPoint file.

Charley began by emphasising the value he gets from the groups he participates in from the early QMS Borders Grazing Group hosted by Jim Logan at Pirntaton, where he really began to appreciate what rotational / mob grazing can deliver in terms of extra grassland production and crucially improved utilisation of the grass grown. At those meetings Michael Blanche, the facilitator, said “If you want to go fast go alone, but if you want to go far go together”. This has stuck with Charley and he continues to attend and learns from the farm visits and group discussions held by the QMS Graze+ and Northumberland group events. We have great support and lots of knowledge and experience to fall back on when things get tough – like in 2018 when plans A, B C and D were all ruined by the drought and we just had to go with what was possible on the day. Having these guys to turn to was positive.

FACTS & FIGURES DISCUSSED

Charley talked about how he and Andrea went about planning the changes on farm. It is a big upheaval, pretty hard to get your head around it all, and everything you change has an ongoing impact on something else...! This is kind of how we did it :-

- We took a map of the farm and split it into 4 sections and allocated mobs of stock to each area.

- Paddocks are usually about 6 or 7 acres each
- It takes a lot of temporary electric fencing and a water system to do this, but we calculated that for every 4 tons of organic bought in feed saved we could set up two 30acre fields into eight 7 acre paddocks and the necessary water system. We also found some good electric fencing kit on-line much cheaper than most and it was pretty decent quality too, which helped a lot.
- We have 'permanent silage', which is planned to be cut that year and 'flexi silage', which can be either grazed or cut depending on the balance between grass available and livestock demand.
- We run all 110 Welsh Black and AAX cattle in 1 mob - they're bulled, grazed, wintered and calved in the big mob.
- 600 Easy care ewes are in 1 or 2 mobs depending on the season.
- We have a slave or clean up mob of gimmers and cast cows to tidy up the paddocks that are getting out of hand.
- We plan and manage grazing carefully for the Golden 20 days – 10 days before tugging ewes are flushed and for the first 10 days of tugging when they get the very best of grazing we can provide for them to ensure the best possible scanning %.
- Ewes are winter grazed on deferred grass or forage crops.
- Cows and in calf heifers are wintered in one lot on a field that will be cropped next year and fed silage in trailers, which can be moved around to help keep feed areas as clean as possible. SEPA have been and seen what we do and are happy enough with it.
- Cows are calved outside beginning 1st April. We use a calf katcher [imported from USA] to get newborn calves into the bike trailer, the cow follows the quad and trailer into the field/paddock she is to go to and the calf is tagged before it is released.
- Ewes all start lambing 20th April, anything that is handled [at lambing time, for bad feet or dirty arse etc - not so many now] is recorded/marked and will be culled in the back end.
- Before doubling up groups of ewes to create the mobs we go into the field and stir the ewes and lambs up a bit a couple of times to get them used to mothering up in smaller groups. If you do it before each doubling up they soon learn.
- Calving and lambing are both more or less complete by mid May.
- One of the biggest challenges was the size of the sheep mobs for handling. Need to either restrict the size of the mob to what you can handle on a day or adjust your handling pens to cope with bigger numbers.
- Sheep handling days are big days so need a good working partnership / team to get it all done.
- Having the year old store cattle is also a good flexible tool as they can be sold if needs be. However with the arrangement to sell / move a proportion of them to Giles Henry at Selkirk [which works well as they perform very well there] we have lost some of that flexibility
- Using FARMAX has also been really valuable in helping to plan. As you enter more and more information it really does "get to know your system and become more and more accurate", which is amazing. If you enter different scenarios it shows you whether your plans are likely to give you the results you want in the shorter term but also if there are any longer-term implications. We are now also entering financials onto FARMAX, but have yet to fully explore the power of this part of the program.....
- We did basic pH, Phosphate and Potash analysis at the start and apply lime to get the soil pH to 6 and above. But we are now thinking that there may be some other mineral issues restricting grass growth so are about to start doing more in-depth analysis to investigate whether there is anything on this front that we can do to further maximise production.

Finally, congratulations to Charley and Andrea who won the Farmers Weekly 2019 Grassland Manager of the Year award at the recent ceremony held in London.

OPPORTUNITIES/CHALLENGES



NEFERTITI group with Andrew Marchant and Judith Hutchison at Clonhie

Clonhie were also delighted to welcome a group from the NEFERTITI project to observe and participate in their first Monitor Farm event. Group members hailed from Hungary, Germany, Belgium and Ireland. NEFERTITI is an EU project established to create a network of demonstration and pilot farms aimed at enhancing knowledge exchange, cross fertilisation and uptake in the farming sector of peer to peer learning - <https://nefertiti-h2020.eu/>. This particular group are involved in supporting projects to encourage New Entrants into Agriculture. Our thanks go to Dr Annie McKee of the James Hutton Institute for arranging the visit.

Judith then discussed plans and arrangements for the final six months of this Monitor Farm project – where has the time gone?!

- We have 2 MF meetings left to hold. The next meeting will be a visit Richard and Peter Barbour's
- Auchengibbert cattle herd at the end of November – date still to be confirmed. The final meeting will be in late January or early February at Clonhie.
- We have 2 evening meetings arranged for the winter months
 - Succession with Heather Wildman on December 5th
 - Mind set and attitude by Jen Kemp – date to be confirmed
- Now that we are nearing then end of this project and we don't yet know what opportunities might follow or when they might arise, we should be thinking what the Clonhie group would like to do in future. Any members of the group interested in continuing some group activity or farm visits please contact Judith and we will discuss what is wanted and find a way of keeping a group together.
- The business group have 3 farm visits left to arrange and this year's benchmarking exercise to complete – discussions for these were held on the day.

ACTIONS FOR NEXT MEETING

The management group are keen to arrange a further event where an environmental scientist, who is also a livestock farmer, can speak to the group explaining and discussing what our livestock industry is good at and what we could improve upon in environmental and climate change terms. We hope that this will be of great interest and help farmers to understand the real science of livestock production's role in the modern world, and possibly to stand up and have some of those challenging conversations with more confidence. We should have further information for you on this before too long.

Future Dates :-

Wednesday 27th November – Visit to Richard and Peter Barbour at Auchengibbert
Thursday 5th December – Evening meeting – Succession with Heather Wildman

Date to be confirmed – Jen Kemp Evening meeting – Importance of Mind set and Attitude
Late January 2020 – 18th and final Nithsdale MF meeting at Clonhie
February date tbc – Extra date - Scottish Livestock Farming and Climate Change event
– details to follow

FACILITATOR CONTACT DETAILS

Judith Hutchison: - judith.agridigm@icloud.com ; 07718 919 055
Rhidian Jones: - rjlivestocksystems@btinternet.com ; 07889 182 364

