

ABOUT NITHSDALE MONITOR FARM

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

Meeting Number - 13 Grazing and Forage Management – Michael Shannon and Emily Grant

Meeting Date -Thursday 17th May 2019

Next Monitor Farm Meeting – 9 June 2019

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



Grass clover mix



over-seeder being inspected



Michael Shannon

KEY MESSAGES

- There's too much grass!
- The potential for improving quantity and quality of the grass we grow and utilising it to grow still more kilos of beef and lamb from every acre we farm is amazing
- GrassCheckGB will be a valuable tool to see and predict our grassland growth rates – take a look
- Clonhie FARMAX trial introduced to evaluate this type of software in our livestock industry

ANDREW S CLONHIE UPDATE

Lambing has gone well, just a pity the numbers weren't there in the first place. However, it does mean that single lambs are growing fast. Got the marking all done last week and really starting to find a

difference in the performance of the A flock and B flock - it is pleasing to see that our investment in genetics is coming through on the ground.

- I am wondering about fertiliser plans and whether I can change, or reduce, fertiliser applications. We put some urea early on and I think that gave us a nice early and even start to the season. But I can see that I'm going to be wading in the stuff shortly. Given the year we maybe didn't need to put as much on. I'm hoping that this is where FARMAX [more about this later] will come in...
- Have a grass over-seeder working in two fields today. The 'grass to grass' reseed from last year hasn't been great. We nearly took it out and started again, but decided to give it another go - not sure if we've done the right thing or not. We are over-seeding it with a Watson's Duart Mix at 8kg per acre. There are a fair few thistles in the field, largely due to the patchy take of grass.
- The field we called the thistle field in year 1 of the project now has no thistles, but it has no clover either - except for a couple of wee triangles I missed when spraying the thistles. The triangles clearly show the difference in the grass growth where the clover is and is not. So I'm keen to get the clover re-established. So, we're over seeding this with 2kg cast clover per acre
- Calving has been going well, and with little or no help/intervention from ourselves. We did lose one calf but had a twin to set on which worked no bother. The year- old heifers have done well and we have 10 fit to go to the bull this summer. That will be a total of 30 at the bull this year. It's great to see the increasing numbers going to the bull each year.
- As you will have seen we have the frame for the deer shed up. Half of it will be for the handling system and half can be used for wintering young stock, which will have a corral to run out into as well. The shed has been built with the plan to extend it over time to increase wintering space as the herd numbers grow.

Rhidian's Grassland Update

- Grass covers this year have been higher throughout the spring. We currently have 1627KgDM/ha which is almost 300kgDM/ha more than this same date last year.
- We have a new reference points for Grass Growth and quality information in GrassCheck GB - <https://www.grasscheckgb.co.uk> where you can see average growth and quality information for Scotland and individual farm figures by clicking on the map. Alisdair Davidson, Michael Shannon, Giles Henry and Robert Fleming are 4 of the 9 farmers in Scotland participating in this project, which will also include weather information once the site is fully developed.

AREAS OF DISCUSSION

Michael Shannon - discussed the re-seed fields during the morning tour his main points being:-

- Maybe he would have scrapped last year's reseed and started again
- It's always worth putting clover at the start given the difference it makes to the sward
- You can kill most weeds out with a light spray of MCPA [1.2litre MCPA / hectare] which will knock the grass and clover a bit for 10 days, but it will recover quickly after that.
- Coated clover seed
 - Is only worthwhile when the coating includes the particular rhizobium fungi which that variety of clover requires to establish and perform properly

- Each variety of clover requires its own particular variety of rhizobium. You can have 100s of different rhizobium in your soil but if you don't have the right one there for that variety of clover then it just won't establish well to do its job properly.
- Be aware that coating the seed will increase the weight of the same quantity of seed from say 1kg to 1.5kg per acre

Michael gave a very interesting talk in the afternoon the main points of which were:-

- Whole farm was split into sections and fenced using "map maker" a free download.
- Applies 10:26:26 fert in early spring to get P & K on annually with a wee nitrogen boost to get things going early on. Then apply further nitrogen little and often as required over the season.
- Only uses red and white clover with diploid varieties of ryegrass because he is looking for the best grazing sward he can produce
 - Silage is a necessary by product of the grazing season but grazing is the main aim
 - Modern diploids now have better sugar content and last longer than tetraploids
- A firm believer in reseeding because
 - Weed grass species always work their way into the pasture and they are much poorer for yield, quality and response to nitrogen applied
 - Also new grass varieties are always improving (on older varieties) and giving better yield, quality and response to nitrogen applied
- 7-year rotation of forage crops, whole crop (undersown), sheep grazed, then 4 years cattle grazing
- Grass is always king. Cattle are grouped by size, paddock grazed, starting at ~1200kg/acre in spring dropping to 800 or 1000kg/acre later in the season. Aim for an average daily liveweight gain of 1.5kg/head/day for the whole grazing season – so the DLWG in spring is much higher than that.
- Must be flexible to make it work. Rotation length shortens from 18 to 21 days in spring to 30 to 40 days in the final autumn rotation. The grass cover (or length) that we graze down to also varies from 3 or 4 cm in spring to 6 cm in summer and then right down in the final autumn rotation.
- Need to avoid the grass heading at all costs. Not that you get it right across the whole farm but that's when you get the real quality throughout the whole season. If the grass heads - game over
- Do my own version of a winter TMR in the field with baled silage, 25% Swedes and 75% Kale for the store cattle and Ad Lib whole crop silage with Fodder Beet for the finishing cattle at 48p/hd/day
- Plans for the future? Expand up not out – do more, produce more forage and grow more beef on the land we already have. Forage & livestock genetics, health and performance will all play a role.

OPPORTUNITIES / CHALLENGES

Emily Grant of Forrit Consultants introduced attendees to FARMAX, a cloud-based software package, developed as a monitoring and information tool for grassland farmers to improve production, profitability and sustainability through better informed decision making.

FARMAX – how does it work? :-

- Enter a whole lot of data on pasture growth, N applications, grazed & cropping areas and dates, supplementary feeds used, livestock numbers, mating dates, weaning %, growth rates and liveweights, housing dates, sales numbers and dates, deaths. It seems a lot at the start but after that it's a case of updating as you go along. If you don't have the data available, the system uses

standard data to fill any gaps. Over time the model will become more and more accurate for your farm as the system builds up true data year on year. Users get much better at understanding how it works and how best to use the information the model generates.

- An initial graph of farm grassland supply and livestock demand identifies how well the two work together, or don't, and where the best opportunity is to make better use of the grazing you have.
- Graphs help to identify pasture quality ie the proportion of green leaf, dead material and stem in the sward.
- Once the basics have been done the system can begin to compare scenarios, such as
 - what happens if you change calving or lambing dates?
 - Should we increase or decrease sheep or cattle numbers?
 - What happens if we introduce 150 red deer hinds?
 - How many B&B cattle can we graze to make best use of our available summer grazing?
- Financials (excluding support payments) are also added giving a full biological and financial model of the farm business. Figures can be produced on whole farm and enterprise levels and will give information on the financial implication of the different scenarios considered.
- Clonhie are doing a trial project to evaluate the value of this software for the remainder of the Monitor Farm project and we look forward to reporting on the progress at the remaining meetings.

ACTIONS FROM THIS MEETING

1. Continue with FARMAX
2. We are doing Open Farm Sunday on 9th June – all welcome

FACILITATOR CONTACT DETAILS: -

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

