

ABOUT NITHSDALE MONITOR FARM

Farm name	Clonhie Farm, Penpont, Thornhill, DG3 4NB
Meeting Number	10 – Grass Master Charlie Morgan
Meeting Date	Thursday 20th September 2018
Next Meeting	to be confirmed

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 total farmed area to 303ha (800ac) running from 100m to 300m above sea level in the Marrburn valley, in Nithsdale.

Sheep - 900 lambing ewes in 2017 + 240 ewe hogs [not lambed]. The main breeds are North Country Cheviots, Lleyn cross and Texel X Beltex. 130 Texel crosses lamb from early March inside, with the remaining 770 lambing outside in April. From 2018 all 900 ewes and half the hogs were lambed outside from 1st April

Cattle – a small herd of Luings is being established with the first calves being born in 2017. However, summer grazing cows and calves are taken in and store cattle are wintered in the sheds as well.

Red Deer – Deer fencing was completed and 60 red deer hinds introduced to Clonhie in February 2018. This enterprise is a joint venture with Buccleuch Estate. The plan is to increase breeding hind numbers to 200 in the first instance.

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.

About 35 attended the 10th meeting of the project to inspect the Clonhie reseed, an old pasture and silage fields at Glengar where there were many questions and plenty of discussions, led by Grass Master Charlie Morgan, on soils management, sward choices and grazing systems.



There's a pan here



This is healthy friable soil



Modern cocksfoot is a good choice to extend the season

KEY MESSAGES

- There may be challenges out there, but this is an exciting time to be a livestock farmer.
- Get soil conditions, pH, P & K levels right, proactively manage the soil biology, establish productive grass and forage swards and see the results when you get the grazing control optimised.
- Need to take control of grazing NOW in order to see the flock through to the spring with minimal feed or forage purchases.

ANDREW'S FARM UPDATE

- Re-seeds are both patchy having suffered from the drought conditions, we will see one of them later today.
- Did a small on farm trial on the effect of a generic mineral drench on the daily liveweight gain of finishing lambs which showed absolutely no difference between those drenched / not drenched.
- Fattening lambs aren't really performing the way we would like. Average of 170g/hd/day in the past 4 weeks [110g/hd/day since weaning] but would like it to be over 200g/hd/day throughout.
- Focusing on building grass covers and the winter feed budget as we are going to be tight for supplies through to spring.
- Have deer fenced another 24ha and are about to build the handling pens and do shed alterations for the young stock which will be housed over the winter.
- See pdf copy of farm update and grazing plans for further information

AREAS OF DISCUSSION

Field discussions with Charlie Morgan

Reseed field

- The Fyvie mixture reseed [with added chicory and plantain] in last winter's kale field was planned to be a grazing field for growing and finishing the young red deer. It is pretty patchy with a poor catch of grass, while the clover, plantain and chicory have fared a little better in the drought.
- There was some discussions as to the actual coverage [ranging from 40% to 80%]. Andrew had drilled in the same mixture at full rate the week before the meeting, which was thought to have been a bit high – half rate would probably have been enough.
- Including some of the modern Cocksfoot and Timothy varieties, which have excellent roots and good drought resistance would be good for a 'hard' field such as this. Cocksfoot is also good for extending the grazing season into the autumn, while Timothy grows earlier in the spring time.

- On digging a couple of holes to see what the soil was like we found a pan at about 3 to 4 inches deep, which surprised everyone as the field had been ploughed before the kale was sown. The crop roots had not penetrated the pan, which had obviously affected the establishment of the crop. Digging a couple of holes in May before sowing the new sward would have indicated that the discs needed to be set lower to break the pan and give the new sward a much better chance.

Field 13 old sward at Glengar - [see handout map]

- This was at least 30 years old. pH 5.7 – plan to apply ~5t/ha [2t/ac] of calcium lime to raise pH to around 6.1; P level is high & K level is normal; Mg very high [use calcium lime]. Growth rate recently has been 14kgDM/ha/day since I last measured 6 days ago.
- As this is a grazing field and no crops are being removed so could probably take a P & K holiday for a year or two with no detriment to DM/ha yields grown.
- A few worms were found in the sods dug and there was little trash build up on the soil surface, which can happen in older swards. Roots were going a reasonable depth, with no indication of any panning. This soil seems to be perfectly healthy but the biological activity going on in there is quite probably a fraction of what it could be. Paddock grazing this field would waken the soil up, increase biological activity within the soil, release extra nutrients and result in greatly increased production.
- Some rye grass and white clover were found which could form a good base for improving sward population through grazing control – without the need to plough and upset the already healthy soil. Slotting in some of the new modern varieties might help to improve the pasture performance, especially if some of the modern Timothy and Cocksfoot varieties are included. Timothy grows at 4oC [ryegrass and most other varieties begin to grow at a soil temperature of 5oC] giving an earlier bight for stock in springtime, where the modern varieties of cocksfoot are smaller, more nutritious and palatable than old varieties and grow later on into autumn to lengthen the grazing season.

Fields 10 & 12 – silage fields

- With the introduction of the deer Andrew is looking to increase the production from these fields and to cut silage from them.
- pH is 5.9 and 5.8 respectively so 5t/ha [2t/ac] of calcium lime is to be applied this autumn if / when conditions allow. P levels are high, K levels low and Mg levels very high for both fields. As these are to be silage fields there is a need to ensure K levels are replenished while P levels are probably high enough for the time being. Grass growth rate over the last 6 days has been 59kgDM/ha/day.
- There isn't a huge amount of clover in these swards but that would change with the right cutting and grazing management system in place.

OPPORTUNITIES / CHALLENGES

Exciting times for Livestock producers

After lunch Charlie Morgan talked about the opportunities that these management systems offer to livestock producers – please see the PDF of his presentation. The main points included:-

- Understanding and managing the physical, chemical and biological aspects of your soil is key to future success in livestock production. Improvements in soil health increase biological activity within the soil and lead to improved sward productivity, at relatively little cost
- Improved soils management encourages the growth of productive species of grass and clover. When rotational grazing is added productive species [ryegrasses & legumes] out compete and out perform poorer species [e.g. bents, Yorkshire fog & meadow grass] raising sward production.
- Ryegrass and legumes are our cheapest feed resource [~6p/kgDM compared to ~23p/kgDM for concentrate feeds purchased]. We need to grow, manage and utilise them more efficiently. Don't waste cheap feed and replace it with expensive purchases
- With improved grazing management [rotational grazing] grazing season and grazed days per hectare over a growing season can be greatly increased [e.g. from 2743 days/ha on a set stocked system to 3471 days/ha on rotational grazing – an increase of 728 days/ha/year]
- Farmers are inclined to focus on livestock breeds and genetics, but without good management of soils, nutrients and grazing utilisation, as discussed above, you will never reap the true potential available to your business.

[THE NEXT MEETING - date and topics to be confirmed](#)



FACILITATOR CONTACT DETAILS

Judith Hutchison	Email: judith.agridigm@icloud.com ;	Tel: 07718 919 055
Rhidian Jones	Email: rjlivestocksystems@btinternet.com ;	Tel: 07889 182 364
Josie Mallinson	Email: josie@jkmbusinessservices.co.uk ;	Tel: 07824 629 007