

ABOUT SHETLAND MONITOR FARM

Farm name	Bigton Farm, Bigton, Shetland, ZE2 9JA
Meeting Number	06 – Soil Management
Meeting Date	Saturday 2nd December 2017
Next Meeting	Sunday 14th January 2018/Monday 15th January 2018

Kirsty and Aimee Budge farm Bigton farm on the south west of the Shetland mainland.

Land: Two units are run together, covering 305 ha of in by and rough grazing.

Crops: Around 25 ha of spring barley is grown, 4ha of forage rape and about 40ha of silage cut.

Cattle: 72 Shorthorn x Saler cows producing Saler or Charolais x calves which are sold store or finished.

Sheep: 240 Shetland x Cheviot breeding ewes which are put to a Suffolk tup. Replacements are bought in.

Management Group:

Jamie Leslie (Chairman): Graham Fraser, Kirsty Budge, Aimee Budge, Lauraine Manson, Hilary Burgess, Eric Graham, Jim Tait, John Abernethy, Johnina Henderson, John Sandison, Aaron Sinclair, Ronnie Eunson and Matthew Westmoreland

- 42 farmers and crofters came along to the 6th Shetland MF meeting, joined by Bill Crooks, SAC and Paul Harvey and Sue White, Shetland Amenity Trust.
- Kirsty started the meeting with an update on winter feeding and pre-tupping ewe management
- Bill Crooks gave a talk on soil health.
- Paul Harvey presented the findings from the Environmental Audit, and Sue White guided the agri-environment exercise.



KEY MESSAGES

- Test your soil – do the basics first
- Make sure pH, P, K and Mg are on target
- Protect the soil you have – a good quality soil is one that is protected from erosion and damage from compaction by good management
- There is lots of potential for agri-environment management at Bigton
- Lamb finishing options need to be evaluated

FARMERS UPDATE

- Kirsty gave an update on what had been happening on Bigton Farm since the previous meeting.
- Kirsty went over her winter feeding rations for the cattle. The store calves are eating 21kg/head/day of silage and 2kg/head/day of barley. The Charolais calves are exceeding their DLWG target and gaining 1.25kg/day. This is surprising due to the low protein levels in the silage and no protein is being added to their diet this year as a trial to test this ration. Smaller calves will be kept separately to ensure they can gain weight and not be bullied. In calf heifers are eating ad-lib wrapped straw, along with 20kg per head of silage.
- The suckler cows are still outside, on sandy ground, eating grass. They will be fed silage once the grass decreases.
- Kirsty spoke about the plans for increasing suckler cow numbers. Between the two units, there is enough space to keep 100 cows inside.
- Calving would have to be staggered in order to go above 100 and financial viability needs to be confirmed. Ewes have been condition scored into groups for appropriate grazing before tupping.

AREAS OF DISCUSSION

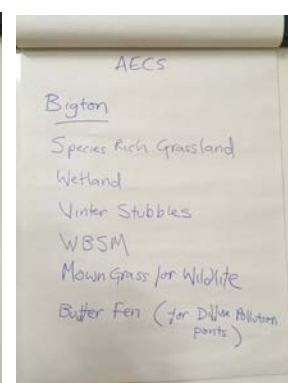
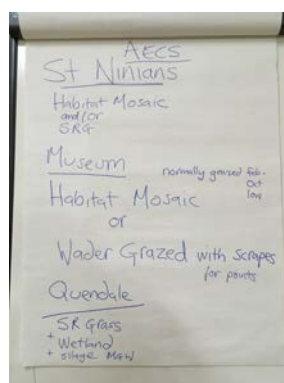
Soil Health - Bill Crooks

- Bill emphasised the length of time it takes for the organic top soil to be created and how quickly this can be eroded through poor management.
- He discussed the different types of organic fractions that make up our soils and how management practices impact them.
- Discussed that soil quality means different things depending on what is expected or wanted from the soil.
- The pros and cons of different types of liming materials was covered.
- Soil analysis from a range of farms was reviewed and acidity management and potash usage stood out as factors that may be limiting production.
- Out in the “Manson park”, Bill dug a hole and found a good depth of mineral top soil, which was full of earthworms, indicating the healthy soil management at Bigton. The importance of good drainage was discussed in order to raise the soil temperature.
- The buried cotton underwear demonstrated the sheer power of the soil to degrade organic material. At the last meeting, 5 local farmers volunteered to bury underpants. These were dug up and brought along to the meeting along with samples of the soil from these fields. There was a huge variety in the levels of degradation of material.



Environment audit and AECS - Paul Harvey and Sue White

- Paul Harvey and Sue White of the Shetland Amenity Trust carried out an environmental audit throughout the summer. They mapped the different habitats and noted key indicator species. Some of the plants and birds are rare or endangered and Paul was encouraged by the populations found across the units. St Ninians Isle has areas of species rich grassland and coastal heath and grassland. At Toab, there was a mosaic of different habitats including wetlands, fens and short grassland.
- In the afternoon, the community group carried out an exercise to identify possible AECs options.
- At Bigton, there were areas suitable for bird friendly cutting of silage and opportunities to sow out crops for wild birds. The Mails (museum) had areas suitable for wader options and/or habitat mosaic, while at Quendale there were possibilities for Species Rich Grassland, Wetland and Mown Grassland for Wildlife, and St Ninians Isle could be also be considered for Species Rich Grassland and/or Habitat Mosaic.



ACTIONS FROM MEETING

- Kirsty and Aimee are going to discuss AECS options and apply.
- Develop a soil testing programme to monitor potash levels.
- Test the home produced manure for levels of P and K.
- Determine cost benefit and trial different concentrate feeds for finishing lambs.

FACILITATOR CONTACT DETAILS

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