



# FARMER LED, FARMER DRIVEN

## DEESIDE

2nd Meeting Report  
17th June 2023



# MEETING REPORT

## THE RIGHT BEASTS FOR THE RIGHT FARM

Over **60** members of the farming community attended the Summer Meet, from Deeside, Donside and beyond.

Discussions and debate were the order of the day at four stations held at Duncan's Upper Ingliston farm at Inverurie:

- **Grass management** with Michael Blanche
- **Crop establishment** by James Hardie, George Duncan Agri Solutions
- **Selecting the right bull for your business** led by Rachael Robertson, Woodside Vets
- **Discussion on breeding stock**, with Duncan Morrison

## FARM FACTS

Partners: Duncan and Claire Morrison

- **558ac** over **3** units
- **220** sucklers made up of **120** commercial and pedigree Aberdeen Angus cows and a leased herd of **100** Stabiliser cows.
- Most **Stabiliser** bull calves are finished
- **Breeding heifers** are sold at **12-14** months, the rest sold as stores.
- **37ac** of arable silage and **20ac** of kale.



Duncan and Claire Morrison



The meeting begins

## Multi Species Swards (MSS)

Duncan is a big fan of multi-species swards which tend to comprise of perennial ryegrass, a bit of timothy, red clover, white clover, chicory and plantain. Red clover especially has been a revelation as far as Duncan is concerned. He likes having fields where he can accelerate animal performance.

### Suggestions

Get the right system. Duncan's is:

Year 1 - deferred grass and bales

Year 2 - kale

Year 3 - arable silage mix undersown with a multi-species seed mixture, to reduce weed ingress.

### MSS need

1) grazed then rested (i.e. rotationally grazed)

2) longer rest periods than a normal sward (minimum 25 days and ideally greater than 30 days) and

3) not overgrazed –go down to a minimum of 6cm rather than 4cm.

The prize of getting it right can be summarised from Irish work (UCD/Germinal/Teagasc):

Increase/Decrease	% change over pure ryegrass sward	Variable
↻	60%	Fertiliser
↶	12%	Yield*
↷	20%	Animal performance
↻	50%	Worming treatments in lambs

\*Yield is also more even through the season and a greater differential will tend to occur in very dry conditions



## Measuring grass

Duncan uses Farmax to predict efficient use of pasture through the season.

### Suggestions

Measure grass regularly: balance stock demands; save cost and increase production from forage.

Pasture measurement works best in rotational grazing systems where you measure kilograms of dry matter. You can calculate:

- dry matter on farm and how much each field grows,
- your pasture's growth rate
- what the stock need

The figures help to refine the craft of the grazier – getting rotation lengths right, pasture quality optimal and animal performance motoring from the cheapest resource we have.

## Crop Establishment

With the lack of rain a key talking point at the meeting, visitors discussed the impact on farm's kale crops with James Hardie from George Duncan Agri Solutions.

Duncan is growing wholecrop barley and peas undersown with grass which will be cut, baled and fed through winter.

## Duncan's practice

- Arable silage is sown in the last week of May.
- Undersown with a grass/multi species mixture.
- Kale at Upper Ingliston was sown at the same time.
- Kale was to be sown at Meikle Maldron and Womblehill later in June once silage work was done.
- Duncan has bought an old set of heavy discs to rip up old grass and cultivate kale stubble/deferred grazing aftermath.

Kale will lie dormant in the soil, if conditions are dry, which has happened at Upper Ingliston. Seeds can survive and grow after rain, but face competition from weeds.

- Dry conditions are evident at Upper Ingliston. Over 100 silage bales await for winter feeding.





## Selecting the right bull for your business

Where to begin looking at a good bull?

### Suggestions

Check for good eyes, healthy and correct teeth and muscular/skeletal form.

***Legs and feet issues lead to premature culling.***

A scrotum should be a pendulum with not too much fat insulating testicles.

***Scrotal fat influences semen quality.***

Get a guarantee of BVD, Johnes and TB status and possibly IBR and Leptospirosis.

***Check the bull's health status***

### Looking after your bull

A bull's rumen takes 6-8 weeks to convert to a change of diet from a pre-sale concentrate to grass or forage based diet.

***Give the bull time and buy early.***

Bulls can lose significant body condition after purchase.

***Rapid loss risks laminitis and culling.***

Don't have your new bull in a falling condition when you're putting it out for the first time.

***It can negatively affect semen production***

Heavy bulls on a new diet can lead to stress on feet, legs and hips.

***Reduce weight in a controlled, gradual manner***

### Semen testing

Once home, on the right diet and exercised, carry out a semen test.

Scrotal circumference is a predictor of the bull's fertility and semen production.

***A bull with larger scrotal size produces more fertile daughters.***

Check the bull's scrotum and sheath for free movement, lumps, infection and pain.

***These can seriously affect performance.***

A vet will carry out a rectal exam for accessory sex glands, in preparation for electrical stimulation of the bull which leads to ejaculation.

***The vet studies semen under the microscope for movement, shape and quality.***

Coiled sperm tails are linked to stress and thermal regulation

***Has your bull had a previous high temperature from an infection?***

It takes 61 days to make sperm.

***A solution takes at least this length of time!***

Semen testing doesn't test libido or the skill needed to mate.

***This is the stockperson's role to notice!***

**Duncan sees semen testing as an insurance policy ahead of the breeding season.**

# NEXT STEPS

Over the next few months, the Deeside Monitor Farm project will be:

- Beginning benchmarking with other livestock producers.
- Looking in depth at Meikle Maldron's soils.
- Using Farmax software to decide optimal grazing.
- Planning for the Winter Open meeting!



Farm businesses can still sign up to be part of the **Management Group**. Participants should be willing to supply their own farm data, information, and ideas.

This should lead to change and better resilience for the Monitor Farmer and themselves. Individuals can also join the wider **Community Group** to keep in touch with the project and receive event invites.

**To find out more or to sign up - contact Regional Adviser Peter Beattie**  
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**Update:** The Management Group met in May to hear **SAC-**

**Consulting** summarise **Duncan's Integrated Land Management Plan (ILMP)**.

The IMLP has led on to Duncan taking up the option through two funded Specialist Plan.

Karen Stewart, SAC, investigated nutrition and costings across all Duncan's stock classes with a focus on bull beef, as its future is up for debate. Analysis of Duncan's figures helped him decide to reduce the number of bull beef going forward in favour of grass finishing steers at 18 months.

Poppy Frater, SRUC is working with Duncan to develop Farmax for his grazing management.

**SoilEssentials Ltd** completed their sampling of Meikle Maldron and Upper Ingliston with SRUC carrying out the analysis. The results helped Duncan to target lime applications where most required and gave a clearer picture of the status of phosphate and potash.

As part of the ongoing Monitor Farm programme, Duncan was visited by SRUC animal behaviour and welfare expert Simon Turner to discuss livestock handling systems and cattle movement. Light and shade, curved races and cheap-to-attach sheeting can encourage cattle to go in the desired direction!



# MONITOR FARM Scotland

To find out more or to sign up, please contact:

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Initiative supported by:



**Scottish Government**  
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