



Meeting kindly sponsored by



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SEED MERCHANTS

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EAST LoTHIAN

2nd Meeting Report
5th July 2023



Farming from above and below

Around 40 members of the farming community attended the meeting.

The afternoon was full of discussion looking at:

- **This year's crops at Castleton**
- **Drones and their application**
- **Funding opportunities**

David Aglen the manager at Balbirnie Home Farms in Fife came along and joined Stuart McNicol to do a joint station.

Soil Compaction

After overwintering sheep on the farm Stuart has noticed a lot of soil compaction this year. David suggested tackling the issue by shepherding the sheep more intensively, so they mob graze and move on quicker, reducing the risk of repeated poaching and compaction.



FARM FACTS

- **164** hectares total
- **110** of Cereals
- **20** of other crops
- **16** of potatoes
- **10** of permanent pasture
- **8** of woodland and tracks

Weeds

Cover cropping is an important part of the system at Castleton, which is based round a strip till system using a Bednar drill.

While crops had established well despite a late spring, weeds, particularly brome, are an issue this year, and have caused a significant dent in the farm budget.

Stuart is going to trial a mechanical weeder as part of a blended approach to control and hopes this will help reduce costs.



A **PÖTTINGER** mechanical weeder in action at the Banff and Buchan Monitor Farm earlier in the summer.

Drone Ag- drones and their application

Drone Ag came along to give us an overview of their Skippy Scout programme.

The aim of the company is to allow for more productive farming through practical, hassle-free drone automation.

By using their Skippy Scout system, you can inspect your crop 10x faster than walking. It will then produce automated reports on % cover, weeds and damage within minutes.



- Emergence

Count plants per square meter. Compare to seed rates and yield.

- Tillering

Monitor Early Growth

Trends getting better worse?

- Mid-Growth GAI

Monitor crop variability

Use GAI for Vari N

- Unhealthy Crop

Monitor disease pressure

- Ear Progression

Monitor Ear Emergence through to Ripening



We also discussed how drones could, in future, spot spray issues in crops, reducing chemical use and compaction issues. All issues Stuart is interested in reducing at Castleton.



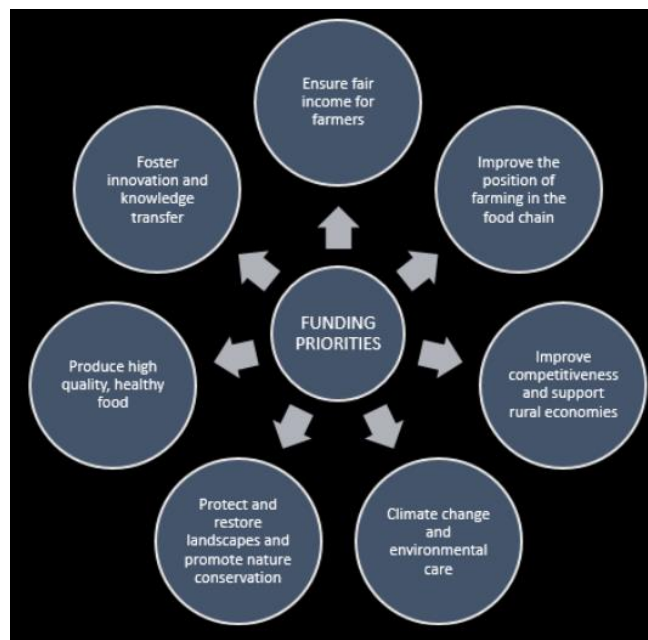
Example of the skippy scout interactive farm overview

Funding opportunities

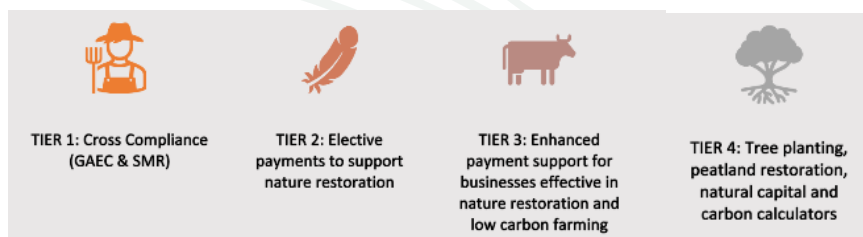
Alexander Pirie from SAC came along to discuss the wide range of funding opportunities available.

He explained that while the current policy would continue until 2025, this would then change to incorporate biodiversity auditing. However, the current framework will remain until then with any changes coming in gradually.

This approach will be about the overall outcome for nature, rather than being prescriptive about what is done.



Targets for the new agricultural bill

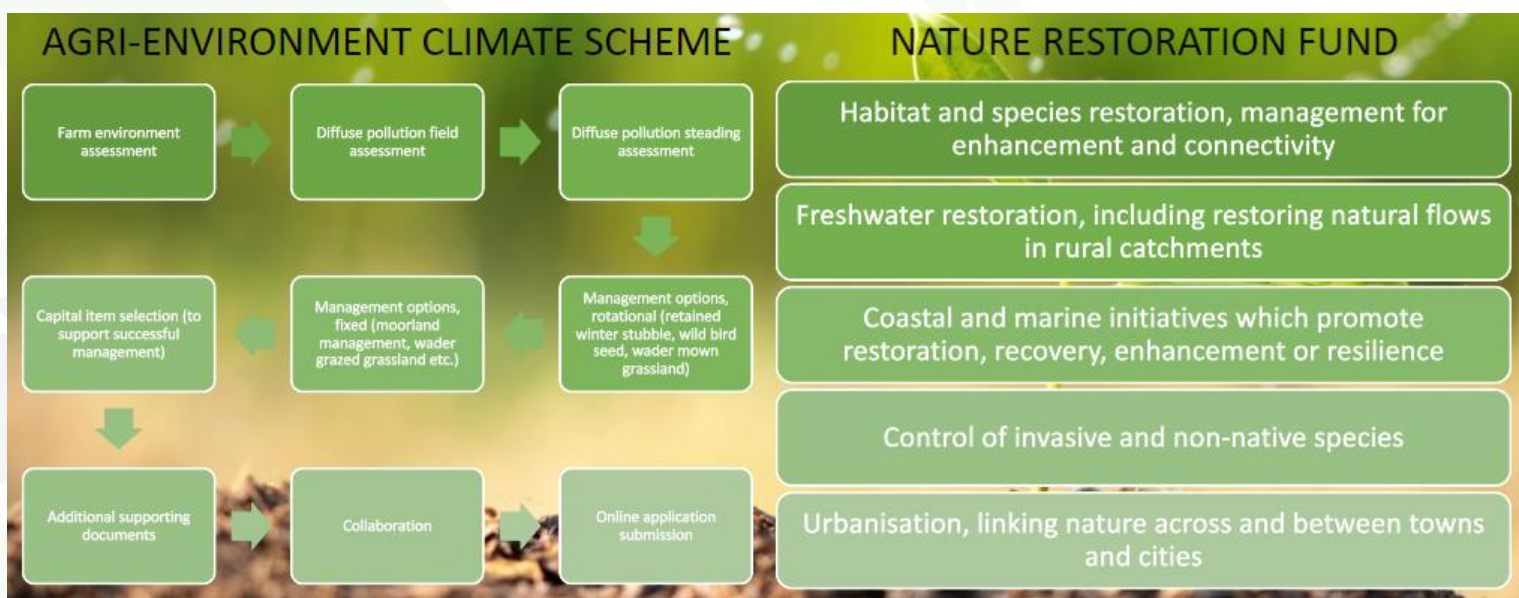


The 4 Tiers of funding



Alex gave an overview of both the **Agri-Environment Climate Scheme** (AECS) and highlighted that there will be another round of funding for this.

Also introduced newer Nature **Restoration Fund** (NRF) which provides funding to carry out limited but high nature value work.



Example of an AECS funding process

Funding opportunities with the NRF



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