



FARMER LED, FARMER DRIVEN

STIRLINGSHIRE

Summer Open Meeting Report
31 July 2026



MEETING REPORT

Introduction and Grassland

Around **40** members of the farming community attended the meeting.

As the last summer meeting of the programme, we looked at the impact of the grass re-seeding and liming programme, cattle and sheep figures and the aims and direction of travel for Duncan family's business.

At the Stirling Monitor Farm meeting, discussion focused on the importance of **soil fertility and grassland management** in improving livestock productivity and reducing input costs. Grass was highlighted as the key driver of performance in both sheep and cattle systems, with **soil pH** identified as a major factor influencing grass growth, clover establishment and nutrient efficiency.

Over the past four years, approximately **539 tonnes of lime** have been applied across the farm, representing an investment of around **£21,000**. This has helped raise **soil pH** levels and improve the productivity of reseeded fields. Farmer and Adviser Graham Lofthouse noted that maintaining pH **above 6.0**, and ideally around 6.4 following reseeded, is essential for high-performing perennial ryegrass and clover swards.

The benefits of reseeded were evident, with one previously unproductive field now supporting significantly higher stocking rates and producing a silage crop. Estimated dry matter output has **nearly doubled** compared with the previous sward.

The group also discussed clover management, recognising its potential to supply up to **100kg of nitrogen per hectare** annually. While weed control remains a challenge, particularly where dock populations are high, maintaining good soil fertility, careful grazing management and targeted reseeded strategies were identified as key to encouraging **clover persistence** and maximising long-term grassland performance.

"Grass really dictates what the cost of production is going to be for a businesses."

Graham Lofthouse



Taming The Beast!

Managing Improved Grassland

Improving grass productivity and reducing cost is hugely beneficial to any business but **management** of the crop becomes key to fully utilise it's potential.

'When you haven't got it it's easy to manage and it rarely gets out of control'

We can fill gaps with concentrate, bought in forage or nitrogen but **these carry cost.**

Know how much grass you want or need to grow then **target the most productive fields.**

<u>Causes of High Growth</u>	<u>Control measures</u>
Optimum Ph (6.2-6.5)	Match stocking level to average grass supply
Moisture	High quality conserved forage replaces concentrates
Productive Grasses	Match nutrient applications to required yield
Heading date	Set stock through high growth but shut off all excess as baleage/hay/cow silage
High Growth rates Mid season (May to July)	Buy in trading stock to consume excess (think about health status before you do)
Fertiliser applications	Leave oldest grass as standing hay (graze late summer, cows)
Stocking levels	Cut and graze the youngest grasses to stop heading and keep digestibility and energy high

Liming Pays Off

Soil pH **improvements** across the farm demonstrate the impact of the liming programme. Fields that were previously testing as low as pH 4.9 to 5.3 **have been lifted** into the target range, with **many** now **achieving pH 5.9 to 6.2**. This improvement is helping to support more **productive** grass and clover swards, increasing grazing capacity and improving overall **forage** production.

Field	2023	Lime/t/ha	2024 Lime/t/ha	2025	2025 crop	2025 Lime/t/ha	2026	2026	Current Crop
Below Car Park	5								
Below Davie Youngs	5								
Below Halls	5.5						5.9		
Below House	6.2						6.1		
Below Rooksbys	5.3	5		5.9	Forage crop	5'	6.2	2.5	Reseed 26
Bowl Field	5.3		3.7				5.9		
Bulls Field	5.1								
Car Park	4.9								
Facing Archies	5.7	5 variable		6.2			5.9	2.5	Forage Crop26
Facing Gaidrew	5								
Golf Course Field						5	5.4		
In Front of House	5.3						5.2	5	
John Craigs	5.1		5	5.5	Reseed grass	5	5.9		
Lower Mackenzies	5.7						5.8		
Mums Field	5.1		5	5.3		5	5.3		
Ridge							5.6		
Top John Craigs	5.2		3.7	5.7			5.5	5	Reseed 26
Upper Mackenzies	5.4						5.5		
Whitsons	5.9						5.9		
Willie Blacks	5.4	5		5.9		3.7	6.1		
Crow Hill	5.1								
Hough Bislands	5								
Hough House End	5								
Lambing Field	5.3		3.7				5.4	5	
Middle Dalnair	5.1								
Steep Field	5								
Top Dalnair	5.7		3.7				5.9		

Calf and Lamb Outputs

STIRLINGSHIRE MONITOR FARM - JULY 2026

Silage Quality

Winter feeding represents a significant portion of costs for beef and sheep production systems. Feed is fairly consistently the biggest variable cost on most beef and sheep farms. It is also a key driver of animal performance. Making quality silage can give you flexibility in winter feeding options, and help keep feed costs under control, including the costs associated with feeding out.

Pit silage analysis	2022	2023	2024	2025
Dry Matter %	21.0%	27.1%	22.0%	21.3%
ME (MJ/kgDM)	10.0	10.2	10.7	10.9
Crude Protein (%)	11.2%	11.9%	17.5%	17.6%
NDF %	-	55.2%	56.6%	56.6%
Barley required @£190/t	£100.50*	£85.50*	£57.00	£28.50
Beef nuts required @£310/t	£139.50	£117.00	£81.00	£34.50

*CP likely to be limiting

Silage quality Target: DM: 28-35% ME: 10.8MJ+
NDF: <50% CP: 13-15%

- increasing the quality of the silage means less supplementary feed is required to achieve desired growth rates. Data here for 300kg young stock, growing at 0.85Kg/head/day. Comparing 2022 analysis with 2025, there's a saving of over £100/head on purchased beef nuts (over 150 days).

Selling store calves: When to sell? comparing different sale dates and weights

Form the same cohort, 20 Charolais cross steers were sold at weaning in November 2025, with 14 heifers housed from weaning until sale at end of February 2026, approx 10 weeks later.

All calves had been creep fed ahead of weaning. At housing, the heifers went onto a diet of ad-lib silage, plus approx. 2kgs/head/day beef nuts.

Comparing November or February sale dates	Steers (sold Nov 25)	Heifers (sold Feb 26)
Av weaning weight Kgs	339	301
Av DLWG birth -> sale (steers) Nov 25	1.36	
Av DLWG birth -> weaning (heifers)	-	1.25
Av DLWG birth-> sale (heifers) 28 Feb 26	-	1.1
Average sale weight (heifers)		364.6
Av sale price £/head	£1,617.50	£1607.86
Av sale price p/kg	£4.81	£4.43
Average age at sale - days	30w 5d	41w 2d
Average gain from weaning to sale kgs		63.7Kgs
Av value gain £/head/day, without costs	£7.63	£5.57

Calf and Lamb Outputs cont.

Key points

- Both heifers and steers grew well to weaning - particularly the steers
- Steers weaned an average of 38Kgs heavier than heifers
- Steers sold well - average price £4.81/kg - £1,617.50/head
- Steers average value gain from birth was £7.63/day, without costs
- Heifers were sold ~10 weeks later, having gained an average of 63.7Kgs/hd (0.91kgs/hd/day)
- Heifers average price at sale was £4.43/kg - £1607.86 per head
- Heifers average value per day gain from birth was £5.57/day, without costs.
- If assume heifers traded at 10p/kg less than steers in November (based roughly on sale reports from that day), their average sale price would have been ~£1,417.71. That's £190.15 less than their actual sale price in February. If price difference had been 20p/kg back in November, they would have been worth £220.25 less than they were in February
- Feed costs alone (if assume 2kgs/hd/day @ £332/tonne for 70days) will have been £46.48/head, plus the silage, housing, fuel and labour costs

Sheep - Increase productivity, get lambs away quicker

The table below summarises some sheep performance from both the Lands of Drumhead and Blairfad flocks.

LAMB CROP	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
Total ewes scanned	1041	1118	1112	994	1042
Barren	6%	7%	15%	5%	4%
Scanning % - Lands of Drumhead	172%	187%	168%	168%	176%
Scanning % - Blairfad		150%	150%	168%	162%
Total Lambs scanned	1790	1878	1692	1676	1769
Lamb Count @ 1st Dose	1579*	1665*	1475	1546	1623
Losses to 1st dose	11.8%	11.3%	12.8%	7.7%	8.3%
Lamb Count @ weaning/sale	1559	1645	1461	1508	
Total losses scanning to sale	12.91%	12.41%	13.65%	10.02%	
% sold fat	31.0%	25.7%	23.9%	31.5%	
% sold store	49.6%	53.3%	52.1%	45.9%	
% retained	19.4%	21.0%	24.0%	22.6%	

*estimate

Key points

- 2023 sales had the highest proportion lambs sold store
- 2024 scanning had a high barren rate (15%) - the last straw for the Blackies at Blairfad, coupled with highest losses to sale (13.65%) plus the highest % retained ewe lambs.
- 2025 - significantly lower lamb losses (weather?) coupled with the highest % lambs sold fat. No supplementary feed given.
- 2026 currently has 44 more lambs on the ground vs. 2022, for similar number of ewes. This is due to lower barren rate, and lower losses (6% vs. 4% and 11.8% vs. 8.3%). If assume value of £130/head, worth £5,720 (without costs).

Keep, Start, Stop!



The discussion highlighted several strengths within the business that should be maintained. These included continued **investment in soil fertility** through liming and reseedling, maintaining high-quality livestock, testing silage, and benefiting from a diverse mix of enterprises. There was also recognition of **strong teamwork** across the family and staff, alongside positive progress in sheep and cattle management decisions.

Key opportunities identified for future development centred on improving **profitability and efficiency**. Priorities included producing **higher-quality silage**, measuring and managing grass more effectively, **tightening the calving pattern**, increasing the proportion of **lambs sold store**, improving cost awareness, **strengthening weed control**, and ensuring family members are appropriately rewarded for their contribution to the business.

A stronger focus on understanding **profit drivers** and making decisions based on business performance was also highlighted.

Areas identified for reduction or cessation included retaining store cattle over winter, maintaining the current calving pattern, growing forage crops that do not demonstrate adequate benefit, changing sheep breeds frequently, and undertaking activities that do not generate a positive financial return.

Participants also recognised the importance of **using available data** with greater **confidence** when making management decisions and continuing to prioritise **soil health and fertility**.

The evening was rounded off with a delicious barbeque and thank you to the Duncan Family, advisers Emily Grant and Graham Lofthouse, Management Group and everyone who came along.





**MONITOR
FARM**
Scotland

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