Calum with Euan

MONITOR FARMS

Malcolm and Calum Smith of Auchernack Farm began their Monitor Farm journey in 2022. After their first year, it became apparent that being a Monitor Farm would benefit their family business. Valuable information led them to adapt their daily operations, making them more efficient.

As part of the support for the Monitor Farm, Euan Campbell worked closely with Malcolm and Calum to formulate mixtures for grass plots based on their existing grazing leys, with an emphasis on diverse species. The mixtures chosen were Mingary, Hermitage, Fyvie with red clover & herbs and Dundas.

The plots were sown after swedes in spring 2024, and despite inclement weather, they established well, which is a credit to the Smith family's attention to detail and focus on soil health. At establishment, the field was given 250kg/ha of treble 16 to ensure suitable P and K were available to the seeds.

Monitor Farm Scotland organised the summer meeting at Auchernack Farm on 18th September 2024. With excellent attendance and favourable weather, the meeting was a pleasure to be a part of. Various questions and opinions were shared at the grass demo plots, leaving many with new ideas.

The cattle grazed the plots on Auchernack as there are no sheep and it was interesting to see what plots were preferred. The palatability of the more diverse swards was very noticeable and contributed to making the cattle content.

Following the meeting in September, the plots bounced back, and the multispecies appeared to have coped well with their first year of grazing.

Wintering lambs are now having the final grazing of these plots, and it will be interesting to see how they come through the winter. The next stage is to examine persistency and assess the soil structure beneath each plot.

Another two Watson Seeds customers are part of the Monitor Farm Scotland initiative: Richard McCornick of Barnbackle Farm in Dumfries and Craig Archibald of Craigens Farm on Islay.

Richard McCornick, pictured below, is striving to reduce feed costs for his suckler cows and sheep flock. At Barnbackle, Richard has sown our Kale 2 mixture for overwintering pregnant ewes and Caledonian kale for his spring calving cows. Arable silage undersown with Duart plus red clover is used to produce high yielding, high-protein silage for his young stock.

Craig Archibald and his family host the first Monitor Farm on the island of Islay. The unique challenges of farming there are well documented. It is not just the cattle and sheep that enjoy the lush, sweet pastures of Craigens, but also an enormous number of geese during the winter and spring. We established a grass variety trial with 16 plots with Craig back in 2018 to identify which material best tolerated this challenging situation. Pat and Andy assisted with one of the Monitor Farm meetings held to discuss variety and mixture selection for Islay, particularly Craigens. A range of agri-environmental mixtures has also been sown as part of another platform for discussion.

Pat and Craig