



News release

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For immediate use

North east crop plans and profitability discussed at Banff and Buchan Monitor Farm

Crop nutrition plans and profitability came under scrutiny at the latest meeting of the [Banff and Buchan Monitor Farm](#), where Scottish Agronomy's Zach Reilly and Donald Paterson led a crop walk across the farm and discussed its arable performance.

Farmers attending the meeting at Sauchentree, New Aberdour, heard how the crop rotation had changed when Monitor Farmer Bruce Irvine had moved from being organic to conventional farming; last year the farm grew winter wheat for the first time, and he has introduced winter field beans this year.

"I've found wheat has to yield really well to make money as the inputs all add up. It also seemed to be really affected by last year's late drilling and the wet weather," Bruce told visitors.

Zach said that choosing to grow the variety Insitor this year was a good start. It was the top yielder in trials and had good Septoria resistance; its susceptibility to yellow rust was less likely to be an issue in north east Scotland than in coastal Fife, Angus and East Lothian.

Having picked a high yielding variety, Bruce should now be focusing on managing the things which are within his control, he said. "Crop establishment is a vital component to building a strong root system, which is the foundation to yield. The crop is growing now, and it's ready for the first application of spring nitrogen."

While wheat input costs can be high, Zach said farmers often didn't make the most of nutrients in manure, especially when it was freely available on mixed farms such as Sauchentree. "It is worth checking the analysis of all organic manures – people will often know this for poultry manure but still undervalue farmyard manure. It's often just put out on the field closest to the steading but think about where you put it as it can supply all the phosphate and potash you need on winter crops. For Bruce, utilising it effectively could help cut more than £200/ha of costs."

The first crop of winter beans at Sauchentree – still an unusual crop in the north east – also provoked discussion, mainly due to its low gross output. Bruce made the decision to try beans when the soya price was high as they are a good source of home-grown protein for livestock feed, however soya prices have subsequently fallen to more manageable levels.

Visitors could see the beans had some tip burn due to frost, but crucially, Bruce had managed to drill the crop deep enough to avoid winter kill. He said: "I was surprised at how deep they needed to be drilled, at about 4-5in. The aim is not to have too much plant above

the ground when it is frosty and to have the plants deep enough to keep them away from crows - we are lucky as we are very close to the coast so we don't often have severe frost.

"I think the yield will only be about 1.8-2t/acre, so the gross margin will be low at about £200/acre. This might be the first and last year of winter beans at Sauchentree as a result – but I'm surprised at how deep the roots are already, and I think there will be a gain from this and the nitrogen fixing from the beans for the following crop. The gain might not be enough though," said Bruce.

Zach said that while more Scottish farmers were growing winter beans, they were a challenge because of the low gross output. "For beans to really take off as a crop, we need the market to gain critical mass and for feed mills to switch away from soya towards home grown proteins."

About the Banff and Buchan Monitor Farm:

Sauchentree Farm, at New Aberdour, on the north-east coast of Scotland, is run by Bruce Irvine in partnership with his mother. Help at lambing comes from his art-lecturer wife, sister and brother-in-law and, their two daughters are starting to get involved in the farm.

In total, Bruce farms 650ac with cereals, sheep and cattle. Bruce believes the three enterprises are as important as each other, with livestock providing fertility for the arable side. Bruce markets their lamb and beef through Woodhead Bros, Turriff and ANM at Thainstone and enjoys competing with neighbouring farms on yield and lambing percentage.

The family has been at Sauchentree for more than 200 years.

Ends.

Photo captions:

- 1. Zach Reilly showing how far down winter bean roots have grown at Sauchentree.*
- 2. The Banff and Buchan Monitor Farm crop walk looked at all the crops on Bruce Irvine's farm.*

Notes to editors:

About Monitor Farm Scotland:

- The Monitor Farm Scotland programme is managed by Quality Meat Scotland with support from AHDB.
- The programme is fully funded by the Scottish Government Knowledge Transfer Innovation Fund.
- The nine farms chosen to take part in this four-year programme reflect the diverse tapestry of livestock and mixed farming across Scotland.
- The aim of the programme is to help to farms reach full economic, social, and environmental sustainability by optimising production.
- The programme is farmer led and farmer driven with support from specialists and experts to assess farm performance, explore opportunities, and develop solutions to the challenges faced.
- Each Monitor Farm will be steered by a management group of 10 to 12 farming businesses with support from the local community group.

- The learnings and the example set by Monitor farms aims to benefit farmers across the whole of Scotland.
- The programme is managed by an in-house delivery team, who are funded through the programme and managed by QMS.
- For more information visit: <https://www.monitorfarms.co.uk/>

About QMS:

Quality Meat Scotland (QMS) is the public body which helps Scotland's £2.8 billion red meat sector maximise its positive role in our wealth, health and environment. This includes supporting productivity and profitability, sustainability and integrity, as well as around 50,000 jobs across the red meat supply chain including in some of our most rural areas.

90% of Scotland's cattle, sheep and pig livestock farmed for red meat are part of our internationally recognised and approved [assurance schemes](#), under the Scotch Beef UK geographical indicator (UKGI), Scotch Lamb UKGI and Specially Selected Pork brands. They give people at home and overseas the legal guarantee that the meat they buy has come from animals that have spent their whole lives being raised to the highest of standards.

The suite of assurance schemes extends across the supply chain including feed, haulage, auction-markets and processing. Together the six livestock and non-livestock schemes make sure Scotland's red meat is among the world's best for quality, animal welfare standards, production and traceability.

We are evidence-informed and work closely with partners across the supply chain to [track developments](#) in the beef, lamb and pork markets, sharing latest market prices, market developments and commentary with industry.

QMS also:

- runs major marketing and advertising campaigns to promote the brands and drive demand
- supports product development and innovation for profitable supply chains
- works on projects which support environmentally friendly practice for a sustainable sector that plays a key part in protecting our planet
- educates young and aspiring people across classrooms, sports clubs and communities in Scotland on the health benefits of red meat and career opportunities in the sector
- Please note that the use of the word 'Scotch' in the Scotch Beef and Scotch Lamb brands is correct and should not be substituted for an alternative such as Scots or Scottish. The history of the use of the word Scotch in this way traces back to the 18th century.

Useful info

- [QMS 5-year Strategy to 2028](#)
- [Red Meat Industry Profile 2024](#) – for key statistics across the red meat supply chain
- [QMS website](#)
- [QMS social media - Facebook / Twitter / LinkedIn](#)
- [QMS Podcast](#)