



FARMER LED, FARMER DRIVEN

**Weather Resilience
Maximising the Potential of Forage Crops
A Monitor Farm Scotland Innovation Project**



Silage bales with kale give forage options in heavy snow, Duncan Morrison, Kintore

The Deeside Monitor Farm Forage Crop Innovation Project followed and evaluated several outwintering systems in winter 2024/25.

WEATHER RESILIENCE FOR OUTWINTERING

A resilient out wintering system allows a business to be prepared to adapt if the weather changes e.g. extremely wet, long period of snow, etc.

The planning and set-up of a wintering field can aid the resilience of an outwintering system.

Contingency planning should include a plan for enhancing the health and welfare of the animals and the environment around them, and can include the following,

- Provisions should be in place to allow for extreme weather conditions, where these result in animals requiring a higher energy demand, e.g. additional forage, cobs, etc.
- Consider housing stock if the ground conditions turn extremely wet.
- Provide sacrifice areas to take animals off the system for the short term then ring or trailer feed forage
- Invest in anti-freeze troughs or other options if and when water freezes.
- Cost in and provide straw bales to be rolled out where there is a dry lie area.
- Overwinter in fields that provide sufficient shelter for the animals.
- Provide wind breaks where field shelter is insufficient e.g bales, tattie boxes in the field, etc.

PLANNING AND RESILIENCE

Deeside Monitor Farmer, Duncan Morrison, manages in-calf cows on deferred grazing and kale. In the summer months he places bales out in the fields to prevent poaching around a set feeding site. Hay bales are either rolled out or, for silage, the ring feeder is moved to a fresh bale on the daily shift.

Duncan's two crops create a resilient enterprise as the kale stands up well in the snow, while the deferred grazing is cleaner, with a bank of grass which suits a wetter period. A stock of silage is always kept at the farm to bring into the field if conditions turn and additional forage is required.

A back fence is used on the deferred grazing area to prevent animals from trampling over the whole field, and to protect the new shoots of emerging, spring grass.

Robert Marshall, a Deeside Monitor Farm management group member, grows a hybrid brassica for his in-calf cows and heifers. He ensures the crop's yield is assessed throughout the growing season. If the weather affects it, he alters the break size and keeps a close eye on the required supplementary forage. Straw is offered in the dry lie area of the field as a buffer at all times, and silage can be taken to the cows in trailers if required.



Hay bales rolled onto deferred grass at Duncan's Torphins' farm



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

Regional Adviser – Peter Beattie

07769 366614

pbeattie@qmscotland.co.uk

monitorfarms.co.uk

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