



FARMER LED, FARMER DRIVEN

**Taking Opportunities On The Family Farm – Summer
Open Meeting**

Cowbog Farm, Kelso
30th July 2026



Summer Open Meeting - Taking Opportunities On The Family Farm

“**Taking Opportunities on the Family Farm**” is about looking at the farm as a business and being willing to adapt, make decisions and explore new opportunities rather than simply continuing with the way things have always been done. For Cowbog, this meant looking at the business through the Monitor Farm process, understanding its strengths and challenges, and considering where the best opportunities for the future lay. One example was reducing the arable enterprise to create a more flexible, livestock-focused business.

It can mean:

- **Recognising opportunities** – spotting where there is potential to improve profitability, efficiency or resilience.
- **Being prepared to change** – accepting that what has worked in the past may not be the best option for the future.
- **Making informed decisions** – using business information, budgets and experience to assess whether an opportunity is right for the farm.
- **Diversifying** – looking at ways to create additional income streams, such as the Wilson family developing Wilson’s Kitchen.
- **Playing to the farm’s strengths** – making decisions around the land, people, skills and resources already available within the business.
- **Planning for the next generation** – creating a business that is resilient and gives the family options for the future.



Speaker insights –

Sam Charlton Planning for Profit



Creating Opportunities in Farming - Opportunities in farming aren't simply something we wait for or discover they are something we can recognise, evaluate and deliberately create. The challenge is that, without clear principles, every new idea can look like an opportunity. Whether it is taking on more land, diversifying, investing in new technology or developing a new enterprise, none of these decisions are inherently right or wrong. The real question is: is it the right decision for your business?

Planning for Profit explored how the decisions we make are shaped by our paradigms — the beliefs, experiences and assumptions through which we see the world. If we want different results, **we need to be prepared to challenge those assumptions and consider whether the way we have always thought about farming is still serving the business.** This includes asking whether we are spending enough time working on the business, rather than simply working in it, and whether we understand our numbers well enough to use them to make better decisions.

Ultimately, creating opportunities is about having the clarity to distinguish between a genuine opportunity and simply another distraction. By establishing the principles and criteria that matter to our individual businesses — including profit, cash, time, people, future aspirations and the needs of the next generation — we can evaluate opportunities more objectively and make decisions that move the business towards the future we want.



Planning for Profit provides the principles, tools and space to do exactly this: *to challenge our thinking, understand what drives business performance and become better leaders of our farming businesses. Because opportunity dances with those who are already on the dance floor.*

Speaker insights

Alasdair Ralston – MSP Agriculture



Getting the most out of your grass.

Alasdair Ralston from MSP Agriculture shared practical advice on grassland establishment, soil health and maintaining sward quality, with relevance to Cowbog's move from arable production towards more long-term grass.

He highlighted the **benefits of no-till and direct drilling, including reduced soil disturbance, protection of soil structure and potentially lower carbon emissions.**

The discussion explored the importance of considering

- Existing soil and sward conditions
- Acidity
- Thatch
- Soil biology.

And the main causes of ley deterioration -

- Poor soil fertility
- pH
- Grazing pressure,
- Excessive slurry applications
- Poor drainage and
- Unsuitable or non-persistent grass varieties.

Alasdair also discussed grass mixture selection, including Clifton Park-type mixtures, and the importance of choosing varieties suited to the soil, grazing system and intended use.



Grass Seed Selection – Fit For Purpose

Clover Inclusion
Weather Pressure
Heading Date
Life Expectancy
Soil Type & Fertility
Intended Use

Key takeaway: successful grassland starts with getting the soil right. Regular soil testing, appropriate nutrient management and good grazing practices are essential to maintaining productive, persistent swards and maximising forage quality and utilisation.

Speaker insights



Adam Marshall – Oink Catering

Building a Diversified Business - Adam Marshall shared his experience of developing a diverse farming and food business, combining farming, contracting, retail and catering. His journey demonstrated how opportunities can come from looking beyond the traditional farm business and finding ways to add value to what you already have. From establishing a meat plant and farm shop to developing the successful Oink catering business, Adam highlighted the importance of being willing to adapt, recognising when something is working and when it isn't and making difficult decisions when necessary.

Adam's key message: *the importance of having a clear business plan, understanding the finances and surrounding yourself with the right professional support.*

Including good accountants and banking partners. His experience provided a strong example of how diversification can create new opportunities, but also that successful growth requires careful planning, financial discipline and a willingness to change direction when needed

Key Facts

- Started pig farming in 1999, alongside his wider farming enterprise.
- Runs a diverse farming business, including cereals, protein crops, pigs and contracting.
- Established a meat plant and farm shop in 1998. Expanded into catering and hog roasts, creating a direct link between farming and food production.
- Has invested over £1 million since 2008 in his wider ventures
- Built the business around a combination of farming, contracting, retail and catering.
- Emphasised the importance of profitability rather than simply turnover.



Adam and his team deliver around 70 hog roasts a year. They sold around 270,000 rolls in the last year, demonstrating the scale of the catering business.



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