MONITOR FARM Scotland

FARMER LED, FARMER DRIVEN

Making Inputs Count - Summer Open Meeting
Barnbackle Farm, Dumfries
6th August 2026

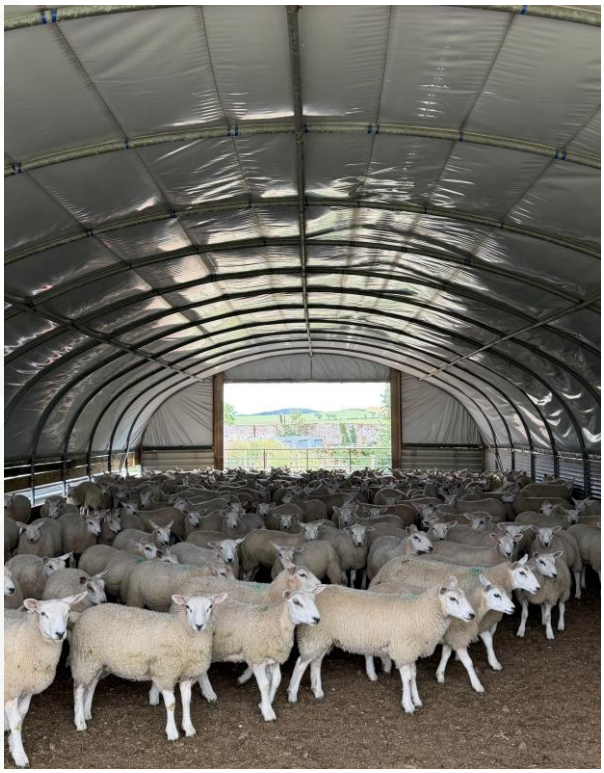
Making Inputs Count

The final Summer Open Meeting at Barnbackle Farm brought farmers and industry representatives together to explore the theme “Making Inputs Count”, with a particular focus on improving the productivity and profitability of lamb finishing systems.

The event provided an opportunity to reflect on the developments made at Barnbackle throughout the Monitor Farm programme, with the McCornick family sharing their experiences, recent changes and the key decisions shaping the future of the business.

With focus on how farmers can make the most of the resources and inputs already available to them such as

- Soil health
- Grassland management
- Animal health
- Nutrition
- Lamb finishing.



Speakers shared practical advice and experiences, **highlighting the importance of targeting inputs effectively and understanding the return they deliver.** A key theme throughout the day was that making inputs count is about working smarter, not simply spending more – ensuring that every investment, whether in land, feed, animal health or labour, contributes towards improved performance and profitability. The event brought together expert knowledge, practical on-farm experience and farmer discussion, providing attendees with ideas and strategies that could be applied to their own businesses.

Paul Hargreaves SRUC Healthy Soils

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Dr. Paul Hargreaves led an engaging session focused on the pivotal role of healthy soil in sustainable agriculture. The session began with a presentation in the shed, where Paul introduced the topic and encouraged participants to consider the importance of soil health.

Explained was the fundamental aspects of healthy soil, highlighting the significance of soil pH and the optimum pH range for promoting plant growth. Participants learned how various soil properties interact to create a conducive environment for crops.

The group took part in a hands-on soil assessment led by Dr Hargreaves, digging and examining soil samples to assess soil health.

Causes of Compaction
The depth of the compaction gives an indication of possible causes.

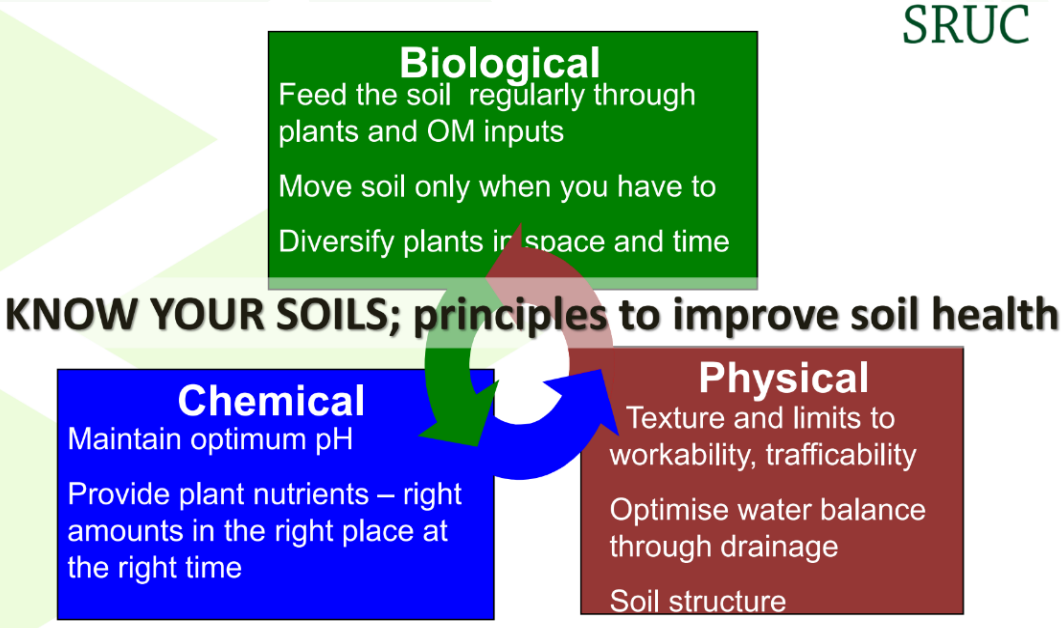
- **Surface level capping** – Capping on new reseeds
- **0.5cm deep** – Sheep trampling at high stocking densities
- **10 – 15cm deep** – Heavy machinery trafficking e.g silage
- **15cm deep** – Plough pan due to repeated cultivation.

Dr. Hargreaves also humorously reminded everyone to **"never forget your shovel" when heading to the field.**

This interactive session not only deepened participants' understanding of soil health but also equipped them with practical skills for effective soil management, highlighting the vital link between healthy soils and sustainable farming practices

Healthy Soils, Informed Decisions.

SRUC



DUMFRIES

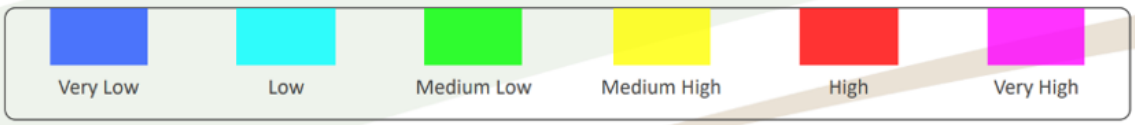
Barnbackle Soil Analysis 2022 - 2026

MONITOR FARM Scotland

2022

Routine results

Field	pH	Phosphate	Potassium	Magnesium	Calcium	Ca:Mg Ratio	Sodium	LOI
		mg/l	mg/l	mg/l	mg/l	Ratio	mg/l	%
Banks	6.8	11.9	279.0	154.4	2900	18.8:1	37.5	16.4
Big Knocksharg	6.2	4.1	143.4	111.7	1600	14.3:1	36.0	14.7
Cottage	6.2	3.8	113.9	92.17	1600	17.4:1	28.0	15.0
Crofts	6.3	6.7	303.2	147.7	2000	13.5:1	35.2	20.0
Crofts	6.2	5.9	260.8	121.8	1900	15.6:1	30.4	18.3
Far Hill Deanston	6.3	4.3	139.5	132.5	2100	15.8:1	34.0	16.8
Gills Craig	6.1	6.1	239.1	141.7	1400	9.9:1	29.1	17.8
Glenfield Deanston	5.9	6.1	237.4	136.8	1300	9.5:1	36.2	14.7
Lochhill	5.9	4.1	170.9	127.1	1300	10.2:1	36.2	14.6
Loch Park Deanston	5.8	5.9	182.7	140.1	1300	9.3:1	36.2	15.2
Meikle	6.4	3.8	316.3	166.1	2100	12.6:1	33.5	21.6
Midhill Deanston	6.3	5.8	178.6	132.4	2200	16.6:1	39.2	17.9
Near Barquar	6.4	4.3	340.0	162.8	2200	13.5:1	29.5	23.7
Smiths Park	5.8	6.0	344.9	143.6	1100	7.7:1	29.7	18.6
Treepark Deanston	6.4	6.7	212.7	131.4	1900	14.5:1	26.9	16.8
Watchman	6.6	6.2	344.3	109.3	2000	18.3:1	23.0	17.3
Wee Knocksharg	6.4	7.3	326.7	156.4	2100	13.4:1	29.8	18.1
Woodhill	6.7	6.0	328.5	123.3	2400	19.5:1	25.1	19.6



2026

Routine results

Field	pH	Phosphate	Potassium	Magnesium	Calcium	Ca:Mg Ratio	Sodium	OM (LOI)	OC (LOI)
		mg/l	mg/l	mg/l	mg/l	Ratio	mg/l	%	%
Banks	6.0	7.2	114.9	81	1328	16.4:1	22.8	11.9	6.9
Big Knocksharg	6.0	5.2	77.2	85	1284	15.1:1	19.8	11.1	6.4
Cottage	6.0	14.9	117.6	76	1258	16.6:1	20.4	12.1	7.0
Croft East	5.8	4.7	146.7	91	1223	13.5:1	19.1	15.1	8.8
Croft West	5.9	6.8	165.3	102	1412	13.8:1	20.6	15.3	8.8
Far Hill Deanston	5.9	8.1	104.5	97	1237	12.8:1	25.2	12.4	7.2
Gills Craig	5.9	6.1	103.0	101	1360	13.5:1	19.1	13.6	7.9
Glenfield Deanston	6.2	8.5	192.0	90	1638	18.3:1	19.6	12.3	7.1
Lochhill	6.0	2.8	126.4	87	1212	13.9:1	19.4	11.9	6.9
Loch Park Deanston	6.1	13.5	84.3	120	1586	13.2:1	17.5	13.1	7.6
Meikle	6.0	5.3	164.9	103	1653	16.1:1	21.9	18.1	10.5
Midhill Deanston	5.9	20.2	89.7	100	1290	12.9:1	18.4	13.5	7.8
Near Barquar	6.0	7.2	212.2	119	1702	14.3:1	21.4	21.4	12.4
Smiths Park	5.9	8.9	191.2	99	1388	14.1:1	19.5	16.2	9.4
Treepark Deanston	5.7	16.3	135.0	104	1109	10.7:1	20.6	12.0	7.0
Watchman	5.9	8.3	212.5	92	1463	16.0:1	19.0	16.0	9.3
Wee Knocksharg	6.0	8.1	110.4	95	1385	14.5:1	21.3	13.2	7.7
Woodhill	6.0	7.9	207.4	88	1556	17.8:1	18.8	16.5	9.6

Graham Lofthouse

Growing more lamb from every hectare

Graham Lofthouse delivered an insightful session focused on key aspects of current farming practices, with particular emphasis on lamb management and grass quality. He stressed the importance of effective policy management in the transition period for lambs.

Key points:

Lamb management: Accurate records of lamb numbers and movements are important for effective flock management and monitoring performance.

Transition treatments: Treatments should be planned and carried out ahead of key transition periods to support lamb performance.

Grass quality: Aim for at least **6 cm of grass cover before grazing**. Three silage cuts were considered sufficient, rather than taking a fourth cut.

Measuring performance: Monitoring lamb performance throughout the cycle allows management and treatments to be adjusted to specific needs.

Tailored management: Highlighted the importance of adapting lamb management to individual farm systems rather than relying on a one-size-fits-all approach.

Barnbackle Key Farm Facts

These were given as handouts on the day of the event.

BARNBACKLE KEY FARM FACTS

SHEEP MANAGEMENT

- Lambing moved to 15th March, with no reduction in lamb weights or sale prices.
- 400 lambs sold to date.
- Flock split into A and B breeding groups to improve replacement selection.
- Carefully selected replacement tups used to breed future flock replacements.
- Four week tupping period introduced to tighten the lambing.
- Regular body condition scoring to better manage ewe nutrition.
- Ewes fed a Total Mixed Ration (TMR) during lambing.
- New lambing protocols introduced to improve consistency and efficiency.
- Veterinary students brought in during lambing to provide additional labour.
- Polytunnels installed to increase lambing accommodation.
- Lambs receive SmartShot and are dipped at weaning as part of the flock health programme.
- Footvax introduced to reduce lameness.
- Greater use of forage crops, with ewe lambs wintered away to reduce pressure on the home farm.

Barnbackle Key Farm Facts

These were given as handouts on the day of the event.

BARNBACKLE KEY FARM FACTS

GRASSLAND AND FORAGE

- Every grass reseed now includes clover, helping improve soil fertility, increase forage production and reduce reliance on purchased nitrogen fertiliser.
- Following forage crops, reseeds focus on high clover inclusion to maximise productivity and build resilient swards.
- Silage fields are sown with hybrid ryegrass, red clover and plantain, producing high quality, multicut silage for feeding ewes during lambing.
- Arable silage crops are undersown with this mix, allowing productive leys to become established while making the most of the cropping system.
- Long term grazing leys include diverse grass mixtures with red clover and plantain to improve forage quality, animal performance and resilience.
- Tyfon is included in selected forage mixes to provide a highly palatable crop for weaning lambs onto, supporting intakes and liveweight gain after weaning.

Ali Haggerty, Stewartry Vets
Making animal health inputs count

Ali Haggerty delivered a practical presentation on **"Making Health Inputs Count Post-Weaning"**, focusing on targeted treatments, parasite monitoring and making cost-effective health decisions. Highlighted was the challenges lambs face around weaning, particularly stress, worms and maintaining adequate grass supply. Rather than relying on routine treatments, importance of targeted parasite control and regular faecal egg counting to guide treatment decisions and help reduce the risk of anthelmintic resistance.

Key Points:

Weaning challenges: Managing stress, nutrition and health risks during the weaning period.

Informed decisions: Using flock data and performance measures to guide health and management decisions.

Nutrition: Gradually introducing feed and supplements to support lambs through transition periods.

Weather impacts: Adapting parasite management to changing weather and associated disease risks.

Worm management: Using faecal egg counts and targeted worming strategies to reduce resistance.

Vaccination: Planning vaccination programmes to support immunity and reduce disease risk.

Early life management: Emphasising good colostrum intake and early life care to build lamb health and resilience.

Ali Haggerty, Stewartry Vets
Making animal health inputs count

Ali also discussed the importance of managing the transition at weaning carefully, including the gradual introduction of feed and supplements to minimise stress. Changing weather patterns were highlighted as another factor affecting parasite risk, requiring farmers to remain vigilant and adapt their management accordingly.

Bluetongue was also discussed, with vaccination highlighted as an important tool in reducing clinical disease. Ali **encouraged farmers to speak to their vet early about appropriate vaccination programmes**, particularly when preparing breeding stock.

The chart below was used during the meeting to demonstrate the **potential cost savings from different health management practices**. It helped livestock owners understand where targeted investment could deliver the greatest benefits for **animal welfare, health and productivity**.

Input	Cost to Business
Parasite Monitoring	↓
Correct Drenching	↓
Vaccination	↓ ↑
Better Nutrition	↑
Weighing	↓

↓ **Investment**

↑ **Cost Saving**

MONITOR FARM Scotland

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

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Initiative supported by:

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