

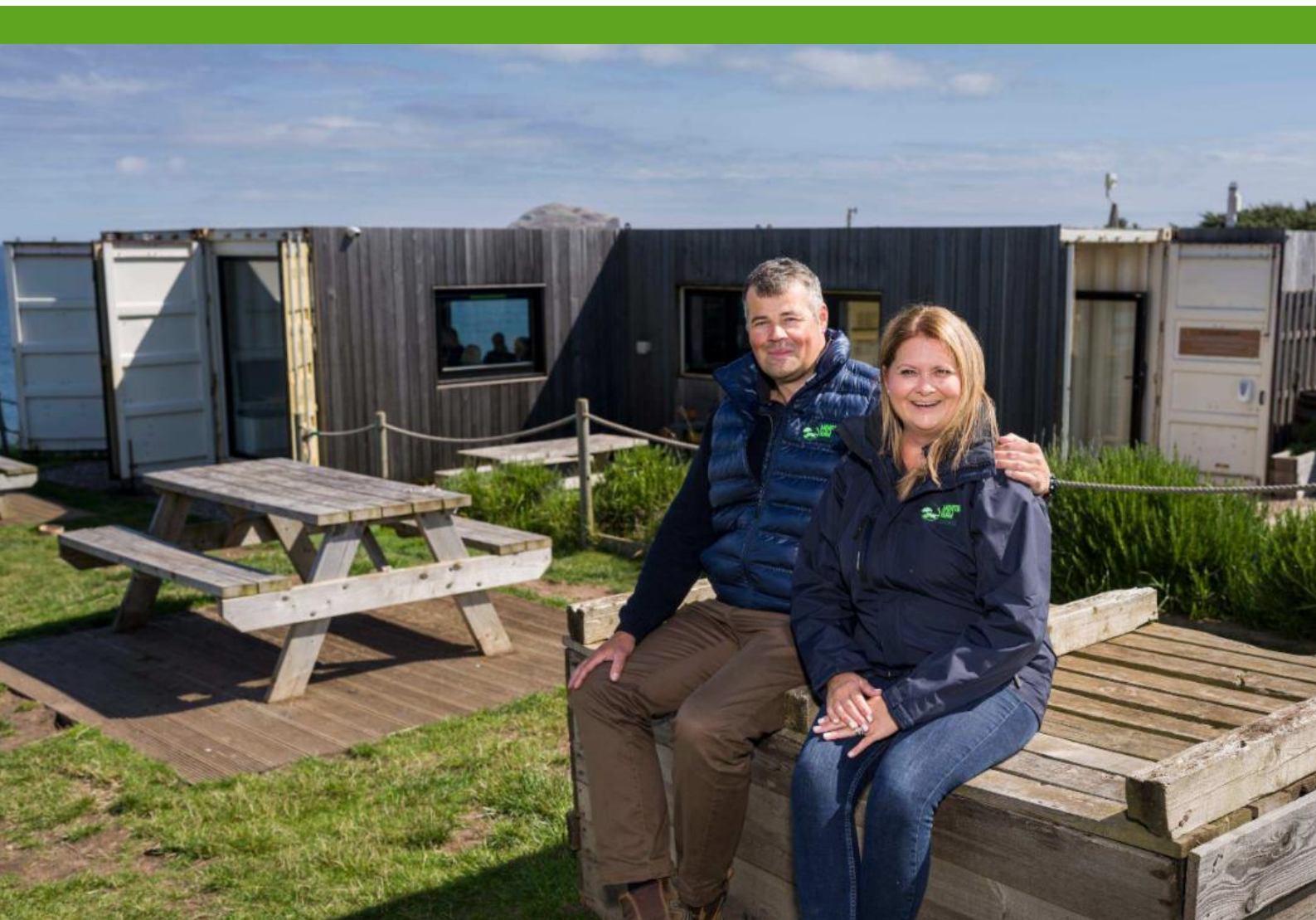


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Farm 24 – Farming for the Future

Castleton Farm, East Lothian

22nd July 2026



Looking To The Future – Farm 24



The Looking To The Future – Farm 24 Monitor Farm meeting marked the final summer event at Castleton Farm, bringing together farmers, industry experts and rural businesses to reflect on progress made through the Monitor Farm programme while looking ahead to the opportunities and challenges facing the industry.

The event focused on the key factors that will shape successful farm businesses over the coming years, including –

- **Attracting and developing the next generation of the agricultural workforce**
- **Adapting to changing agricultural policy**
- **Managing market volatility**
- **Improving business resilience.**

Through a combination of expert presentations and farmer-led discussion, attendees explored practical approaches to future proofing their own businesses.



The theme, Looking To The Future – Farm 24, reflected the McNicol family's commitment to continuous improvement throughout the Monitor Farm programme and recognised that long term success relies on planning ahead, embracing new opportunities and investing in both people and the future of the business.

Speaker insights

David Michie – NFUS



David provided an overview of the latest developments in Scottish, UK and EU agricultural policy, outlining what they could mean for Scottish farm businesses over the coming years.

Looking at the proposed four-tier agricultural support framework, highlighting the continued importance of rewarding active farmers, recognising good farming practice and supporting environmental outcomes while maintaining business stability through area-based payments.



What could support look like by 2030?

- **Tier 1** will provide a foundation of direct income support, continuing to offer essential stability for many businesses.
- **Tier 2** will reward farmers who adopt management practices that go beyond the baseline, with limited bureaucracy requirements.
- **Tier 3** is expected to focus on more targeted environmental and land management measures requiring greater planning and management.
- **Tier 4** will provide the training, advice and knowledge exchange needed to help businesses adapt to the requirements of the above Tiers and make the most of the opportunities available.

Also explored was wider industry issues, including **uncertainty within fertiliser and energy markets, the proposed Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM), Fair Dealings legislation for combinable crops and the potential opportunities and challenges arising from closer UK-EU regulatory alignment.**

A key theme throughout the presentation was **resilience**. With ongoing uncertainty surrounding policy, markets, input costs and weather, David encouraged farmers to focus on building adaptable, profitable businesses that are well placed to respond to future challenges and opportunities.

Please find the full blog here that David has written - [NFUS Blog](#)

Speaker insights

Gillian McFadyen – Borders College



Gillian emphasised the important role apprenticeships and education play in developing the future agricultural workforce. Outlining the range of career pathways available to young people entering the industry and Gillian explained how Borders College works with employers to provide practical, industry-focused training.

Key Points –

Career pathways: Agriculture offers a wide range of opportunities, from practical farm roles to technical and professional careers, providing different routes into the industry.

Apprenticeships: Combine hands-on experience with formal training and recognised qualifications, allowing young people to learn while working.

Employer partnerships: Borders College works with businesses to provide industry-focused training that reflects the skills and needs of employers.

Benefits to businesses: Apprenticeships provide an opportunity to develop people within the business, build skills and support the future workforce.

Supporting young people: Practical experience helps young people build confidence, develop skills and see agriculture as a long-term career options.



It's vital to show the important role apprenticeships and education play in developing the future agricultural workforce. Outlined was the range of career pathways available to young people entering the industry and explained how Borders College works with employers to provide practical, industry-focused training.

If you have any questions, please contact Gillian on - gmcfadyen@borderscollege.ac.uk

Key message: Apprenticeships can play an important role in developing skills, supporting succession planning and helping businesses attract the next generation of agricultural workers.

Speaker insights

Stevie Grey & Greg Dawson, Scottish Agronomy



Stevie Gray from Scottish Agronomy looked at how green manures and protein crops can be used within arable rotations to improve soil health and resilience.

Key benefits:

1. Improving water infiltration and water retention, helping soils cope better with both heavy rainfall and drier conditions.
2. Improving soil structure by increasing water-stable aggregates, which can support better rooting and reduce the risk of soil becoming compacted.
3. Contributing to soil fertility by capturing and cycling nutrients within the rotation.
4. Adding organic matter and helping support overall soil health over the longer term.

Green manures are not a one-size-fits-all solution. Their success depends on factors such as **crop choice, establishment, timing and how they fit into the wider rotation.**

Points to consider before introducing green manures include:

- The cost of establishment and inputs required.
- Potential for introducing weeds or volunteers into following crops.
- How and when the green manure will be terminated.
- The income forgone from taking land out of cash crop production.
- Whether the soil and rotational benefits justify the additional cost and management.



The key message from the multi year trials and the longer-term rotational benefits of green manures was to look beyond the establishment cost alone and consider the overall impact on **soil health, crop performance, rotation and farm profitability** when deciding whether they have a place within a farming system.

Speaker insights

Stevie Grey & Greg Dawson,

Scottish Agronomy



Greg Dawson focussed on the commercial resilience of combinable cropping and the factors that influence the performance of an arable business. Bringing together financial performance, agronomy, market exposure and environmental considerations, providing a practical look at the opportunities and challenges facing combinable cropping businesses.

Encouraging consideration of how **costs, yields, crop choices, markets and environmental outcomes interact**, and where changes in management could help improve profitability and resilience.

Harvest 2027 planning scenarios.

The following worked examples are ***planning assumptions, not firm forecasts***. They should be stress-tested for yield, price, input inflation and rotational or agronomic constraints.

	W Barley	W Wheat	WOSR
Yield (t/ha)	8.5	9.75	4.5
Price (£/t)	£165	£195	£430
Output (£/ha)	£1,402	£1,901	£1,935
Seed	£100	£110	£88
Fert & Lime	£415	£445	£450
Crop protection	£101	£215	£154
Total variable costs	£626	£770	£692
Gross margin (£/ha)	£787	£1,131	£1,243

Key Points

- ✓ **Cost-price squeeze:** April 2026 indices presented show agricultural inputs rising more quickly than outputs, led by energy and fertiliser.
- ✓ **Forward margins:** 2027 worked examples put winter wheat at £1,131/ha, almost equal to the fixed-cost benchmark; winter oilseed rape exceeds it, while winter barley and all spring examples fall short.
- ✓ **Operational priorities:** know production costs, reduce fixed costs, protect soil condition and adopt integrated farm management.



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Initiative supported by:



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