



Agriculture & Horticulture
DEVELOPMENT BOARD



Fife Monitor Farm



Meeting Four Report

16th July 2014

Next Meeting: 29th October 2014

Facilitators: Stephen Young 07502 339 613

Greg Dawson 07766 421 130

The Fife Arable Monitor Farm Programme is an HGCA and Potato Council project supported by the Scottish Government SRDP Skills Development Scheme.

Introduction

Chairman David Aglen welcomed around 50 members of the community group and trade to Demperston for the fourth meeting of the project. The meeting was also joined by a BBC film crew who have been finding out the opinions of families across Scotland on the upcoming referendum. Danny & Alison are one of the families chosen for this.

David explained that the management group along with Danny & Alison had developed a theme for the project which was to simplify the farming system to allow more time to be spent with their young family while remaining profitable. The structure of the meetings will be based around achieving this goal over the next 2 and half years.

Update

Danny

Silage making started on 9th June, slight delay due to rain leading completion on the 19th. Around 32 bales/ha were made.

“Scrap heap challenge” Grain Drier project nearing completion. The drier will then be housed under cover in an extension to the grain store and transferring grain across yard minimised. The extension will cost around £9k for the steel and roof with a further £4k for erection.

Some barley was sold in May at a good price with the remainder sold at start of July leaving an average of £170/t.

John

2013 crop marketing almost complete with 159 tonnes still to move next week.

Some blight around with 7 day spray programme underway with product choice majoring on Ranman, Infinito & Revus.

Irrigation started in 1st week of June with 15mm in first pass and 20-25mm on the second. Run off is the current limiting factor until canopy cover is complete.

Agronomy Update

The Group split into 2 and were shown the Spring Barley and Wheat crops, by Greg and farm agronomist Donald Hay (Agrii). Discussions also took place on the Winter Oat, Winter OSR and Spring Bean crops.

Wheat – Donald Hay

Final T3 spray has been applied and the crop is looking well. It is not envisaged that glyphosate will be required pre-harvest.

On the try-out of three varieties, after looking very good earlier in the season the Hybrid has now been caught up by the others and is harder to spot. Viscount is coming under pressure from new variety Horatio which is looking well across the country. Disease pressure has been consistently high across the whole of the UK. Yellow Rust and *Septoria tritici* have both been challenging variety resistance and crop protection programmes.

Spring Barley – Greg

Spring crop growth has been particularly lush in 2014 and the dense canopies have prompted PGR applications in some varieties and circumstances. The Demperston Optic crops had not suffered from such issues and the disease control programmes had been successful in containing disease to date. It was recognised by the group that the variety Optic has become outclassed as a malting variety and a replacement should be considered. With the exception of Concerto it was considered prudent to check end user acceptability with the purchaser before committing to any of the alternative varieties discussed.

Market Update – Roger Baird, WN Lindsay

Unfortunately Roger was unable to attend the meeting, however he did provide a market update which was delivered by Stephen.

“Here are some thoughts of mine and other’s. You will see that there is very little ‘bullish’ news, we had huge global crops in season 2013/14 and the likelihood is the same if not bigger in 2014/15. This means huge stocks and pressured sellers, entwined with the usual early export programme from the Baltic, before ice cover shuts this corridor, which all equates to an out and out buyer’s market, with no respite in sight.

We will not see any change to this outlook, until after the turn of the year and that will only happen if there’s some major development affecting southern hemisphere harvests’ or northern and southern hemisphere plantings and crop development. Our thoughts are, is that the market will continue to weaken.

Most of the main Scottish crops, wheat, malting barley and oats are dictated to/linked to the LIFFE Nov futures. 10 weeks ago Nov 14 was at £160, today it is hovering above the £130 level so almost a £30 drop.

We hope for an early, dry and cost effective harvest, with many tonnes to make up for the difficult market conditions.”

Grains Overview

- Since the bearish USDA results last week, the markets have continued in a similar vein with prices suffering significant falls across the board
- Independence day in the US last week meant the markets were closed Friday, and operating shorter hours Thursday/Monday
- USDA WASDE data is out on Friday. Bearish news is expected. **The questions is how bearish will it be?**
- The next few weeks of trade direction will be reliant on **weather developments**. For now, **everything looks positive**
- Funds have played an important role in the sell-off, slashing their positions. Perhaps the fall has been overdone with the traditionally volatile summer months in front of us?
- Technically, the **grains are all in oversold territory**, a strong signal for buying

The above is a good resume of where we are at present, the likelihood being that the USDA report on Fri will increase the grains stock level and increase the bearish outlook, pushing Nov 14 futures down still further.

Wheat and Soya are at market lows, it is difficult to see any upside, especially with barns bursting at the seams, in every direction you look.

In discussion with the group Grain marketing is something which is of interest to many. Citing gaps in information, skills and time to execute a robust marketing plan it is something the group would like to look into further in future meetings. Gavin highlighted the HGCA website has statistics to show the levels of success in using different strategies across the season.

Top Tip: Have a look on HGCA website to see how differing marketing strategies have fared recently.

[HGCA Wheat Pricing Strategy Comparison 2013](#)

Soil Sampling & Precision Farming – Daan Kiezebrink (Soil Essentials)

In March Soil Essentials sampled one field at Demperston as well as one at Dura Mains. Daan examined the results as well as options for precision farming.

- Sampling based on ¼ hectare grid, minimum of 12 cores.
- The two fields were distinctly different in there 'wet' pH value. The lighter land showed large variation in pH (5.3 – 7.1) while the heavier field was fairly uniform throughout.
- Recommended liming rate to achieve a pH of 6.2 on the light field varied from 0 – 9.0 t/ha using 16.8 tonnes of lime on 15 ha. Targeting a pH of 6.5 required 41.6 tonnes. Normal farm policy of blanket rate would have used 55.6 tonnes.
- Significant saving demonstrated even allowing for sampling and testing costs.
- Cost per sample varies with area tested. Potential for savings if groups of fields can be tested together.
- Consider splitting fields into zones for P & K sampling rather than incurring cost of grid sampling. Old field boundaries often indicate zones.
- Applying to offtake based on yield maps is possible if the soil status is known to be satisfactory.
- Machine control (auto shut off on sprayers and spreaders) was considered a logical route to investigate for potential savings

Top Tip: Precision mapping PH can make a greatly reduce the cost of liming. One field reducing from 75 tonnes to 16.8 tonnes. A saving of £873 before the cost of sampling. Yields should also be more uniform.

Group Work

Led by the management team the group split into three to consider three topics relating to cropping for 2015 harvest. The groups were asked to look at these with the theme of simplifying the system and reducing workload in mind.

Group 1 - Rotation Planning

The group recommended the following simplified rotation:

Winter Oats, Winter Wheat, Spring Barley, Spring Barley with ad hoc rotational grass or rents for vegetables/potatoes.

The benefits would be:

- ✓ Maximising crops providing highest margin
- ✓ 50:50 spring/winter split to reduce autumn sowing pressure
- ✓ Would meet 3 crop rule
- ✓ Oats provide good return but must not be grown without a good contract
- ✓ Removing Beans & OSR reduce workload throughout the year
- ✓ Grass break can be down for 3 years and provide a complete break from cereal production.
- ✓ Option to use Spring Oats if conditions don't allow Winter Oats
- ✓ Potential to look at Veg/Potato land lets on a year by year basis depending on condition to supply additional non cereal break crops.

Group 2 – Variety Choice & Early Season Management

Wheat

- Istabraq was the groups first choice for the lighter soils and later drilling slot, with Horatio to be tried for earlier drilling.
- Final decision can be aided by the results of the current try out.
- Reduce to two varieties from 3 to simplify system.

OSR

- Club root is not an issue at Demperston so Anastacia was the group's first choice based on its performance in N region RL trials. Amelie was also considered as a potential new comer with the added advantage of turnip yellows virus resistance.
- Potential to try these side by side and measure performance

Winter Oats

- Contract to dictate the choice
- Gerald is the most popular with Balado worth considering as its shorter straw height and good resistance to lodging simplifies PGR management. The trade-off is a tendency for slightly lower specific weight.

Spring Barley

- Options shifting for spring barley. Optic is increasingly becoming a niche variety. Concerto currently has the widest demand with end users but a number of other varieties such as Propino and Odyssey could be considered if markets can be identified through contracts.

Spring Beans

- Currently Demperston is growing Fuego but the group considered Fury to be an attractive alternative due to its slightly higher yield and appealing agronomic characteristics.

Early season management tips:

- Adjust sowing rate to TGW
- Select seed treatment based on seed testing results (in particular microdochium levels) and intended sowing dates. For early drilling consider a seed treatment with insecticidal activity for BYDV control or where microdochium levels are not too concerning priorities early yellow rust suppression.
- Look at options for P & K savings for winter cereals where soil testing has demonstrated moderate or above soil status.

Group 3 Cultivations & Sowing

The group looked at ways of increasing work rates as well as reducing costs of crop establishment without the need for large capital outlay in new machinery.

- ✓ **Reduce** plough use where rotation and conditions permit - Save Time and Money
Improve Soil Structures
- ✓ Match cultivation strategy to soil conditions and cropping patterns
- ✓ Use rotation to control weeds “ Start controlling next year’s weeds with this year’s crop”
- ✓ Look at trying different options
 - Direct Drill – reduce number of passes
 - Try using current drill with a cultivator in front instead of the plough– speed up work rates without incurring excessive additional fixed costs
- ✓ Measure the amount of time and fuel saved and calculate effect on margin when new machinery purchase is taken into account.
- ✓ Select varieties to lengthen sowing window.

The group recommended having a try-out with the different systems on the farm with a note being kept of time spent/ha as well as fuel use and other costs. This can also be compared with other systems used within the community group and discussed further at future meetings.

Future Meetings

Next meeting is the 29th October followed by the 10th December with the following topics to be covered in the coming year.

- Harvest Update
- Marketing Strategies
- Establishment Try-outs
- Potato Land Let Agreements
- Succession Planning
- Labour Utilisation – Getting the most from farm staff
- Practical and financial effects of CAP reform.



The Glamorous life of a Monitor Farmer!

Management Group

The management group has been established. It is their role to represent the community group and to drive the project. Contact details are listed below, if you have any ideas or thoughts on the project feel free to share them with any of the facilitators or management group.

Danny & Alison Milne	Demperston	07809 747044/07764 747418
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