Managing the dairy herd
Discussion group visit to The Barony

This is the seventh meeting of the Woodhead focus farm discussion group, who visited SRUC’s Barony Farm in Dumfries and Galloway to consider strategies to improve the sustainability of the farm business.

Key points:

- Cull hard to remove loss making cows and keep the herd young.
- Look for more cost effective alternatives for bedding — Barony uses oatsusks at £50/tonne compared with sawdust at £120/tonne.
- Consider more than just litres in the tank, especially on an A/B pricing situation. It’s worth calculating the cost of marginal litres.

Managing a high yielding herd through tough times

Since the launch of the Woodhead Climate Change Focus Farm the dairy industry is now unrecognisable. Many farmers are looking for ways to cut costs without impacting on the performance of their cows or on the bottom line.

This was the theme of the recent Climate Change Focus Farm meeting held at The Barony Farm, Dumfries, and chaired by Robert Ramsay, SAC Consulting.

David Keiley (SRUC Dairy Specialist) spoke to the audience of farmers who had attended from across the south west, and then the group toured the farm with the farm manager Paul Kelly to discuss a range of measures used at The Barony Farm to improve efficiency and reduce the cost of production.

Budgets and cash flows were discussed in depth at the meeting. The importance of knowing your cost of production and benchmarking was also discussed. Farmers should be monitoring this closely and looking for areas where they could improve.

The next meeting is at Woodhead farm, Newmilns, on Tuesday 11 October 2016 where we will look at improving energy efficiency on a shoestring budget. All farmers welcome; book your place with the Ayr office on 01292 525 252.
Forage and feed

High quality forage is key to having a low cost of production at Barony. David Keiley highlighted the importance of producing good silage as a way to reduce the need for purchased feed. Grass quality is also important at grazing. Those grazing without paddocks should look to subdivide fields to increase grass utilisation. Temporary electric fencing allows flexibility in paddock sizes and a quick return on investment.

Whole crop can be a useful addition to a ration. It can provide starch and is more consistent in yield than grass silage. When grazing high yielding cows a buffer ration based around whole crop will help to reduce the decline in butterfat that usually occurs. The Barony grows winter barley and spring barley, both for whole crop.

Forage quality should not be forgotten about when feeding youngstock. The importance of these animals was stressed by Mr Keiley. How heifers are treated now will impact their future success in the milking herd. Good quality forage and high quality grass is needed in order to achieve calving at 24 months old.

The Scottish Government’s Integrated Land Management Plan (ILMP) offers funding for business advice. See www.fas.scot or ask your agricultural advisor for details.