

Ardoch of Gallery

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Climate Change Focus Farm

Production strategies for low commodity prices

Notes from the Discussion
Group Meeting on 16th November 2015

This was the second meeting of the Ardoch of Gallery focus farm discussion group, considering practical and profitable ideas to improve the farm business.

Update on cropping

Host Willie Officer gave the group an overview of the current yields and cropping at Ardoch of Gallery

- Daffodil bulbs have been harvested. They have been in the ground for 2 years (works with 2 year down varieties).
- All the yields are above average this year; currency seems to be the main problem with the grain trade.
- Winter barley was put in to give early entry for bulbs, yields were average with low bushel weights.
- Of the winter oilseed rape crop, some desiccated, some swathed. The swathed crop was a hassle with the weather and pigeons. Yields average 1.8t/acre dry weight.
- Spring barley had skinning issues but Optic out performed the other varieties this year. Belgravia 2.7t, Optic 3t and Concerto 2.9t. Both the Belgravia and Concerto required a lot of drying.
- Winter wheat was harvested at reasonably low moisture and yielded 4t/acre.
- Potato yields were good with only the odd trace of scab seen. Salad crops were slightly over size. The Jenson variety is becoming more popular. Saw a lot of problems with exports at the last minute due to a change in riddling size. No tatties exported yet, (November); currently away for inspection. 1st year growing Royal for McCain and it has done well, with around 18-19 boxes/acre.
- Winter crops are all in the ground.



Saving costs; Efficient nutrient use

Nutrient budgeting and targeted nutrient application can make best use of product and improve yields

David Ross, Senior Agricultural Consultant with SAC Consulting highlighted the importance of knowing your soil status and applying P & K accordingly. David also suggested targeting a pH of 6 – 6.2.

David looked at the difference in variance of pH from the 1st year of GPS sampling compared with the next year of sampling. It showed a decrease in pH range throughout the fields, making field pH more uniform.

This led to a discussion and a possible focus farm trial going forward for lime application, looking at applying on stubbles vs applying on the ploughed field. Discussion then went on to granular lime – was this a good idea or not? We will be exploring these topics in more detail at future meetings.

The group noted how the efficiency of P & K utilization falls as pH decreases (meaning applied nutrients are not being utilized as efficiently, or to put it another way, you would need to apply more for the same yield response) and how a noticeable difference in crop performance is seen once pH reaches 5.6 – 5.7.

Precision farming

Know what the previous crop has taken off

Aiden Monaghan from SOYL talked about the importance of a good pH balance; its estimated that pH will drift by 0.1 - 0.15 per year so does need management.



Aiden illustrated the importance of a good nutrient balance with some slides on P deficiency in a spring barley crop where pH was originally thought to be the problem. Aiden demonstrated that by using GPS, the P issue was able to be picked up much more accurately in individual areas of the field.

Phosphate maps at Ardoch showed P levels to be on target and well maintained. When discussing the yield maps for Ardoch, some areas of an individual field were yielding 9-10t/ha, with others yielding 14-15t/ha. If fertiliser was applied aiming for a 10t/ha yield, then the P and K offtake from 15t/ha is a lot more than was budgeted for so needs to be taken into account when planning future applications.

Cover Cropping

Peter Gray from Lindsays along with David Ross discussed the use of cover crops on farm and a trial that was done at Ardoch. Two different cover crops were sown in July. These mixes were as follows:

- Mix 1 – 20% phacelia, 20% daikon radish, 20% crimson clover and 40% buckwheat, sown at a rate of 5kg/acre.
- Mix 2 – 33.3% vetch and 66.6% tetraploid Italian ryegrass, sown at a rate of 6kg/acre.

This led the group into a discussion of the use of cover crops. Willie commented on the abundance of earthworms seen in the field once the cover crop was established. It was discussed how the use of cover crops could help improve soil structure and improve organic matter in the soil. The outcome of this presentation was more suggestions for further trials on cover crops over winter.

Grain Market Outlook

With UK prices at a 6 year low, what are the prospects going forward?

The past 3 years have seen high yields, with production higher than market demand, according to SAC Consulting's Rural Business Consultant Julian Bell. CAP payments for cereal growers could be down 25%, giving even more urgency to optimise grain production and protect profits.

2015 saw a large UK (and Scotland) wheat surplus. Around 3.7m tons have been produced; its estimated that probably less than 1m tons will have been exported by Christmas. Scottish wheat is receiving £2.50 more than English wheat.

Malting barley purchasers are at capacity in Scotland there are smaller areas of crops but still the spot price still remains weak.

Long term action is required to look into raising wheat yields. Over the past 20 years UK wheat yields have stuck around 8-9t/ha, whilst American maize yields have increased greatly. The top 25% of grain producers have 20-30% less costs per ton produced.



Julian suggested that for 2016, look at the forward prices. Get a handle on your production costs and have an aim. This should help in giving you a figure to work with when making selling decisions.

Potato Market Outlook

How might the market look in 2016?

2014/2015 saw a global over supply of tatties and lower consumption (down by approx. 500,000 tons), explained Sandy McGowan from Grampian Growers. A depressed market with low prices and Russia closing it's EU trading has had a big impact. In 2015-2016 we are seeing a reduced planting area for seed; area has decreased by about 10% in Scotland (UK total of 7%). This season has seen below average yields and average quality, with a challenging harvest period.

In terms of seed exports, a change in politics in Egypt has had a big impact on the export trade. The maximum riddling spec was cut back from 60mm to 55mm at the last minute, meaning it was too late for many growers to do anything about it.

Sales are slightly behind schedule this year as clients are waiting on packers issuing contracts.



This year there were larger ware yields than expected in eastern countries so demand is not as high for exports. A lack of storage in the west has put pressure on price. There are issues with exports going to the canary islands – potatoes are being rejected for too much soil on them (the weather at harvesting has not helped this at all this year).

Prospects looking forward – a stronger demand for the Christmas rush followed by a January lull. Could be storage issues. A shortage of salad and baking varieties may be seen. Seed availability could become a problem as planting areas decrease due to all other changes in the market.

There are nine climate change focus farms in Scotland. Keep up to date with their activities at



www.farmingforabetterclimate.org

Meetings are free to attend and all farmers are welcome.

For Ardoch of Gallery, contact farm facilitator David Ross in the SRUC Stonehaven Office on 01569 762 305 or david.ross@sac.co.uk

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