

Climate change focus farms.

Open meeting at Glenkilrie on Wednesday 13th October 2010.

This was the first climate change focus farm event at Glenkilrie and aimed to highlight some of the initiatives that the group will consider over the three year project. Glenkilrie is owned and farmed by David and Morag Houstoun and covers some 1000ha with around 150 beef cows and 1000 ewes.

Peter Lindsay from the SAC Perth office is the Farm Facilitator.

The aim of the open meeting was to introduce how farmers can turn managing carbon to their advantage though identifying and minimising hidden costs to the business whilst improving production and learning from others as part of the farmer community group. The meeting focused on livestock issues. Peter Lindsay gave a brief introduction and welcome to the group and then handed over to the following speakers:

- **Scottish Governments perspective – Antje Branding, Scottish Government.**

Antje Branding noted that currently all sectors are being encouraged to take a voluntary steps towards minimising greenhouse gas losses and how the Cabinet Secretary was keen that agriculture plays its part. The Scottish Government has been encouraged by the industry taking the climate change issue on board and successful mitigation measures would hopefully lessen the need for mandatory measures to be introduced at a later date.

- **Welcome and explanation of the day – Graham Kerr, Group Manager Environment and Design, SAC**

Graham Kerr gave an overview of the Farming for a Better Climate initiative and how measures would focus on practical steps on the farm. Participation in the discussion group could lead to increased productivity and efficiency on the farm and also help to work towards climate change targets for Scotland. It would be up to local farmers in the group to decide how they wanted to take the project forward and what they wanted to discuss; today's meeting would focus on livestock productivity and the associated benefits that it could bring to the business.

- **Overview and welcome to Glenkilrie, David Houstoun, Farmer**

David Houstoun gave an overview of the farm and explained how he was initially reticent to joint the project but saw that the Farming for a Better Climate key action areas were something that did fit with what he wanted to achieve for the farm and could see how this could benefit his business. The project did have scope to be quite wide ranging, so David was looking forward to the forthcoming meetings and working with local farmers over the next 3 years.

- **Livestock condition scoring – Jimmy Hyslop, Beef Specialist, SAC.**

Converting the inputs to the business into saleable products with maximum efficiency was Jimmy's key message.



Jimmy spoke about condition scoring and how it can help monitor livestock condition and therefore better manage the annual production cycle. Livestock farmers need cheap grass over the summer months so as stock are going into the winter with a decent fat content, allowing some loss of condition over the winter balanced alongside a tailored ration to keep more profit in the business. Jimmy and David, with help from David's stockman Neil, put three cows through the crush to give farmers the opportunity to test out some of the condition scoring techniques that Jimmy shared with the group. Jimmy stated it was important to get young calving cows right in terms of nutrition to maintain fertility and reduce calving problems and so farmers should look to assess their stock and if necessary, split into groups based on condition to better control feed intake.

- **Forage analysis – Jimmy Hyslop, Beef Specialist, SAC.**

Jimmy took the group back to basics and outlined the importance of knowing the quality of forage you are feeding your stock. With the help of some real figures, Jimmy illustrated how easy it can be to either over or underfeed stock if you were just assuming a standard silage quality.



Peter had brought along 4 samples of silage and asked farmers to grade how good they thought the silage was. The silage voted as best by the group was not the best representative in terms of feed quality.

One of the poorest looking samples, a red clover silage, actually came out top in terms of feed value but was rated worst by our group, illustrating the importance of getting silage analysed.

Date of next meeting

There will be a follow up meeting for the discussion group before the end of November. Members will be notified by email/telephone. All farmers welcome to join the group; its free and members will be able to help influence the topics, speakers or sites to visit for future meetings.

Further information and contact details

Contact Peter Lindsay, SAC Glenkilrie Farm Facilitator at SAC Perth Office on 01738 636611; email peter.lindsay@sac.co.uk, or Rebecca Audsley, Climate Change Manager on 01292 525089; email rebecca.audsley@sac.co.uk .

Alternatively you can visit the website at www.farmingforabetterclimate.org or email a general enquiry to climatechange@sac.co.uk