

# Climate change focus farm information day



Open meeting at Torr Farm on Wednesday 15<sup>th</sup> September 2010.

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*This was the first climate change focus farm event to highlight some of the initiatives that the group will consider over the three year project. Torr is a 420ha organic dairy with some beef plus grass and arable silage, run by brother and sister team Ross and Lee Paton.*

Although a wet and blustery day at Torr, the climate change focus farm information day still attracted 65 participants from around south west Scotland. The aim of the open meeting was to highlight how can farmers 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.

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

Graham Kerr gave a brief introduction to the project and its support from Scottish Government and NFUS, thanking Ross and Lee for their willingness to participate. Graham noted that the focus farm would be facilitated by Gillian Reid, SAC Farm Business Consultant at the Dumfries Office. Through participation in the climate change focus farmer community group, farmers in the South West and wider could benefit from new techniques and practices, improving their farm business. It would be up to local farmers in the group to shape what they wanted to discuss within the bounds of the project.

- **Overview of and welcome to Torr – Ross and Lee Paton, Farmers**

Ross Paton gave an overview of the farm and welcomed the participants. Ross noted that Torr is an organic dairy farm and in common with other farms in the south west, quite wet. Ross explained that he was looking forward to identifying improvements to farm practices at Torr, for example reducing electricity use and considering on-farm renewable energy options, or just looking in more detail at routine practices with the focus farmer group.

- **Why climate change matters - Alan Crichton, NFUS**

Alan noted that NFUS are delighted to be involved in the climate change discussion as it can be a win:win situation for farmers, with all farmers having the opportunity to be involved. Although farming has reduced its carbon footprint by 20% already since 1990, farmers can still improve nutrient management, energy efficiency of the farm business and capture and storage of carbon.

## **Format of the open meeting**

Participants split into four groups to visit the invited speakers at four 'stations' around the farm for an introduction to some of the potential future topics for wider discussion;

- **Station 1 - Using energy and fuels efficiently plus potential for renewables - Jim Campbell, Environmental Consultant, SAC**

Jim went through some of the money saving opportunities in terms of electricity use for Torr and other dairy farms. Some discussion centred around what would be the best options to consider in terms of cost and payback time. Jim then looked at different renewables focusing on wind turbines and their associated costs and potential issues that may have to be overcome in terms of planning such as grid connection, potential noise and shadow

flicker; significant costs could be incurred through the planning stage with no guarantee of success.

- **Station 2. Optimising application of nutrients - Hugh McClymont, Crichton Royal Farm Manager, SAC**

Hugh gave an entertaining and informative look at grass production at Crichton Royal Farm and how they were getting the best out of their silage crops. Hugh explained how better use of clover and nutrients in slurry through slurry separation and shallow injection had significantly cut the spend on bagged fertiliser whilst reducing their carbon footprint. For example, a slurry tanker containing 10m<sup>3</sup> (2200 gallons) of slurry was worth about £50 at current prices in terms of fertiliser value, so well worth taking this into consideration when planning fertiliser requirements.

- **Station 3. Locking up carbon - Carole Christian, Environmental Consultant, SAC**

Carole had some interesting facts about soils, for example how it could take around 100years for 1cm of topsoil to form, yet this could be lost in overnight if soils at risk of erosion. Carole discussed topics such as adding carbon to soils through FYM and compost application, tillage practices, drainage, tree planting, cover crops and the use of clover in grass rotations and what these practices could mean for the farm carbon balance. These were all topics that could be further explored by the community group with the help of industry specialists at the forthcoming meetings if this was something that the group wanted to know more detail about.

- **Station 4. Optimising livestock management and storage of slurry and manure - Seamus Donnelly, Farm Business Consultant, SAC**

Seamus outlined a number of options that Torr could follow in terms of increasing productivity from the dairy herd such as the number of lactations and age of first calving. Torr already compared favourably with benchmark figures but there were still things that could be done to improve output of milk and beef in terms of greenhouse gas emissions; ideas were presented in terms of financial benefits to Torr (and neatly compared in terms of the number of cars you would have to take off the road to achieve the same carbon savings).

The day closed with a round up of what we had heard, the opportunity for questions and ideas for the next focus farm community group meeting. A number of farmers said that they found the day enjoyable and informative and would definitely attend the next meeting.

### **Date of next meeting**

The next meeting is for farmers on **Tuesday 26<sup>th</sup> October at 10.45 until 14.30 at Torr Farm** and will look at easy ways to get the best out of slurry and manures and what this could mean in terms of cash benefits to the farm. The meeting is free; lunch is provided (but participants are asked to register with Gillian Reid to establish numbers for catering).

### **Further information and contact details**

Contact Gillian Reid, SAC Torr Farm Facilitator at Dumfries Office on 01387 261 172 [Gillian.reid@sac.co.uk](mailto:Gillian.reid@sac.co.uk) or Rebecca Audsley, Climate Change Manager on 01292 525089 [rebecca.audsley@sac.co.uk](mailto:rebecca.audsley@sac.co.uk) .

Alternatively you can visit the website at [www.farmingforabetterclimate.org](http://www.farmingforabetterclimate.org) or email a general enquiry to [climatechange@sac.co.uk](mailto:climatechange@sac.co.uk)