Update from Ardoch

Host Willie Officer gave the group an update of activities at Ardoch since the last meeting

- Caught up with all the ploughing but not yet ploughing heavier potato land due to ground conditions. There seems to be more tattie land available for renting this year than last (still being offered land out and about).
- The tatties that are currently left in the shed have stored really well.
- Potato variety Orchestra will probably be dropped from production for wares (3rd party grower).
- Salad potato area will increase in place of the Orchestra crop, as it is in high demand.
- Hermes variety might struggle now for export with the top riddle size down from 65mm to 55mm.
- The balance of winter wheat sitting in the shed has now been sold.
- Not much change in the spring barley crop - still will be grown on contract with Diageo with the same varieties used this year as were grown last year.
- Daffodils are still about a fortnight away from slower picking starting.
- This year’s fertiliser is all ordered, the logistics might be tricky due to business of hauliers but using the farm’s own lorry should help with this.
- First application of fertilisers (liquid N) went on winter barley the morning of the meeting and some of the 2nd winter wheats have also had nitrogen to kick start them.
Oilseed rape management
Philip Marr, Agronomist from Agrii looked at two varieties of OSR

More problems are now being seen in OSR crops in terms of molybdenum and boron. These are not thought about as much when applying fertiliser to the crop. Molybdenum is one of the main nutrients that OSR requires.

Philip commented that there are many different varieties of OSR but in the north we really need to focus on using the best variety for our conditions with high disease resistance, especially for light leaf spot.

Too thick a canopy of OSR can restrict yield as it prevents the sunlight from reaching the bottom leaves that are still trying to photosynthesise and keep the plants producing. Application of too much nitrogen, too early on in the season usually causes this problem of too thick a canopy.

Pigeon damage was mentioned in that it may in fact benefit the crop slightly and give better yields due to the pigeons changing the physiology of the crop meaning it throws out more laterals and is shorter in height.

The next month’s growth in the OSR crops is essential; in-particular the growth of root hairs to increase nutrient uptake.
Comparing varieties
Philip compared two varieties of OSR - Incentive and Extrovert.

Incentive
- 7 plants in the circular 1/10m² weighing 55g.
- 70 plants/m² weighing 550g
- Green area index (GAI): $550 \times 0.8 = 440$ then $440 / 1000 = 0.44$
- Aiming for a GAI of 3.5 and for every GAI the crop needs 50kg N.
- So in the crop just now there is 22kg of N ($50 \times 0.44$)
- Soil N above and below 30mm combined was approx. 13kg so the crop overall has 45kg N in at just now.
- Needs another 140kg N for the canopy, split over 2 applications.
- Soil temperature on the day was 5.9 degrees (aiming for 6 to allow fertiliser application) so the advice would be as soon as ground conditions allow go with 70kg N just now and another 70kg N in a fortnight (based on a 5t yield).
- To push crop for a 6t yield at yellow bud stage, add another 75kg N.

Extrovert
- 4 plants in the circular 1/10m² weighing 62g.
- 40 plants/m² weighing 620g
- GAI: $620 \times 0.8 = 496$ then $496 / 1000 = 0.496 = 0.50$
- In the crop just now there is 25kg ($50 \times 0.50$) combined with soil N results.
- Advice was to go on with 90kg N for the canopy (this crop is more forward than the incentive).
Cover Cropping at Pert
Alan Johnston from Kings Crops

The group went to look at a field of radish cover crop at Pert by kind permission of Ewan Swanson. Ewan and Alan explained how it had performed and how it was looking.

It came through the ground quickly, a few days after sowing it was appearing through. It was drilled into stubbles and rolled to get good soil contact.

The oil radish is not a host of clubroot but mustard is and this makes oil radish a good option for OSR growers.

It can achieve good bulks if sown in the spring, an example of a field of rye and vetch in East Lothian produced 840g/m² of bulk which multiplied up to a fresh weight of 4.8t/ha and dry matter weight of 3.1t/ha which was worked out it provided 53kg N/ha. Radish on its own has been seen to reach up to 1.1kg/m² fresh weight and 62kg N/ha.

The plan for the cover crop at Pert will be to plough down (no pulverising required) then sow the field into spring barley. The top dressing application of N will be cut back slightly in this field.

Another point mentioned was that flea beetle love radish crops so this should also be kept in mind for OSR growers.

There isn’t normally much slug damage seen in cover crops but vetch is one of the crops that can show damage. Also noted that vetch sown in the autumn doesn’t seem to produce much bulk or do much growing.

Another point noted that was having the crops in the soil seem to have made the ground easier to work and plough up in current conditions than fields of stubble.

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 SAC Stonehaven Office on 01569 762 305 or david.ross@sac.co.uk

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