Farm Forestry

A CONFOR SPECIAL REPORT

Confor
Promoting forestry and wood

INTRODUCTION

Andrew Barbour

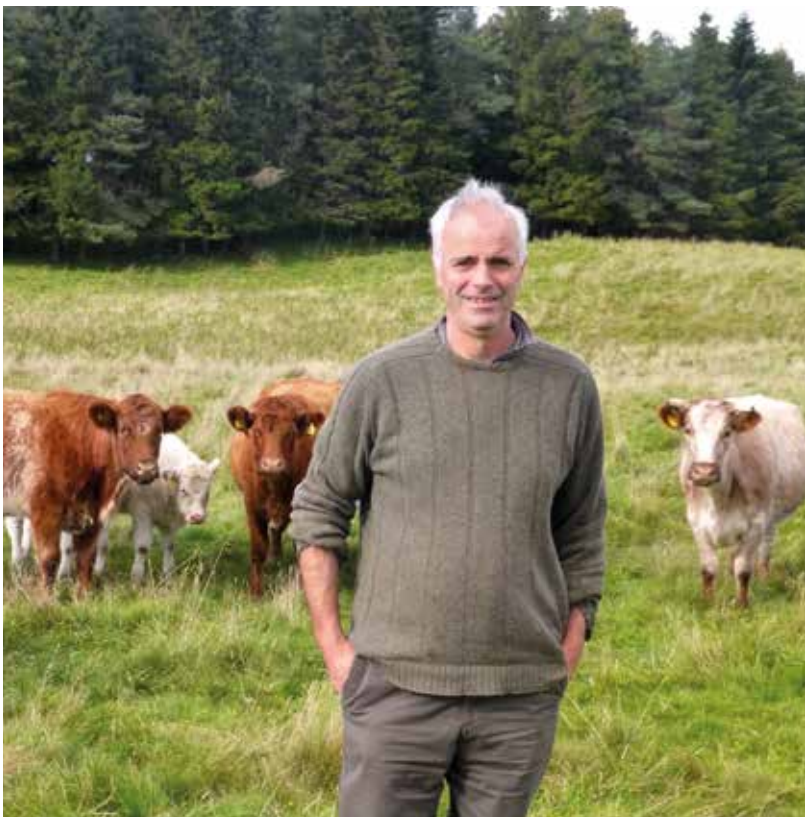
Livestock and Woodland

Livestock or Woodland – so much of the debate about land use in Scotland in recent decades has been built around these two apparently competing interests. But does it have to be this way? "No' is the answer of course, although it has often appeared to be otherwise. On the more extensive farms it is possible to plant trees to benefit the livestock enterprise and to create a valuable source of capital for the future. On the smaller farms the scope is reduced, but there is still always room to farm with trees which will add to the profitability of the farm.

Look at the experience of those who have gone this road. By taking the poorer ground out of agriculture – as long as there is access for the eventual lorries to take the timber out – the farmer who invests in trees can get the ground to work in a more efficient fashion. Trees will grow on the poorer soils which can sometimes only support lower levels of stock or indeed, may present management problems to famers. Liver fluke is the commonest quoted problem here but there can be others. Perhaps most importantly though is the potential of new woodland to improve shelter on the better ground reserved for the livestock enterprise which in turn can improve the performance of the animals. Increasingly, farmers are getting more out of their grass parks which lend themselves to more intensive grass management – the paddock system honed by the New Zealanders – and this approach can free up the land that suits this type of management less well to grow trees as one option well worth looking at.

So will growing trees make you money if you go down this route? Our collective experience is that it can, provided that it is done right. As government grants can create positive cashflow in the early years, the risk is taken out of this to a large degree.

But growing commercial crops of trees is only one option for the farmer who realises that in a changing climate improving shelter for the livestock enterprise makes long term sense. Creating new pastoral woodland which, in time, is grazed by the stock is one way to have your cake and eat it. The trees can provide a fuel wood source in areas where this demand exists and while it is growing can improve the performance of the livestock.



The farmer who invests in trees can get the ground to work in a more efficient fashion.

Woodland on farms creates value, as measured by the pounds and pence, when done with the existing land uses in mind. But woodland creation brings much more than just money – it can make a great place to live, for both us and for the wildlife that surrounds us.

Andrew Barbour farms Bonskeid Estate, near Pitlochry.

CASE STUDY

Kilsyth

Complementing agriculture

Archie Macgregor and his son John produce prize winning sheep and cattle on the upland farm of Allanfauld near Kilsyth.

During 2015-16 they planted 87 hectares of their hill ground with a mix of commercial conifers and native broadleaves.

Scottish Woodlands Ltd have supported the Macgregor family throughout the project from initial ground surveys and grant application, to implementation and maintenance works. The woodlands have been created to diversify and increase the long-term value of their land asset. Agriculture remains the principle focus of the holding and the new planting integrates with and provides benefits for their existing successful livestock activities while producing a positive short-term cash flow to allow investment elsewhere on the farm.

The business case for tree planting at Allanfauld includes:

- making better use of less productive areas of the farm;
- creating over 50 hectares of productive timber crop with good access which will provide future income;
- accessing the new grant support for fencing, which has improved boundary and livestock management as well as protecting the young woodlands;
- providing future shelter for livestock on the exposed hill;
- creation of native woodlands along steep riparian areas to reduce erosion, aid livestock management and enhance biodiversity;
- create positive cash flow over five years to allow investment in other projects on the farm. Some areas planted are eligible to retain Basic Payment Scheme payments.

For more information contact:
Andy MacLachlan, Scottish Woodlands, Fenwick,
Tel: 01560 600489 or 07900 698447
Email: andrew.maclachlan@scottishwoodlands.co.uk
www.scottishwoodlands.co.uk

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CASE STUDY

Scottish Borders

Securing income and creating choices for the future

Howden Farm is a 285 hectare farm in the Scottish Borders, privately owned by a local farming family. Part of the farm is geographically separated from the rest of the property making this area increasingly difficult and costly to manage as a productive farm unit for beef and sheep production.

The farmer therefore decided to diversify the business by creating a woodland within the separate land parcel. This will create a commercial and productive woodland to provide an alternative source of income in the future.

Tilhill Forestry was asked to design and implement the woodland creation scheme and take care of all the necessary grant applications and site surveys.

The new 52 hectare Haremoss Woodland has established well and has made the farm unit easier to manage, reduced financial risk to the farm and increased the capital value of the land. It has allowed for diversification of the farm business without affecting the financial viability of the farm unit. All woodland creation costs were covered by the Scottish Rural Development Programme (SRDP) grant funding. Land planted under the current SRDP funding also continues to be eligible for the Basic Payment Scheme.

The woodland has provided several valuable choices. The family can reap the benefits of their woodland for many generations to come, or they now have the potential to sell the woodland once fully established to release capital for farm improvements.

For more information contact:
Tilhill Forestry, 40 High Street, Jedburgh,
Roxburghshire, TD8 6DQ
Tel: 01835 863244
Email: cborders@tilhill.com
www.tilhill.com

Tilhill FORESTRY

CASE STUDY

Grampian estate

Productive pine on a Highland estate

This traditional Grampian estate combines forestry, tenanted farms, and lowland and upland sporting interests.

Scottish Woodlands Ltd were engaged to implement a large reforestation scheme incorporating 307 hectares of native Scots pine and 70 hectares of commercially planted Scots pine.

Scottish Woodlands Ltd implemented this large scheme from the concept stage. The scheme was generally well received by the various stakeholders and this process was beneficial to creating the final design of the scheme to meet the objectives and this ensured a smooth process once the application for funding was made.

The estate has the prospect of a well-established quality woodland for the future, the opportunity to reinvest in farming activities, and to use forestry to restructure previously marginal hill land to be more productive for both timber and grazing.

The objectives of the scheme included:

- diversification of hill land use on the estate;
- creation of a productive timber crop where access was suitable, which will provide future income;
- grant-funded new deer fencing, which has improved wider deer management issues as well as protecting the young woodlands within the fence;
- creating new native woodland habitat for a number of Biodiversity Action Plan species;
- creating positive cash flow from year one, allowing for investment across other areas of the estate.

For more information contact:
Neil Crookston, Scottish Woodlands, Fochabers,
Tel: 01343 821 338 or 07917 223 920
Email: neil.crookston@scottishwoodlands.co.uk
www.scottishwoodlands.co.uk

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CASE STUDY

Peeblesshire

Restoring a landscape for lower input farming

Following extensive deforestation during the First World War, Netherund Farm in Peeblesshire, farmed by Andrew Adamson, is now situated in an almost treeless area.

Netherund comprises 223 hectares of marginal arable and hill land, stocked with 150 store cattle and 820 hill ewes and lambs, and growing 32 hectares of wheat, spring barley, fodder rape and swedes.

There are six discrete areas of woodland on the farm, all over fifteen years old, ranging from 0.13 to 2.6 hectares in size. Four areas are predominantly Sitka spruce yielding productive timber. The other two areas are due for replanting. Many of the fields are have mature 'policy' trees that escaped the wartime deforestation.

Andrew is replanting felled woodland and extending native woodland areas. These include fencing for natural regeneration in wet areas, replacement specimen trees to replace dying veteran policy trees, and planting new shelter belts.

Land lost to trees will have minimal impact on the stocking rate and future subsidy payments to the farm. The replanting scheme will generate a surplus of grants over cost establishment of over £5,000 over 15 years. The new planting of native woodland on 2.4 hectares will generate a surplus of £3,100 over costs of establishment over 15 years.

The woodland is important to Andrew for many reasons, one of which is, 'I grew up with them and can't imagine the farm without them'. Ongoing maintenance, extension and restoration of the trees on this farm will repay now and in future generations.

The trees afford many benefits to which it is difficult to assign monetary values:

- shelter and shade for stock;
- valuable habitat and wildlife corridors;
- rearing ground for around 300 pheasants;
- a free supply of woodfuel;
- aesthetic appeal, both for Andrew, and to add value to the shoot.

For more information contact:
www.forestry.gov.uk/scotland
Tel: 0300 067 6156

Forestry Commission Scotland
Coimisean na Coilltearachd Alba

ANALYSIS

Chris Badenoch

Woodland, forestry and sheep production

The economic success of hill farms depends upon the output of the breeding ewe. Capital is short for fencing, winter-keep, away-wintering or for building wintering sheds. Cattle can only ever be part of the answer, unless they can be out-wintered with little winter feed. Many hill-farms are tenanted and so there is no tradition or understanding of woodland management or of its attendant game production.

The current system of upland grassland farming demands a lambing percentage in excess of 120%, much larger hefts per shepherd, and seriously effective utilisation of in-bye pastures with a minimum of bought-in winter feed. Inevitably, labour reduction has meant less daily movement of stock to utilise the hill pasture. The proportion of in-by ground on many hill farms is only 10-16%. This leaves a huge area of hill which is under-utilised: about 900kg dry-matter per acre each season. The sheep are able to select the more digestible and nutritious plants, and leave the rest. This permits the big 'biomass' producers, Purple Moor Grass, Moor Mat Grass, Tufted Hair Grass & Rushes to expand year on year at the expense of the better Bent-Fescues. Further, this mat of dense vegetation has more rapid run-off leading to downstream flooding, and prevents adequate nutrient (urine and faecal) return to the hill soils. Muirburn can only address some of this.

Spot 'improvements' on the hill by fertiliser application and even small-scale reseeding have been shown by the Hill Farming Research Organisation to be short-lived and less cost-effective than more intensive grazing through the summer.

The grazing ewe needs higher planes of nutrition at three specific points of her year: steaming-up, for adequate ovulation before mating; later pregnancy, when the growing foetus is making high demand; and just after lambing and into lactation, just after winter, when her body reserves are low.

The aim must be to address these three periods through accessible, quality grazing by encouraging bent-fescue grasses through removal of the huge biomass competitors. It is obvious that the better, usually lower, areas of 'hill' should be managed to this end, providing rest for much-needed in-bye (for twins), the provision of more improved 'hill' grazing for ewes-and-singles, for growing lambs and for restoration of the ewe's body condition.

This requires that newer intakes ('paddocks') of the lower hill be much more heavily grazed to eliminate the under-used species and to encourage bent-fescue swards. Cattle have been used for this. But there is no capital for such fencing. With a bit of care, properly designed forest blocks, utilising the associated grant-aided fencing can provide those paddocks, will provide additional shelter for the sheep, associated timber and timber products, game and wildlife, and some flood relief.

Chris Badenoch has worked with the Agricultural Research Council, Natural Environment Research Council, Nature Conservancy Council, and as Regional Operations Manager with SNH. He was a founder of the Farming & Wildlife Group and Tweed Forum. He is currently an ecologist on the South Scotland Regional Forestry Forum.

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Contact Confor

0131 240 1410 eleanor@confor.org.uk @forestsandwood www.confor.org.uk

Confor: promoting forestry and wood represents more than 1500 businesses across the UK. Its members cover the entire supply chain, from nurseries through to sawmills and beyond.

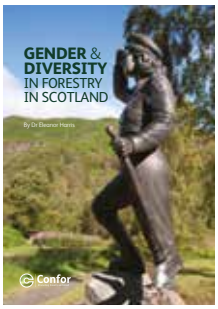
Confor promotes sustainable forestry and wood-using businesses through political engagement, market promotion and supporting its members' competitiveness.

It produces regular videos and publications on the big issues:

Our Forests, Our People

A short film explaining how the sector works

A Thriving Forestry and Timber Sector in a Post-Brexit World



Gender & Diversity in Forestry in Scotland