

News from the Farm Advisory Service:



Webinar catch up - Schmallenberg Virus

As the number of confirmed Schmallenberg Virus cases continues to rise in South West Scotland, farmers are becoming increasingly concerned for lambing and calving season.

The impact of the virus can be devastating, with infections resulting in low scanning results, abortions and foetal deformities.

Catch up with our webinar recording from last month, where we learn more about the virus, including how it's spread, the symptoms, testing and potential ways to mitigate risk in the future.

Alix Ritchie from Farmstrong also talks about wellbeing as we approach the lambing and calving season, and Michael Goldie from Harpicroft Farm in Ayrshire discusses how he dealt with a Schmallenberg outbreak both physically and mentally, and how making a plan of recovery early on helped him move forward and think about the farming year ahead.

Find our video by using the QR code or the link below
www.youtube.com/FASScot



The potential of the hemp crop in Scotland

Is the hemp crop about to become mainstream in Scotland?

A study published in March 2025 titled: "Advancing a Sustainable Scottish Supply Chain for Industrial Hemp and Co-Products", identified the potential of this highly versatile crop as a profitable break crop for farmers, the source of a wide range of natural products for industry and as an excellent method of carbon sequestration. It was funded by the Industrial Biotechnology Innovation Centre and Scottish Enterprise and delivered by SAC Consulting.



The world hemp market is projected to grow 400% by 2030 as demand increases for biobased materials to replace products derived from fossil fuels. Industrial hemp is used across sectors such as agriculture, automotives, bio-energy, construction, food and beverages, furniture, paper, personal care, recycling, and textiles.

Hemp crop trials in Scotland in 2024 confirmed that hemp grows well, particularly across central and eastern regions. Once established (late April/early May) growth is rapid with typically 95-110 days between sowing and cutting in August, by which time crops have grown over 2 metres in height. The cut crop then relies on retting in the field; a 4-6-week process that requires proximity to the soil and moisture for soil microbes to break up the lignin and cellulose in the fibre before rowing up and baling when the crop has dried.

The study assessed the feasibility of setting up a grower co-operative supplying a decortication and cleaning plant, processing up to 12,000 tonnes per year grown from 2000 ha. Capital cost of the decortication and cleaning plant is estimated at around £5 million, preferably with significant investment from farmers to obtain added value from the hemp crop.

Barriers to entry include a less-than-straightforward licencing system, limited demand from the construction industry for natural products and a lack of incentives to pump-prime the development of a hemp grower co-operative and the associated processing facilities. Establishment of a new bio-fibre steering committee for Scotland looks to be progressing and will hopefully increase momentum for a clear policy framework and industry incentives for biofibre, together with a government-backed carbon credit platform to valourise the crops' contribution to the circular economy. Progress here would greatly aid the establishment of a network of hemp and other fibre crop co-ops in Scotland.

Mark Bowsher-Gibbs, SAC Consulting

Further information can be found in our full article at:
www.fas.scot/article/the-potential-of-the-hemp-crop-in-scotland/



Free Events

At the Farm Advisory Service we run a range of events both online and in-person.

Visit www.fas.scot/events to sign up or contact the advice line and we'll help you get booked on.

Soil Association – Planning for Change: Whole Farm Plans on Organic Farms

Online, 9th April, 12:30pm - 1:30pm

Want to catch up on our previous webinars?

Visit www.youtube.com/FASScot for our webinar recordings

Diversification on a Shoestring



As of 2022, 58% of Scottish farms have diversified beyond traditional agriculture. On average, diversified farms earn £24,200 more annually than those that rely solely on farming.

Small steps can lead to success. Assess your assets, such as unused land or buildings, and explore trends in market demand. Starting with a pop-up event or temporary service can help test ideas before full implementation. Grants, partnerships, and rural business are great networks that can help with funding and share resources. Additionally, free training programs are available through agricultural support networks. Partnering with professionals, such as chefs for farm-to-table ventures or tourism experts for agritourism projects, can help bridge knowledge gaps.

To overcome regulatory and planning barriers, start with permitted development options to minimise legal hurdles. Market competition and uncertainty can be mitigated by targeting niche markets such as eco-tourism, rare-breed livestock, or wellness retreats. Think of cost-effective marketing strategies, including social media and word-of-mouth, to build a loyal customer base. Time and labour constraints can be addressed by choosing projects that complement existing farm activities. Automating tasks and streamlining operations through simple technology, such as booking systems, can improve efficiency. Family members and local volunteers can also play a role in easing the workload. Collaborating with other local farmers on shared marketing and sales initiatives can further enhance financial resilience.

Farm diversification does not always require a significant investment. By leveraging existing resources, collaborating with others, and starting small, you can build a resilient and profitable business. The journey begins with a single step - what will yours be?

Sterre Vester, SAC Consulting

To read the full article, please visit our Milk Manager News publication at:

<https://www.fas.scot/article/diversification-on-a-shoestring/>

Scotland's Farm Advisory Service is funded by the Scottish Government. It is delivered by SAC Consulting, part of Scotland's Rural College, and Ricardo Energy and Environment.

If you need more advice on any topic, the Farm Advisory Service has a range of support and help available:

Advice line

For free telephone advice on a wide variety of topics including cross compliance, water framework directive requirements, climate change and other technical issues call us on **0300 323 0161** or email advice@fas.scot. The advice line operates between 9am and 5pm Monday to Friday.

Bespoke Advice and Grants

FAS can also help you to increase the profitability and sustainability of your farming business through Scottish Government grants including Integrated Land Management Plans (ILMPs) – worth up to £2,000.

The ILMP will identify opportunities and cost savings for your business, based on an independent and confidential assessment of your business by an experienced farm business adviser of your choosing. As part of your plan you can choose to benefit from up to two further specialist advice plans.

Online

Our website contains articles, videos and much more at www.fas.scot