

Net Zero Arran



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The Net Zero Arran Group is comprised of businesses located across the island of Arran, with a range of different enterprise types and business models but all with a common interest in better understanding carbon and promoting sustainable land practices, in relation to climate change, and increasingly, conservation. The group has been active for 4 years now and the support of the Farm Advisory Service has allowed the group to build their profile, expand their knowledge transfer potential and play its part in normalising farm level carbon and climate change discussions.



Over the last year the group has held five meetings, covering a range of topics that included collaborative cropping, soil health planning, livestock nutrition, animal health and welfare planning and biodiversity baselining. Engagement from the group remains high and feedback is consistently good, with participants applying for support under the Preparing for Sustainable Farming (PSF) Fund, the National Lottery Heritage Fund, Agri-Environment Climate Scheme (AECS) and latterly the group has begun development of a Nature Restoration Fund (NRF) proposal.

Key Interests

- Over the last year the group has been keen to broaden the discussion out from carbon and include aspects relating to technical efficiencies and conservation planning.
- The importance of lime and the impact of incorrect pH levels of uptake of inorganic fertilisers was a hard-hitting message for many.
- The animal health and welfare meeting was particularly well attended, with members wanting to better understand when preventative treatment of livestock with antibiotics is justified and when no action is the correct action.
- While the collaborative cropping project hit problems with the weather and ground conditions, both farmers are keen to give it another go in 2024 and will carbon audit to see what impact it has in 2023.
- The group has expressed an interest in developing a whole island plan for nature conservation, something that can be done in cooperation with NatureScot.

Group Successes

Of all the meetings held, the soil health meeting was probably the biggest success in terms of impact, following the meeting the group crossed the threshold of 100 soil samples analysed and at the time of writing is up at 127 and since the soil benchmarking began the average soil pH has risen from 5.12 to 5.37. Soil and grassland management continues to be of interest, with some members requesting the return of consultants Robert Ramsay and Lorna Galloway.

Our attempt at “Collaborative Cropping” turned out to be a tough lesson learned. In an attempt to increase agricultural output and reduce reliance on purchased straw two group members planned to grow an extra field of barley on ground that had not been cropped in 20 years. While a good idea and something that could be of great benefit, poor weather conditions meant that the grain could not be harvested and the subsequent bales were of poorer quality – but both parties will try this again in 2024.

What the Members Said:

In relation to the soil health planning meeting:-

“From my point of view, as the host, it was a very successful and informative day. I’m always a bit hesitant in discussing my method of farming with other people as you never know what other people think of you and your methods. Friday gave me a good confidence boost, lots of good discussion and pointed me in the right direction for improvement and lots more grass”.

“If anyone else is thinking of hosting a meeting on their farm I would 100% encourage them to do it. Having three consultants on the farm, all coming at the same problem from different angles was extremely beneficial”.

In relation to the livestock nutrition meeting:-

"Really interesting meeting, now I have to go and bolus my bull".

Action Plan for 2024/25

At the final meeting this year the group were asked to feedback on the kinds of topics they would want to investigate from summer 2024 onwards:-

1. Farm scale renewables – the topic has proven extremely popular with farmers on the mainland and there are very specific barriers to viable renewable projects on the island that could be unpicked with the correct speakers and contributors.
2. Grazing strategies and grassland management – a topic that builds on the successes from the soil meeting and integrates the livestock discussions in 2023, aiming to improve the quality of grassland pastures and grazing across the island.
3. Predator control – the island is geographically located in such a way that it could be a haven for ground-nesting birds coming up the Clyde. However, survey data suggests that the island has relatively few waders and local farmers blame a perceived increase in the number of crows. A meeting to discuss predator control could help bolster wader numbers.
4. Farm buildings, design and the environment – the group would like to explore best shed designs to promote good animal welfare, safety and working conditions.
5. The island has an annual Festival of Food and Farming and this is something the group would like to present at, showcasing the positive steps the farmers on the island have taken in the past few years to members of the general public, to build a better understanding and appreciation of action to deliver quality food, actions for climate change and to build biodiversity.



Actions

- Lining up informative, passionate speakers always takes time and should be a priority to hit the ground running in the summer.
- Identification of suitable venues going forward, ideally all members should have the chance to host but that will be driven by the willingness of individuals and that topics are relevant to the host farms.
- Group chats are becoming more widely used by other FAS Connect groups, this may be an effective way of sending quick updates and gauging enthusiasm and thoughts on a topic but with growing member numbers could become unwieldy – something to investigate.