

NE Organic Discussion Group

Newsletter



February 2021

Welcome to the February edition of the Newsletter. I hope you all are all well and thankfully the weather has taken a turn for the better. With the successful roll out of the vaccination programme we can hopefully look forward to a relaxation of the Covid-19 restrictions.

In this edition of the Newsletter, I have included information on rotational grazing; a link to the organic oilseed rape technical guide; a link to the Organic Research Centre 40-year celebration podcast and anniversary hub; some succession planning funding and forthcoming meeting information.

As mentioned in the January Newsletter there will be the first online event of the year in March. It is a mini conference and there will be two sessions. One on Tuesday the 23rd of March and the other on Thursday the 25th of March. I hope you can make at least one of the meetings if not both. Details of both events can be seen below. Also, as I said in January later in the year, I hope to have another virtual farm tour so if you have any suggestions of organic farms you would like to visit but never had the opportunity also please let me know. Online presents an ideal opportunity to see somewhere we could never go for an actual visit in a half day.

Tuesday 23rd March 7.30pm till 9.00pm

This the first of two meetings of our mini organic conference.

The main topic will be carbon footprinting which is very topical just now and a subject all farmers must be familiar with and take on board. We have two very knowledgeable speakers in Anna Sellars who is a rural business consultant with SAC Consulting. She previously worked for the Organic Research Centre and is now involved with AgRE Calc (the SAC Consulting Carbon Footprinting Tool). Also, Dr Laurence Smith who is a lecturer in agroecology at the Royal Agricultural University. He was also previously at the Organic Research Centre where he did his PhD on a comparison of emissions between organic and conventional farmers and has done a lot of work on greenhouse gas mitigation. They will give an overview of carbon footprinting in agriculture, emissions from organic vs. conventional/non-organic production systems, followed by a discussion of policy and business opportunities for organics and carbon. There will be time for questions and discussion.

Looking to the future this will be followed by David Lawson a grassland agronomist at SRUC who will briefly tell us about the potential grass and clover has for being used to produce protein.

Two topics of current interest and a meeting not to be missed by any organic farmer.



Thursday 25th March 7.30pm till 9.00pm

The livestock half of a mini-organic conference. Two topics organic livestock markets and the value of dynamic health planning and an integrated approach leading to increased efficiency. There will also be a short “ask the vet session”. An ideal opportunity to ask those burning questions.

We have two great speakers. Lesley Wylie a consultant in the SAC Consulting livestock team. She previously worked as a cattle buyer for a meat processor, building relationships with farmers, advising on nutrition, breeding and marketing. She has a good understanding of the red meat supply chain and the challenges within it. So, an ideal speaker on livestock marketing. She will cover -

- Available Markets
- Market Specification and how to hit the spec
- Challenges

Tim Geraghty is a SRUC Veterinary Centre Manager at Craibstone and has many years of experience of veterinary matters. He has an interest in dynamic health planning and the integration of livestock health issues with nutrition and management systems which is the organic philosophy.

In addition to speaking there will be time for discussion and questions.

Grass Production

Looking forward to spring I thought I would include a bit on grass production and a reminder of the meeting on 12th March 2020 when Ewan Johnston gave a presentation on grassland management using paddock grazing. Covering grass varieties, methods and the calculation of requirements. His main take home messages were that rotational grazing can increase grass utilisation by 50% and paddock grazing can further increase it by 90% which leads to increased profit. I have attached a copy of Ewan’s presentation and a rotational grazing fact sheet.

Organic Oilseed Rape

The technical guide written following the Knowledge Transfer Innovation Fund - KTIF project (SCottish Organic CANola - SCOCAN) can be found at [Scientific Poster Template - Portrait SRUC](#)

Funding

Scottish Government lifts restrictions on succession planning funding

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As the saying goes – tomorrow is not promised. As such, it is important to plan ahead to make sure you get to where you want to be. Whether you're starting a new business or planning to retire, succession planning is vital to protecting the future of your farming business and moving you in the right direction.

The Scottish Government recently announced changes to funding requirements for succession planning. This means farming businesses can now access **up to £1,000 in funding** through the [Farm Advisory Service \(FAS\)](#) for specialist advice on succession planning – without the need for a prior Integrated Land Management Plan (ILMP).

This change in funding streamlines the route to accessing support, saving farming businesses valuable time and effort.

Do you have a plan in place for when your circumstances change?

The average age of farmers in Scotland is over 50 and it's estimated that less than 50% of farm businesses have established a succession plan. Succession can be a tricky subject to broach for many as it may involve awkward conversations among family members or colleagues. However, if handled correctly and at the right time, succession planning can provide certainty for the longer term.

Yet, doing this alone can be daunting. Enlisting the help of a professional adviser to lead discussions can remove the anxiety from those initial tricky conversations about your business vision and growth plans. This is where FAS can help. Our advisers are here to help build your confidence when looking at business viability, profitability and technical efficiency; and to provide an independent and objective viewpoint to help guide discussions.

It is recommended that succession plans are reviewed regularly, particularly when there is a change in family circumstances, or to your tenancies or land occupation. Succession planning funding support through FAS is open to all farming and crofting businesses in Scotland at any stage.

Start making plans now for the future of your farming or crofting business to allow for a smooth transition when the time comes to hand over the reins.

To apply for a **succession plan** of up to **£1,000** or for more information, please visit <https://www.fas.scot/specialist-advice>. Alternatively, call **0300 323 0161** (up to 30 minutes of free advice available) or email advice@fas.scot

Organic Research Centre

[ORC February E-Bulletin: Podcasts, Research Digests and more! \(mailchi.mp\)](#)

Other Meetings

Some of you might be interested in the following: -

Mob Grazing Q&A

Outwintering to reduce inputs

Thursday 4 March, 7–8.30pm

Join us to hear from farmers who are outwintering livestock in Scotland on how they do it and why, including saving on housing and machinery costs and improving soil. Hear from:

- Andrew and Robert Brewster of Easter Denoon Farm, Angus, on bale grazing methods, breeding and infrastructure
- Johnnie Balfour of Balbirnie Home Farms, Fife, on integrating mob grazing in an arable system and grazing young stock on cover crops and silage over winter
- Lynn Cassels and Sandra Baer of Lynbreck Croft, Cairngorms, on grazing pigs and cattle in an agroforestry system, including bale grazing for pasture diversity and feeding tree hay

These farmers are also sharing short videos on their outwintering practices throughout February. You can find them on Twitter and Facebook under the hashtags #MobGrazingScot and #outwintering; and you're welcome to join our [Mob Grazing Scotland Facebook group](#).

FREE and open to all.

[Book online](#)

You can also learn more about mob grazing here: www.soilassociation.org/mobgrazing



Watch videos on outwintering, put together by farmers already practising mob grazing [here](#).

You might also be interested in this Agroforestry event:

Agroforestry in Scotland: Discussion groups, Thursday 18 March, 7–8.30pm (*Save the date*)
Funding and grants, growing fruit, trees and livestock, planning and design, planting and protection, wood products, choosing species

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