

NE Organic Discussion Group

Newsletter



February/March 2022

Welcome to the joint February/March Newsletter. This is the last edition of this Newsletter. Depending on funding, which is still being finalised, I hope to have three meetings this coming year. The format will depend on Covid-19 restrictions, but the plan is to have 2 based on farm in the NE and one virtual farm tour based in the successful format of the last two years. There are more national plans, and I will keep everyone informed of what is available under FAS, so look out for news.

As usual the Newsletter contains a mix of articles and news: -

Articles

Perhaps you could? – which suggests a positive future for organic production at present

Guide to looking after your new bull

Integrating trees network: a growing success

Could reintroducing livestock into arable systems increase biodiversity on farms?

Links and news

Philip Day MSc Organic Farming Summary - Significant factors in effective weed control strategies for UK organic arable crops

Farming for a better climate

Grass Varieties Technical Note

As ever, get in touch if you have any questions or want more information.

Perhaps You Could?

Last August the Scottish Government and the Scottish Green Party published its draft shared policy programme within which there was a commitment to at least double the area of land farmed organically in Scotland within the space of this parliament. With the next round of AECS funding window open, it would seem that political will, organic farming, and the funding to facilitate that conversion are now well aligned. Coupled with significantly rising fertiliser prices, it may seem that the organic farming option could look like a good option. So far so interesting, however can the demand for organic produce keep rising to cover the potential extra supply of primary produce that this perfect storm of organic opportunity poses.

It's a risk that significant uplift in volume of organic primary production could lead to oversupply in the small and sometimes volatile organic marketplace. This especially with beef and lamb, and that this could lead to the erosion of the organic premium for producers. This is a genuine concern, and one which has caused problems in the organic marketplace in past years. This concern may be unfounded, the pandemic has exacerbated renewed interest from the general public in organic food and farming. People seem to be more engaged with how and where their food comes from. Organic can offer much here in this space due to its audit trail, and its good credentials with the general public. The Soil Association published its organic market report for 2022. Interesting facts from it include:

1. "The no. 1 reason shoppers cite for buying organic is "No use of Pesticides".
2. Sales of organic certified produce in the UK broke £3bn for the first time ever.
3. Meat, fish and poultry **rose by over 5%** and Soil Association certified organic processors report **strong sales of organic beef**, with expectations that this shall continue right through 2022.

So, the picture would suggest that organic has a long and viable future, and that there is plenty of room for growth in volume of organically farmed produce for some time to come.

Sacha Grierson, Project Manager, Scottish Farm Business Survey, SAC Consulting
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Guide to Looking After Your New Bull

Many of you may have bought a new stock bull at the spring bull sales or plan to buy a bull at the forthcoming May sales. Purchasing a new stock bull is a significant investment – it is often, quite correctly said that the bull is half the herd, so it is important he is given the right care and attention post purchase.

Quarantine

It is important that a bull is given time to settle in and get used to his new surroundings. Some bulls are affected by the stress of travel, showing and the sale ring. Do not simply take him home and pen him where he cannot see what is going on around him on the farm or where he is unable to see other stock. Bulls brought to sales are usually housed from weaning with other bulls and are therefore not used to isolation. Yes, he needs to be quarantined (check what the rules are for your herd) but he needs to see movement and activity going on around about as he will have had a lot of close contact prior to sale with haltering training etc. As soon as he is out of quarantine then close contact with other livestock is advisable.

Diet Changes

Feed management of your new bull post sale is very important. Do not suddenly put him on a restricted diet. Sudden changes in quantity and type of feed can cause stress, which can then lead to fertility issues. He needs controlled condition score loss by gradually reducing the amount of concentrates in his diet. He is not used to a diet of just forage. Make sure that not only is the correct energy and protein fed but there are also the right levels of vitamins and minerals.

Insurance

Make sure you have your new bull insured. Breeder warranty covers bulls for fertility but only for a period of six months. However, breeder warranty will not cover the bull if ability and or fertility is lost due to accident or injury within the six months. Speak to your insurer, so that you know exactly what you are covered for before using your bull.

Exercise

To avoid injury to the bull when he goes out with cows, allow him exercise in a small paddock after the quarantine period is over. This will allow your bull to stretch his legs and exercise the muscles he will be using when serving cows. This preparation is likely to reduce the risk of injury when you start to use the bull.

Sarah Balfour, SAC Beef Consultant sarah.balfour@sac.co.uk

Integrating Trees Network: a Growing Success

Farmers and crofters across Scotland have been sharing their experiences, warts and all, about growing trees as part of their businesses.

The Integrating Trees Network is a farmer and crofter-led initiative supported by Scottish Forestry and the Scottish Government. Its aim is to build up a strong network of farm woodland demonstration sites across Scotland, with the hosts showcasing how growing trees have boosted their business.

Sharing experiences and hearing from those who are actually doing it is all part of the ever-growing **Integrating Trees Network**. The initiative has now run twelve virtual events.

Farming Networks

There are six farm woodland demonstration sites across Scotland, hosted by:

- Andrew Adamson of Messrs W Laird & Son, Netherurd Home Farm, Peeblesshire.
- The Imrie Family of Hillhead Farm, Torrance
- Andrew and Debbie Duffus, Mains of Auchriachan, Tomintoul
- Andrew Whiteford, Burnfoot and Ulzieside Farm, Sanquhar
- The Barbour family, Mains of Fincastle, Pitlochry
- The Lockett family, Knockbain Farm, Dingwall

These fantastic farming hosts have shared their experiences and have produced a number of key practical messages for others who are thinking about growing trees. These are:

- Use well known contractors - not always the cheapest but being recommended by others shows they know their job
- You have to work with what's on the ground, don't try and change it too much or work against it
- You can do the work yourself; you don't need to rely on contractors. It can be a steep learning curve and there are challenges. It just takes time and planning, but there is support out there
- Understand your reasons for wanting to plant trees on your land and your business priorities
- Do your research: evaluate your land and monitor your farm to find out what areas are under performing for livestock but could still be suitable for planting trees

- Ask whether having trees on the farm will help diversify the nature of the business to become more adaptable, and in the future will it provide much needed shelter
- Create a habitat for wildlife: life's pretty boring without wildlife!
- Get going now, I wish I had done what I'm doing now 10 years ago.

Crofting community

When the [Integrating Trees Network](#) was launched there was a fantastic response from the crofters too. The interest was so great that it soon became clear that there should be events run purely for crofters. There have now been two such events – Tea and Trees for Crofters. The events were full of people, sharing their experiences and challenges of tree planting, asking advice and even highlighting how the trees can provide benefits to bullocks and bees.

As the network has developed, more resources have been created to help land managers take that next step to planting trees on their land. Scottish Forestry can also put people in touch with organisations, such as the Woodland Trust's Croft Woodlands Project or for farmers, the Tweed Forum.

Helping tenant farmers grow trees for their business

Adding to these resources. Scottish Forestry is working with the [Scottish Tenant Farmers Association](#) to demonstrate how tree planting can benefit all farm businesses. As part of this work, a new [woodland creation case study](#) has been published, based around a tenanted farm. In the coming months we will be highlighting the case study as it's relevant to anyone looking to plant trees on their land.

Scottish Forestry has also highlighted new simplified [woodland creation guidance](#), [small farm loan scheme](#), and [FAS funding](#) to name but a few and most of all, having access to other farmers and crofters who can share their practical knowledge to those considering woodland creation on whatever scale.

These resources and more can all be found on the [Integrating Trees Network](#) website along with host farmer and farm details and their key messages to consider when planting trees.

Everyone is welcome to book onto these free virtual online events. This is a farmer and crofter-led network so please get in touch and let us know what topics you want us to discuss. Drop lyn.white@forestry.gov.scot or Hilary.Grant@gov.scot an email.

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Could Reintroducing Livestock into Arable Systems Increase Biodiversity on Farms?

Opportunity to get involved in a research project!

Integrating livestock into arable systems is thought to help increase soil organic matter and keep competitive weeds under control whilst reducing input costs, but could livestock also provide a much-needed lifeline for biodiversity on farms?

Rochelle is a PhD student at SRUC Aberdeen trying to answer this question. During the summer months she will be measuring biodiversity on farms across North East and Central Scotland. In particular, she will be monitoring bat activity and nocturnal insects. Bats feed on many species of crop pests and pesky midges and being toward the top of the food chain they are a great indicator of ecosystem health. Nocturnal insects are often overlooked when it comes to talking about pollinators, however there are over 2500 species of moth in the UK alone. That is a lot of pollination that happens after sunset!

This study aims to find out if and how integrated crop-livestock systems benefit farmland biodiversity. Rochelle will also be researching how landscape features, such as crop diversity and grasslands, affect highly mobile species like bats and moths.

Want to get involved?

If you farm a mixed crop-livestock or a stockless arable farm and would like to take part, please contact Rochelle.kennedy@sruc.ac.uk (Farms do not need to be organic).

Bat activity will be measured by placing bat detectors on the farm for a week during the summer months. Nocturnal insects will be collected using light traps on one night. All equipment will be set up during daylight hours, so access to the property at night would not be needed for this project.

Rochelle Kennedy, PhD Student, SRUC Rochelle.kennedy@sruc.ac.uk



SRUC Organic Farming MSc

Previously we have included SRUC Organic Farming MSc project summaries in the Newsletter. I am pleased to bring you this last one. Although a summary it is too long to be included in the Newsletter but can be found at <https://www.fas.scot/downloads/msc-summary-philip-day/> . It is looking at significant factors in effective weed control strategies for UK organic arable crops and is by Philip Day.

If having read the summary, you would like a copy of the full project please get in touch.

Technical Note

The [recommended grass and clover varieties 2021-2022 technical note](#) has been updated, with all varieties listed recommended for use in Scotland.

Farming For a Better Climate

Our Winter Farming for a Better Climate newsletter is now available at [Farming For a Better Climate Newsletter No. 23 Winter 2021-22](#) (or via www.farmingforabetterclimate.org; current and previous editions of the newsletter are in the About Us section, top right).

This edition includes some of the findings from the [Soil Regenerative Agriculture Group](#), our on-farm events in partnership with QMS and NFU Scotland, and our #26days26ways social media campaign on the run up to COP26, where more farmers shared just 'one of the ways' they were reducing emissions and benefitting the farm business.

If you would like to be on the mailing list, pop me an email and I'll add you on. There are two editions per year and we don't share our mailing list. You can also find us on [Facebook](#) and follow us on [Twitter](#).

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Organic Research Centre

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Weeds: What can they tell us about our soils?

