

# PUTTING MONITOR FARM IDEAS INTO PRACTICE

Fresh ideas from a young farmer, combined with the knowledge and experience of experts, are already bringing changes to the Angus Monitor Farm.

Mill of Inverarity, near Forfar, is farmed by Robert and Alison Stodart along with their older son, Rory, who has only been full-time on the farm since February. Their younger son, Tom, is an apprentice mechanic but is responsible for the spraying and maintenance of machines on the farm. Daughter Vicky works off-farm, and a full-time tractorman is employed. Grandfather John Syme also helps during busy spells.

The home farm extends to 206 hectares, with a further 152-hectare farm owned nearby. About two-thirds of the farm is cropped with winter and spring cereals, oilseed rape and some land rented out for potatoes. The remainder is rotational grass which supports 200 suckler cows and 500 ewes, with additional summer grazing taken locally.



Rory Stodart now works full-time on the farm.



Robert and Alison Stodart pictured with sons Tom and Rory.

The sheep enterprise has increased dramatically in recent years, and Rory is particularly keen to see it expand further. He said: "It makes sense to expand the sheep enterprise, as it requires the least resources and makes better use of the land we have - and also our time."

Three years studying for a BSc in agriculture at Newcastle University, followed by a spell working on farms in Australia and New Zealand, have given Rory a clear vision of where improvements can be made on the farm and, with the support of his family and the monitor farm process, he intends to increase efficiency and profitability.

"It makes sense to expand the sheep enterprise, as it requires the least resources and makes better use of the land we have - and also our time."

Rory (22) has always been keen on sheep and was given six Texel cross ewes by his parents about 15 years ago. The flock, although getting slowly bigger, remained a hobby until three years ago, when numbers doubled to 200 then again to 400 in 2016. This year there are 500 ewes - half Texel cross and half Scotch Mules.

Rory explained: "We need to be scanning at 200% to make this work. The Texel and mule ewes complement each other. The Mules produce a bigger crop of lambs, while the Texels produce a butchers' lamb."

The lambs are all finished on farm and have previously all been sold through Forfar mart, although Rory reckons as numbers increase, he may sell a few deadweight. Last year they finished at 45 kg and the average price across the whole crop was £76 per head.

Both Robert and Rory feel that the arable land is under-utilised over the winter, when it lies in stubble, and are keen to investigate ways to utilise their land all year round.

The farm is, therefore, currently trialling eight different grass varieties sown under spring barley. Rory said: "This is one of the initiatives to come out of the monitor farm group, and we are hoping to find a variety which will provide cheap winter feed for sheep with no detrimental effect on our barley yields."

The family are also sowing some stubble turnips this year, and in mid-July they began sowing kale onto fallow land under the greening regulations. They hope that the extra winter fodder will increase the sheep stocking potential.

Rory has also been dabbling with rotational grazing and has already seen the benefits, especially because he can prioritise ewes and lambs while cleaning up with cattle.

The plan is to divide more fields into smaller paddocks, as the family are already seeing a saving in fertiliser costs.

Rory said: "This is the first year that our only fertiliser requirement has been 100kg/ha of 46% urea in March followed by 200kg/ha of 38% urea plus Sulphur in April. Normally we would be top dressing again in May and June."

Two cuts of silage are taken before aftermaths are fully utilised for finishing lambs and flushing ewes. This is the first year that sheep numbers have been so high, and Rory pointed out that it would be a bit of trial and error and that he expects to finish some lambs off brassicas. He said: "By next year I should have some useful cost-of-production figures, and being part of the Monitor Farm Programme will help me analyse costs and benchmark our business."

The cattle enterprise extends to 200 Limousin and Simmental cross suckler cows. These are split into spring and autumn calving, with all progeny finished and sold through either Forfar Mart or on the hook to McIntosh Donald.



Mill of Inverarity is one of nine monitor farms that have been established across Scotland as part of the Monitor Farm Programme managed jointly by QMS and AHDB Cereals & Oilseeds.

Working in Australia taught Rory about making economies and efficiencies of scale, and he believes that the way forward at Mill of Inverarity is to have several enterprises of a reasonable size to make best use of resources and management time. A new enterprise just about to start at the farm is a 4,500-bird free-range layer unit, which should fit in well with the other elements of the business.

Running several complementary enterprises on the farm not only keeps the Stodart family busy, but also spreads the risk and offers security going forward into the unknown territory of Brexit and beyond.

The first two monitor farm meetings at Mill of Inverarity have attracted 100 and 80 people, respectively, and the Stodarts really appreciated receiving ideas and practical suggestions from other farmers. They are looking forward to the next two years, during which they hope to put more ideas into practice.✦

## Mill of Inverarity Farm: At A Glance

206  
hectares

A further 152-hectare  
farm owned nearby

2/3  
arable

1/3  
grazing stock

200  
Limousin and  
Simmental cross  
suckler cows

500  
Texel Cross and  
Scotch Mule ewes

Lambs finish at **45 kg** and sold at Forfar averaging **£76**.

Looking at **stubble crops** and **undersowing** to produce cheap winter feed.