New Release

DATE

Draft 2 15/1/24

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**Cabinet Secretary visit highlights opportunities and challenges on South Ayrshire Monitor Farm**

Last week, Mairi Gougeon, Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform, and Islands visited John and David Andrew on their South Ayrshire Monitor Farm, to hear about the positive work being achieved on Scottish farms through the Monitor Farm Programme. Ms Gougeon was joined by Quality Meat Scotland (QMS) Chair, Kate Rowell and Monitor Farm Programme Manager, Beth Alexander.

The Andrew family farms 1,770 acres (716ha) at Rowanston, comprising 320 acres (130ha) of owned land and 100 acres (40ha) of neighbouring land rented annually. Another 1,350 acres (546ha) are rented locally. John and Allison Andrew, along with their son David, and one full time employee, manage 1,000 breeding ewes, 150 suckler cows, with progeny, and a further 200 bought-in store cattle are finished annually, and 100 acres (40ha) of feed crops.

The Monitor Farm Programme, launched by Ms Gougeon in 2022, addresses the key challenges faced by farming businesses, including climbing interest rates, managing eroded margins and changes to support payments, on-farm investment decisions, succession planning, and livestock health and fertility.

Beth said: “We talked Ms Gougeon through what each Monitor Farm has completed in the programme to date, including soil sampling and the production of an Integrated Land Management Plan (ILMP) which provides a SWOT analysis for the business, alongside two Specialist Advise Plans.”

The collective vision of the ILMP from the nine Monitor Farms incorporates creating resilient, enjoyable, multi-generational businesses with an improved work/life balance, which aim to reduce the carbon footprint of farming whilst enhancing soil health and biodiversity, providing employment to local people and continuing to take pride in producing high quality livestock and crops. The ILMP was funded through the Farm Advisory Service (FAS) and accessible to agricultural businesses in Scotland.  The Scottish Government fund up to £1,200 for an ILMP and £1,000 for Specialist Advice Plans through the FAS.

During the past year, 24 Monitor Farm Programme open meetings have seen a total of 1375 people attend. Anyone wishing to find out more about the Monitor Farm Programme is encouraged to visit the website and come along to their nearest Monitor Farm’s next meeting.

On a tour of the farm, Ms Gougeon heard how, as a forward-thinking family and multi-generational business, passionate about agriculture, the Andrew family is looking at new business options.

Rural Affairs Secretary Mairi Gougeon said: “It was a pleasure to learn first-hand from John, David and the wider group about the work that the South Ayrshire Monitor Farm is undertaking.”

The range of business challenges were also discussed, including seasonal land availability, climate change, and a reduction in labour from family members, all of which the Monitor Farm Programme can help to offer guidance with, and solutions for.

Beth added: “The Andrew’s ultimate aim is to continue to produce quality Scotch products but with reduced inputs and cost of production. To achieve this the family is considering the opportunities presented to them such as technological advances in agriculture, to minimise extra labour requirement and overall input costs.

“We discussed the range of opportunities identified within the business, from nutrient budgeting and grassland improvements through to carbon auditing and improved data collection and utilisation.”

Ms Gougeon’s visit highlighted to government the opportunities and challenges for agriculture, and the importance of thriving farm businesses in supporting the wider rural economy, with the Andrew’s purchasing from more than 50 suppliers for their business. The Monitor Farm Programme has been strongly supported by the agricultural trade, with representatives attending meetings to offer advice in a non-commercial way.

John said: “Being involved with the Monitor Farm Programme means we are able to improve our farm’s performance by exploring specific ways to increase efficiency, and future proof the business, as well as benchmark against similar businesses. It has been rewarding to host Ms Gougeon, supporting her understanding of the need for government policies that support an industry which is considered by many, as the backbone of Scotland.”

Ms Gougeon added: “Innovation, sustainability and peer-to-peer support in the agricultural sector is vital to ensure we are optimising food production whilst meeting our climate change and biodiversity ambitions. The Monitor Farm Scotland Programme is critical in our efforts to achieve this vision for Scottish agriculture. I look forward to seeing the tangible benefits that initiative’s ongoing work has on the sector.”

The Monitor Farm Programme is run jointly by QMS and AHDB Cereals & Oilseeds and is funded by £2 million secured from the Scottish Government’s Knowledge Transfer and Innovation Fund. Nine farms are currently one year into their four-year programme which offers advice and guidance to help improve productivity, profitability, and sustainability of their businesses.

For more information please visit:

[Events | Lastest and Past Events | Monitor Farms](https://www.monitorfarms.co.uk/events/)

[Advice & Grants | Helping farmers in Scotland | Farm Advisory Service (fas.scot)](https://www.fas.scot/advice-grants/)

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**Notes to editors:**

QMS is the public body responsible for promoting the PGI labelled Scotch Beef and Scotch Lamb brands in the UK and abroad and also promoting Scottish pork products under the Specially Selected Pork logo.

Please note that the use of the word Scotch in the Scotch Beef PGI and Scotch Lamb PGI brands is correct and should not be substituted for an alternative such as Scots or Scottish. The history of the use of the word Scotch in this way, traces back to the 18th century.

QMS also helps the Scottish red meat sector improve its sustainability, efficiency and profitability and maximise its contribution to Scotland's economy.

The quality assurance schemes run by QMS cover more than 90% of livestock farmed for red meat in Scotland. They offer consumers in the UK and overseas the legal guarantee that the meat they buy has come from animals that have spent their whole lives being raised to some of the world’s strictest welfare standards.

Scotland’s beef, lamb and pork producers make an important contribution to the country’s economic, social and environmental sustainability, contributing over £2 billion to the annual GDP of Scotland and supporting around 50,000 jobs (many in fragile rural areas) in the farming, agricultural supply and processing sectors.

For more information visit www.qmscotland.co.uk or follow QMS on Facebook or Twitter.