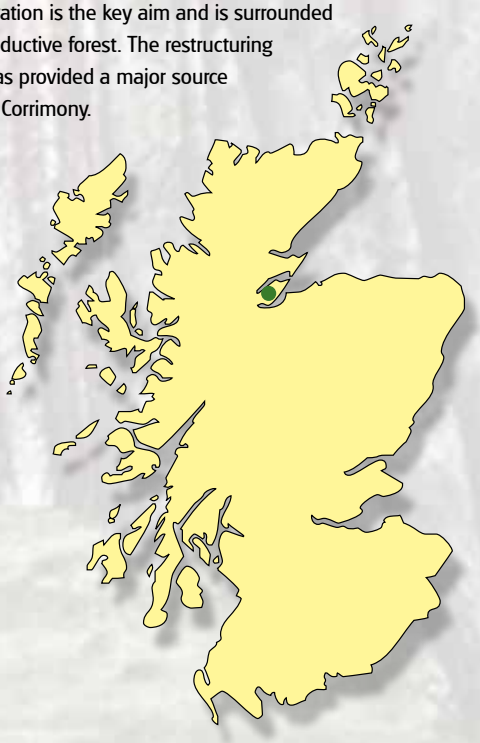
Farm woodland case studies

Corrimony Highland

David Girvan

Corrimony is a 2700 hectare Less Favoured Area hill farm at the head of Glenurquhart in the heart of Inverness-shire. David's grandfather came to the tenancy of Corrimony in the 1940s. Since then the family has bought the farm from the Forestry Commission in 1990, which included a small area of Scots pine and birch woodland. Whilst the farm remains the core enterprise, the Girvans have developed a wind farm, planted trees and what was a simple tenanted hill farm has been transformed into a multifunctional upland holding producing store livestock, wind energy, heat energy and environmental outputs.

The farm is a neighbour of an RSPB nature reserve where woodland management for conservation is the key aim and is surrounded by extensive areas of productive forest. The restructuring of the RSPB woodland has provided a major source of woodchip for David at Corrimony.



The farming enterprise at Corrimony comprises around 40 hectares of ploughable land, 40 hectares of good grass, 40 hectares of poorer grassland backed by extensive rough grazings of 2,500 hectares.The aim is to use this for efficient store livestock production, allowing other enterprises to come into play where land is not needed for the livestock enterprise.

The better quality land of the farm comprises brown earths. The upland and montane soils of the extensive rough grazings vary from stony thin soils to substantial peaty areas.

The farm has 120 spring calving suckler cows which are mostly outwintered, with forward stores sold between 11 and 14 months. David moved to Stabilisers, which were first bred in the US and are now increasingly used in suckler herds in the UK), to get the suckler cow traits he wanted. They are delivering the easily managed high quality stock he is seeking.

There are 500 ewes and 100 hoggs. Almost all lambs are finished on the better land although a few are sold for breeding.

The James Hutton Institute

Forestry Commission Scotland
Coimisean na Coilltearachd Alba

The Scottish Government




Making the woodland work for the farm

Woodland fits into the wider farm enterprise in a number of ways. It generates an income stream from the grants, it provides firewood for the resident families, it provides shelterwood for the stock and it provides the feedstock for a biomass boiler which heats all the nearby farm and let houses and sells heat to a large neighbouring property which the family does not own.

The largest area of planting was of 133 hectares of native Scots pine, planted around the millennium. The trees were planted on an area of hill that was relatively unproductive and surplus to requirements in terms of grazing needs.

A further area 16 hectares of pasture woodland was taken out of grazing so that the woodland can recover. The grazing loss was modest but the grants were a valuable supplement to farm income. Another two small areas of woodland have been planted. Just under a hectare in a wet and awkward-to-work corner has been planted and another 1.2 hectares have been planted up as a shelter belt. There is no significant loss to the farming enterprise with these small additions.

The key use of woodland has been as feedstock for a biomass boiler installed in early 2012. Prior to that it had been a source of woodfuel in the form of logs and was used for grazing.

How it all adds up: the costs and benefits of farm woodland

There has been no loss to the farming enterprise from more active engagement with woodlands. Significant grant income has been received for the farm woodland development, but this has not required any stock reduction. It simply made sense to use land which was of low grazing value and the Native Woodland Scheme offered the best financial return from grant income.

The two biggest blocks of planting have generated £66,000 of grant income before costs. In the longer term, the new woodlands will feed into the biomass heating system.

The major £180,000 investment in biomass boiler was supported by the Energy Efficiency Financing Scheme. The estimated savings across five properties is £25,000 of oil bills. This is less than was anticipated but the scheme has still proved worthwhile, although with the scheme requiring significant underground piping to link a number of well-separated properties, quite a lot of heat losses occur, which reduces the benefit. Nonetheless there is a very substantial savings in cost and in carbon.

Looking forward: where do we go from here?

Corrimony has evolved from a tenanted farm in the 1940s to a mixed estate with a diverse portfolio of enterprises and income sources in the new millennium. Woodland creation has been part of this diversification process.

The two biggest investments on Corrimony in recent years have been the biomass based renewable heat system introduced in 2012 and the wind farm (owned by a mixture of the wider family and the local community) which is just (2013) established. Neither has any adverse effect on the farming enterprise but both renewable energy enterprises contribute to ensuring long run resilience of the business through diversification of income sources.

In the future David is interested in exploring the benefits of silvopastoralism – using woodland to provide shelter for his high quality suckler herd, both through traditional shelter belts and through woodland grazing.

The James Hutton Institute

Aberdeen
Craigiebuckler
Aberdeen AB15 8QH
Scotland UK

Dundee
Invergowrie
Dundee DD2 5DA
Scotland UK

Tel: +44 (0)844 928 5428
Fax: +44 (0)844 928 5429

info@hutton.ac.uk
www.hutton.ac.uk