

# Farm woodland case studies

## Ifferdale Farm Argyll



### Andrew Gemmill

Andrew farms 280 hectares across two farms on the Kintyre peninsula. Ifferdale (the family home) is a mixed hill farm that comprises 190 hectares which has been in the family since 1949. Previously a tenant of the Forestry Commission, Andrew's father took the opportunity to buy Ifferdale in 1988 and passed it on to his son.

Andrew is enthusiastic about the aesthetic and environmental benefit of trees and strongly believes in habitat renewal and conservation. Consequently, he has planted many hectares of both soft and hardwoods across both farms.

Ifferdale originally supported a flock of around 1100 hill ewes but in recent years, due in part to the consistently wet weather and lack of over-wintering ground, Andrew has reduced their numbers to around 250 North Country Cheviots and followers which are now finished on farm.

Many are sold through Andrew's internet and farmer's market business 'Ifferdale Lamb' which adds value to the product.



Along with the sheep, he runs a herd of between 30 and 40 suckler cows and followers. Around 20 hectares of home grown silage provide winter forage and reseeded grassland supplements the hill grazing.

To augment his income and as a legacy for his family, Andrew utilized an SRDP grant to support the conversion of the old farm buildings into self-catering accommodation and a very handsome 'up-market' hostel. However, he feels that the officials aren't following the core values of the SRDP (i.e. keeping rural areas populated) and is uncertain about taking that route again should a similar scheme arise.



Although protected from coastal elements, Ifferdale is situated in a 'wind tunnel' of a glen. Acknowledging the benefit that trees would bring to the farm, in 1979 Andrew began to plant shelter belts and hedgerows. To his surprise, he became successful at 'sticking trees in and they survived.' This success encouraged him to continue planting at Ifferdale.

Following the purchase of High Ugadale, (90 hectares, predominantly utilized for summer grazing) Andrew was able to clear fell a 34 hectares plantation of Sitka Spruce and Larch which 'was a mess,' but which returned 500 tonnes of firewood. Although that site has not yet been replanted he has planted two predominantly softwood shelter belts and has plans for another 12–16 hectares of hardwoods across the two farms.





## Making the woodland work for the farm

Andrew has always been interested in planting trees and in the early days planted some areas without grant aid. More recently, he has made good use of the Woodland Grant Scheme, resulting in mixed ages of woodland, some of which are earmarked for fuel but most will be retained to provide shelter or to 'eliminate areas where sheep go to die.'

The extracted timber from High Ugadale is already being put to good use fuelling the biomass boiler which does an excellent job of heating the house, hostel and self-catering accommodation.

As more people move towards renewable energy, firewood as biofuel is becoming of greater interest. Andrew has purchased a wood processor, supplying modest amounts of fuel to local buyers and has contemplated planting commercial woodland at Ifferdale. Although that may not be feasible due to the problem of transporting tonnes of extracted wood along a farm track, he feels there may be a market in producing smaller amounts of good quality hardwood.

The woodland also enhances the landscape for the tourist enterprises and forms an integral part of a diversified farm business.

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

There has been no quantifiable loss of income associated with the planting of trees at Ifferdale. The reduction in agricultural output has not occurred as a consequence of tree planting, but in response to changes in agricultural support regimes.

The capital costs of planting and fencing have mostly been offset by grants under the RSS, but there was no annual income associated with the tree management. The real benefits of woodlands in this situation are long term. In economic terms, the present value of these plantations is minimal and there is little point in trying to assign a value to them, but there are benefits none the less. The sheep are more easily gathered and managed; the developing trees further enhance the beauty of the area encouraging more tourists to visit, perhaps staying on the farm and buying their produce. The improving shelter provided by the growing trees will help improve livestock production in years to come and the trees themselves will become a source of sustainable fuel and employment.

## Looking forward: where do we go from here?

Whatever the future holds it is likely that both farm units will see both more shelter belts and more environmental planting. Andrew Gemmill is not a man to stand back and let the grass grow under his feet. He has his eye on 28 hectares of FCS clear fell that he would like to buy.

His plan is to plant 20% in trees and allow the rest to regenerate naturally. He is a forward thinking man who is passionate about leaving a lasting legacy for his family in the hope they will be encouraged to stay in the area and reap the benefit of his labours.



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