

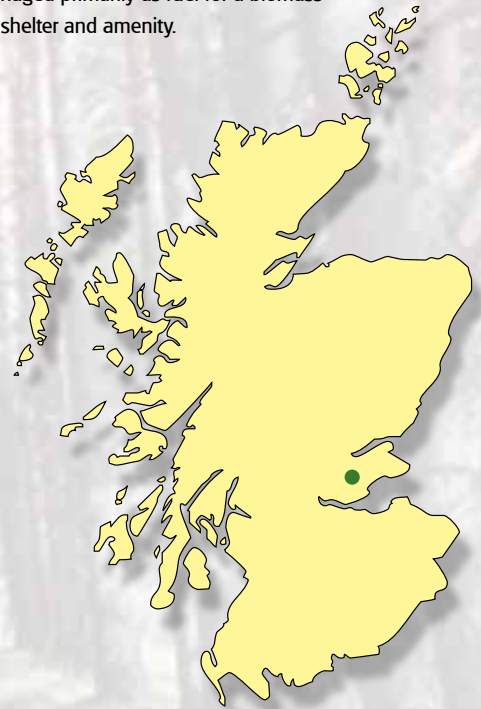
Farm woodland case studies

Newhill Farm Glenfarg, Perth



Bruce Hamilton

Newhill Farm is situated in the Ochil Hills in Glenfarg, Perthshire. Covering 202 hectares in total, it is eligible for LFASS and comprises upland grazing ranging from 500-1000 feet and gentle-sloping south facing arable land. The main livestock enterprises are a herd of 60 Aberdeen Angus suckler cows and a flock of around 600 cross-bred ewes run on the hill. There are five discrete areas of trees across the farm which are managed primarily as fuel for a biomass boiler but which also provide shelter and amenity.



The lambs are finished on the farm and when possible, Bruce prefers to finish his cattle himself. However, recent cold wet summers have seen him selling them on at weaning.

His arable enterprise extends to 81 hectares of crops (spring and winter barley, oil seed rape and wheat).

The conversion of the old Granary into luxury holiday accommodation and his role as manager of the Tayforth Machinery Ring provide additional family income.



Some 30 years ago, Bruce's father planted 2 hectares of mixed woodland to shelter the lambing fields. In 2005, Bruce planted a further area comprising 2.1 hectares of trees which incorporated 0.3 hectares of open spaces and footpaths. It was planted under the SFGS comprising 3200 hardwood and 800 softwood trees which were hand planted into barley stubble that had been sub-soiled. No tubes were used, but 730m of rabbit and deer fencing were put up. Although fence maintenance can be an inconvenience, it has proved worthwhile as the trees have established well and Bruce anticipates getting some fire wood from the woodland by about 2024.



Making the woodland work for the farm

The woodlands deliver shelter to stock, aesthetic enhancement of the landscape for the tourism enterprise and a source of woodfuel. All are valued as part of the land use mix in producing a resilient and sustainable farm business.

Natural thinning occurs courtesy of the wind blowing through the glen. The fallen trees are extracted to supply fuel for the domestic log burning stoves and the 6kw biomass boiler that heat the house, office and top quality holiday accommodation.

Bruce doesn't allow stock access into the woods. The cleared areas are allowed to regenerate naturally providing a renewable source of fuel requiring minimal input and an ideal habitat for wildlife.



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

The costs involved in establishing the wood in 2005 were £4095 with income received at from SFGS grants of £4600. In 2013 the cost of planting would have been higher at around £5860 with grants totalling £8654.

The net cost of establishing the wood in 2005 was a surplus of £505; today it would have produced a surplus of £2794. In addition, Bruce currently receives an annual grant under the SFGS of £550 per year for 15 years. Under the current scheme the annual payment would be £907. The LFA land planted had been used for grazing and growing Spring Barley. The return from Spring barley at the time was poor, prices were low and yields averaged about 3.7 to 4t/ha. The net return forgone from not growing barley on 2.4 ha of LFA land was £434. In 2013, it would have been around £950 based on the same levels of production output and inputs. Although he has foregone income in some years when barley returns were quite high, he now has an available source of woody biomass with a market value of around £4000/annum which means a substantial net benefit to the farm.

Looking forward: where do we go from here?

Bruce believes in 'always leaving more trees than he started with.' Although he has no intention of initiating more planting in the foreseeable future – the bulk of his arable land is too valuable at present to convert to trees – he feels his policy of only extracting timber for domestic use will ensure a sustainable future for his woodlands.

His approach is very much to build a more resilient farm business, where woodland contributes in various ways to enhancing that residence through adding diversity to the landscape, providing a source of fuel and providing shelter for stock. His woodland makes a low key but important contribution to a diversified mixed farm and will continue to do so.



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