



Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Food and the Environment Richard Lochhead paid a visit to Robert and Jac Neill of Upper Nisbet Farm in near Jedburgh. He was there to thank them for their participation on the Scottish Government's Farming for a Better Climate (FFBC) initiative, which saw the Neills reduce their business' carbon footprint by an impressive 19% and achieve savings of just over £19,000 between 2011 and 2014.

Robert and Jac volunteered for three years as a Climate Change Focus Farm in Farming for a Better Climate, which is run on behalf of the Scottish Government by SAC Consulting (a Division of SRUC).

Although better known for their award winning herd of 300 Limousin cross cows, as a focus farm the Neills focused on the arable side of their business. Upper Nisbet has 242ha of winter wheat, winter barley, spring barley and beans, 202ha under grass with an additional 80ha of grass rented on a neighbouring farm.

Using SAC Consulting's own farm efficiency measurement tool 'AgRE Calc©', Robert and Jac investigated a number of areas and made practical changes to routine activities which benefited both the business and its carbon footprint. Data from 2014 was compared with the baseline year of 2011.

Key findings include:

- A good harvest in 2014 meant an increase in arable crop sales, improving farm yields when compared to inputs.
- Knowing the value of FYM on the farm, plus GPS soil analyses of Phosphorous and Potassium levels and pH, meant improved targeting of nutrients to where it was needed on the farm, saving on the fertiliser bill.
- Better management of the farm fleet meant fuel use decreased.

- Careful monitoring of the weights of finishing livestock enables cattle to be sold when they reach their optimum performance and thus reducing their contribution to on-farm emissions.
- Managing grass as a crop and increasing grass/clover leys in the rotation allowed young cattle to be kept at home rather than away wintered, achieving more output from the home farm.
- Through these measures financial savings of just over £19,000 were achieved and the overall farm carbon footprint was reduced by 19% in 2014 compared to baseline year of 2011.

During his visit to Upper Nisbet, the Cabinet Secretary toured the farm to hear more about the successful changes that have been implemented.

He said: “I would like to thank the Neills for participating in the Scottish Government’s Farming for a Better Climate initiative for the past three years. They have had great results from taking part, saving many thousands of pounds and significantly reducing emissions. It just goes to show how making small changes to farming practice can make a big difference to finances and the environment, and I urge everyone to consider following their fantastic example as we work to tackle our changing climate.”

Jac Neill said “Taking part in this study has focused our thinking throughout our business and as well as finding ways to reduce our footprint we have been able to make cost savings. The group meetings covered many interesting topics and on many occasions led to a lively debate with neighbouring farmers and advisors.

“Farmers must be prepared to analyse their business and often all it takes is for small changes to be made to current working practices to improve efficiency and increase profits. We would encourage any farmers who get the opportunity to take part in a study such as this to grasp the opportunity.”

The Neills involvement with Farming for Better Climate has now come to an end but nine other farms around Scotland are currently participating. For more information, visit www.farmingforabetterclimate.org or follow the project on Twitter @sacfarm4climate or Facebook.