

# Saltburn Monitor Farm report

Launch meeting  
Date: 6 June 2017  
Venue: Barns Farm (Saltburn Monitor Farm)

[cereals.ahdb.org.uk/saltburn](http://cereals.ahdb.org.uk/saltburn)



*John Aynsley, monitor farmer*

## Summary of launch meeting

- Overview of the Monitor Farm concept
- Discussion of farm background, enterprises, current rotation and cultivation practices
- The direction for soil management at the monitor farm
- Farm business management and benchmarking
- SWOT analysis and discussion of winter meetings programme.

## Saltburn Monitor Farm – current position (John Aynsley, Monitor Farmer & David Coates, agronomist)

- Over the last six years (since moving here), changes have been made to a large part of the arable enterprise
- Previously continuous winter wheat
- No ploughing for 10 years
- Current arable cropping consists of wheat, barley and oilseed rape, all winter sown
- New rotation includes WB – WW – OSR
- Still an area of arable enterprise to focus on – 250 acres of continuous wheat on poorer land
- Other cropping consists of grassland and moorland
- Livestock enterprises:
  - 700 stabiliser cattle (440 Spring-calving cows; 220 bulling heifers and finishing bulls)
  - 3400 sheep (including 900 Lleyne ewes and 1900 this year's lambs)
  - Eight full time staff
- Particular challenges the farm would like to address:
  - Which rotation gives the best profit without compromising the soil?
  - Control of sterile brome
  - Is precision technology providing value for money?

## Soil management at Saltburn Monitor Farm – Steve Townsend (soil management consultant and Monitor Farm steering group member)

- Soil management is central to farm profitability
- Arable soils generally are worn out – lack of organic matter
- The carbon in organic matter is vital for soil structure
- Treat the carbon in the soil as a bank account – put more in each year than you take out
- Organic matter can be lost from soils by over cultivation and lack of growing crop
- Ploughing releases large amounts of carbon and nitrogen into the atmosphere
- Loss of organic matter can be reduced by growing cover crops as an alternative to grass in the rotation
- Minimising soil disturbance and maintaining ground cover can help to make soils weather proof

For more information on AHDB soil research, use the links below:

- Soil research [website](#)
- Soil research [projects](#)
- GREATSOILS [website](#)

## Importance of financial management – Ali Gray (ACS Grays; Monitor Farm steering group member)

- Huge variation across the industry in net farm income
- Net farm income of the *top third* of arable businesses is 50-60% above the average (from Askham Bryan survey data 2015/2016)
- Measuring the performance of your own business is key to understanding where improvements can be made
- Think about the longer term objectives of your business – what can be done better and where can you make changes?



## SWOT Analysis – carried out by whole group

### Strengths

- Management experience
- Enthusiasm
- Knowledge
- Listening
- Open-minded / willing to try
- Vision
- Clear objectives
- Benchmarking
- Timeliness
- Mixed farming (livestock)
- Soil management
- Size / land available
- Diversity
- Muck available (livestock)
- Staff
- Scale – buying power
- Open minded
- Good fertility
- Good trading location

### Opportunities

- Mixed farming – livestock integration
- More available land?
- Grass/stock available for further weed management
- Close to public/consumers
- Access to technical expertise
- Building land
- Brexit
- New markets
- Expand sheep
- Partnership working
- Open-minded
- Share experiences
- Change the soil
- Diversification
- Room for expansion
- Monitor farm
- Trial new techniques
- Precision technologies

### Weaknesses

- Grass weed control
- Rotation (barley/brome; only three crops in rotation)
- Road work / distance / spread of land
- Small fields
- Urban fringe
- Not ring fenced
- Soil type
- Lack of buildings/infrastructure for livestock
- Reliance on agricultural chemicals
- Lack of knowledge
- Window of opportunity
- Climate

### Threats

- Sterile brome
- Grass weeds in a no till system
- Post-Brexit agricultural policy
- Unknown future subsidies / BPS future?
- Market volatility / Price stability
- Reliance on Ensus
- Legislation
- Environmental issues
- Loss of actives
- Short season
- Shortage of skilled staff
- Slugs
- Urban fringe
- Weather / climate change

## Focus areas for winter meetings programme

- Grass weed control / brome control
- Rotation options (bringing cover crops and protein crops into rotation)
- Impact of cover crops
- Livestock feed against bought in protein
- Establishment and cost of establishment
- Slug control
- Weed control
- Seed rates
- Muck incorporation
- Control of fixed costs
- Machinery costs (fixed cost analysis)
- Stewardship areas
- Soil health
- Soil chemistry
- Marketing
- Varieties
- Combined bulk buying
- Precision

## AHDB Cereals & Oilseeds – useful links

### Farmbench

For benchmarking your farm business: <https://farmbench.ahdb.org.uk/>

To join the monitor farm Arable Business Group (benchmarking), please ensure we have your correct contact details

### AHDB Cereals & Oilseeds Tools

Grain Market Daily  
[cereals.ahdb.org.uk/markets](https://cereals.ahdb.org.uk/markets)

Crop Research News  
[cereals.ahdb.org.uk/newsletters](https://cereals.ahdb.org.uk/newsletters)

Pest and disease forecasts  
[cereals.ahdb.org.uk/monitoring](https://cereals.ahdb.org.uk/monitoring)

Podcast  
[cereals.ahdb.org.uk/podcast](https://cereals.ahdb.org.uk/podcast)



## Next meetings

Date*	Topic
End of October / early November	Rotations, controlling grass weeds, and soil chemistry
December	Varieties (using the Recommended List) and Marketing
January	Controlling fixed costs
February/March	Precision farming – getting the best out of the information

*\*all dates yet to be confirmed*

To attend a meeting, please contact your AHDB Cereals & Oilseeds Knowledge Exchange Manager:

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