

Scottish Agritourism Monitor Farm Programme

Meeting Three Report – EAST CENTRAL

‘How to put ‘Agri’ into Agritourism’

Castleton Farm, North Berwick –

Thursday 8th August 2019



The third meeting of the three-year Scottish Enterprise Agritourism Monitor Farm Programme took place on Thursday 8th August 2019 at Castleton Farm, North Berwick, owned by East Central Monitor Farmers, Stuart and Jo McNicol.

Stuart runs the farm alongside his father Bill and grows 430 acres of cereals, comprising of winter wheat, spring barley, oilseed rape and winter beans.

DRIFT. café was established in June 2018 by Stuart and Jo. The café is built on a cliff within the family's farmland and overlooks a sandy beach, with panoramic views out to sea and over to the Fife coast.

The couple also run an additional events business called Castleton Events, which delivers high end events and weddings in a marquee based on the farm. Currently they host around seven events per year due to planning restrictions on site. The venue can accommodate up to 250 people with access to a private beach.

The meeting theme 'Putting 'Agri' into an Agritourism Business' focused on different ideas which could help Stuart and Jo make a better connection between the farming enterprise, DRIFT. and Castleton Events.

During the meeting, attendees heard from Sascha Grierson, who runs an [organic farm](#) with her husband, Hugh, in Perthshire. The couple have developed their agritourism business which now consists of an on-farm butchery, selling their produce online and through farmers markets, open days/farm tours and cookery experiences from within their farmhouse kitchen.

Sascha spoke to the 30 attendees about how they developed their agritourism business and what elements worked well for them when trying to make the farming connection.

A farm tour also took place, during which Stuart and Jo shared some of their thoughts and ideas about linking their enterprises and making the farming connection more known within DRIFT. and Castleton Events.

Attendees also took part in a small exercise where they worked in groups to record short videos, to help build their confidence and skills on using photography and video to sell their businesses. A copy of the videos along with some 'top tips' on creating videos are [available here](#).



PUTTING 'AGRI' INTO AGRITOURISM

Agritourism is a distinctive tourism offering within rural tourism. What makes agritourism different to rural tourism is that it takes place on a working farm or croft where food is grown or reared.

There are several hundred farms in Scotland which welcome guests on to their farm, either for a short retail or food experience, day visit such as a tour or event, or an overnight stay. For the customer, some of these experiences offer no connection to the food and drink produced on the farm, or the farming family, while other experiences provide a real connection to the farm and agriculture.

There are different ways in which visitors can know they are on a farm and enjoy a unique experience as a result. The benefit to the agriculture and food and drink sectors is that consumers can understand more about how their food and drink is produced, what farmers do and how farmers care for the environment and are custodians of the land for all. Bringing thousands of people on to farms for tourism or leisure can therefore build relationships between farmers and the public and build brand loyalty for specific products or Scottish food and drink in general.

For the individual farm business, offering a distinctive experience in agritourism can differentiate the business in a crowded marketplace and hopefully increase repeat and word of mouth business.

SASCHA GRIERSON'S FEEBACK

Hugh Grierson Organics is part of a traditional farm, which, in 2002, gained organic status. Sascha and her husband have developed new areas within their farming enterprise which include:

- Butchery production of home-reared beef, lamb, pork and chicken
 - The couple have an online sales service for customers to buy butchery packs
 - They sell the meat at different farmers' markets throughout the year
- Farm tours
 - The farm tours are high end farm tours that take visitors round the farm, showing them the animals
 - The visitors also get a tour of the butchery area, seeing the meat carcasses and butchery demonstrations, before heading back to the farmhouse kitchen to enjoy a steak tasting experience with Sascha cooking four different cuts of steak for the visitors to taste and enjoy
 - This has also developed, and the couple now offer lamb tasting and burger making experiences

Why did they develop an Agritourism Business?

- They could make more money long-term butchering and selling their own produce, rather than selling through a market/abattoir
 - Sascha's husband Hugh decided to undertake the on-farm butchery to create his own market, increased margins and servicing meat demand from the local community
 - There was also market demand for high-end farm tours
- The couple were committed to connecting with the public and selling their farming story

- They wanted to show the public a 'real' farming experience and the importance of supporting/buying from local businesses
- People were asking for it
 - The couple had people asking for meat and farm tour experiences
- The 'tasting experience' was developed because Sascha wanted to utilise all of the meat from the butchery
 - Part of the reason behind developing the 'steak tasting experience' was due to the butchery often having good quality, remaining meat after the sales had been fulfilled
 - The steak eating experience has also resulted in the couple now doing 'burger making' and a 'lamb tasting experience.'

Top Tips from the Griersons

- ✓ **Believe in what you are doing**
 - If you are not committed to driving your idea forward, you won't give it 100%
- ✓ **Volunteer and build your confidence through organisations such as RHET**
 - Organisations like RHET give you a great opportunity to build confidence and experience of bringing visitors onto your farm, learn how to offer tours and investing in resources initially
- ✓ **Have a key selling point and use it to drive your idea**
 - E.g. if you have native cattle (Aberdeen Angus), organic land, produce barley for famous distilleries, use this to promote what you do
- ✓ **Re-educate yourself on what you know**
 - Take yourself back to basics and look at what the visitor/consumer wants to see/hear, but give an honest view



PUTTING THE AGRI INTO DRIFT. & CASTLETON EVENTS

During the meeting, attendees were taken on a farm tour by Stuart and Jo, where they discussed the layout of the farm, what crops they grew and what thoughts and ideas they have had with regards to developing the 'Agri' side of both DRIFT. and Castleton Events.

After the tour, attendees split into groups to discuss ideas and give feedback to Stuart and Jo about potential developments for both enterprises.

Group Feedback

1. **What could Stuart and Jo do better to connect the farm to DRIFT.?**

- Use/sell produce that is produced from the cereals grown on farm,
 - Biscuits
 - Flour for the cakes
 - Bread
 - Beer
 - Gin
 - Whisky
- Whisky/Gin/Beer tasting nights with storytelling about the farm – high end foodie events in the café with a whisky expert
- TV type display in the café which has a story board of the farm playing in the background
- Story boards/beautiful pictures on the wall
 - Different seasons/work that is carried out on the farm (e.g. sowing, harvest)
- Interpretation boards of the farm in the car park
- A map of the farm/farmland in the carpark or at the entrance of the door
- People behind the farm
 - Do some talks/meet the farmer events in DRIFT.
 - Show & tell – take a tractor/machine down and do a show and tell session at DRIFT.
- Video diaries from the farm on social media/website on what is going on that week/month
- Images of the farm on the website, our story on the website which shows the unique location of the farm by the sea, family history, what you grow etc

2. What could Stuart & Jo do better to connect the farm to Castleton Events?

- Wedding favours
 - With produce from the farm (e.g. honey, shortbread)
- Tractor transfers for the wedding party
 - Take the bride/groom to/from the reception
- On-farm wedding photos
 - Charge extra for wedding parties to have their wedding photos taken on the farm (in the fields, with the tractors etc.)
- Perhaps make the Castleton Events more beach themed?
 - Create beach huts for guests to stay in
 - Promote the private beach more
 - Theme within the marquee ‘from land to sea’
- As per Drift for website and social media telling story of the farm

3. Other additional ideas to create on-farm and promote through DRIFT. and Castleton Events

- Farm walk
 - Farmer led – where the farmer takes groups on a tour round the farm and shares the farming story
 - Self-led – create story boards throughout the walk which tell the McNicol’s farming story
 - People could pay extra for a high-end farm tour which includes a talk with the farmer and sitting inside some of the machines etc.

- Make sure the farm walk starts and ends at DRIFT. and encourage the visitors to go back to the café for coffee & cake after (could include farm tour, cake and coffee deal)
- Picnic farm walks
 - Pre-book the farm walk and pick up a premade picnic from DRIFT. to take on the walk
- **Beach Huts**
 - Build beach huts on the beach below DRIFT. and offer day rate hire
 - Pre-book a picnic through DRIFT. to be delivered to the beach hut
 - BBQ area and create BBQ packs for visitors to collect from DRIFT. and cook down at the huts
 - Include solar powered fridges within the huts, so again picnics can be pre-ordered and delivered down to the huts
 - Fire pits – pre-order wood for your beach hut fire pit
 - Castleton Events could create beach huts for guests to stay in after a wedding/event
 - Pre-booked breakfast packs etc. waiting in the huts for guests
- **Dog Walking Area**
 - Create a secure area with high fencing for people to come and walk their dogs
 - Make it a system where visitors can be in ‘zones’ without any other walkers/dogs so they can safely let their dogs run free without the risk of them getting away
 - Dog/puppy classes
 - Create classes so people can come and train their dogs/puppies in a secure area
 - Pay a monthly fee or pay as you go system
 - Use a key card/code to access the area
- Maize Maze, grass sledging, egg rolling, zorbing etc.
 - Create a ‘artificial hill’ on the farm close to DRIFT. where visitors can come and use it for different activities
- Family events
 - Treasure hunts
 - Egg hunts (Easter)
 - Christmas events
 - Gin tasting evening with local gin distillery
 - ‘Taste the farm’ evenings
 - Visitors come and hear about what products are made from produce from the farm and then have a tasting session (e.g. cakes, whisky, bread etc.)

BUSINESS FEEDBACK

What are the main issues you have around inputting the ‘Agri’ into Agritourism? (if any?)

- We like to limit ingress of people onto our off-the-beaten-track location. Biosecurity is very important, so I think we take a controlled welcome approach;
- We don’t have a business yet;
- None;

- Not so easy when it is an arable farm. Not everyone who is coming to the farm may be interested in farm – more about experience so it shows you may tap into different markets;
- Adding value with a good stay;
- We are not ready yet;
- How to develop contacts from tours into an income stream instead of free storytelling;
- Knowing where to start;
- Time to do tours;
- Camera shy!

What should Stuart and Jo do to improve?

- Story boards and videos about “farming” inside DRIFT. A big screen (top QLED) with the farming year and Stuart and Jo talking silently with subtitles. I think another container could develop Sascha’s concept of eating the produce except with wheat => flour => rolls => rape seed => grinder and then small bottles of oil;
- Plan so they don’t become too busy for not a lot extra financial return;
- Decide what they want to do. To make extra income without loads of extra work;
- Not do farms walks. Already too busy. Use the products of the farm in produce at DRIFT.;
- DRFIT. – boards – seasonality for crops;
- Hard to link the farm to Castleton. Maybe with both DRIFT. and Castleton Events more to the location – sea/bass rock/castle;
- DRIFT. working well, try to focus on other aspects of the business;
- Tractor driving experience;
- Focus on high margin ideas. Possibly think of ideas that won’t add additional pressure to DRIFT. and the car park at current. Opening tours on morning and evenings. Using it for additional catering;
- Link up the farm/seasons in the café;
- Dog walking;
- Look at what return on the highest margin and focus on that, nail it and move onto the next project;
- Subtle farm images round DRIFT. to relate customers back to agriculture;
- Photo storyboard model of the farm etc. at DRIFT. Mill for wheat with some wheat for the customer to make a handful of flour;
- Make sure extras don’t affect the café business;
- Look into educating visitors about where food is coming from;
- Cut back on all these ideas and deal with one thing at a time;
- Focus on one or two things. Loads of ideas, hard to focus on one;
- Utilise the beach for financial gain;
- Think outside the box. Focus on a couple of ideas. They could be at risk of spreading themselves too thinly.

What things will you change as a result of what you have learned?

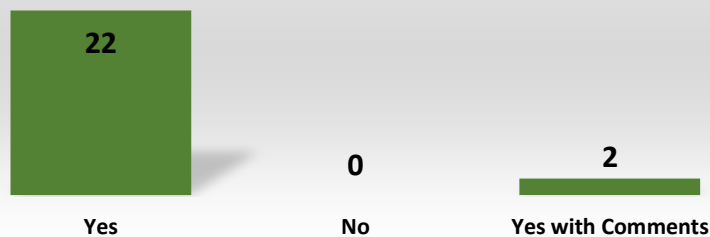
- Try to get beef into freezer would help;
- Think again about our Agri links. How to “add-on” sales. Consider USP’s;
- Price and publicity;
- In value from more farm tours. So, what more can be done throughout year for tours;
- Ask visitors to pay for experience. Feasibility study of enterprise;
- Consider online videos. Try to think outside the box – dog walking area example was very interesting;
- Start lamb stables? Tell the farm story through social media, perhaps develop farm tours, farm walks. Connect farm and environment more;
- Prepare to bring more public onto the farm through visits/events/produce;
- Charging for tours. Develop tour side/experience day;

- Work on building networks;
- Think out the box for tour ideas;
- Agritourism has more awareness than you think. Time management. What will make money and how do you charge for services provided;
- Start advertising farm tours and developing new experiences;
- I really fancy a path around the farm, with sculptures or follies or carvings. This would please all our campers;
- Think about principles for experiences. Price for business. Price direct to retail. Get on with marketing – make a video or two. Find tour companies;
- Use more social media;
- Look at increasing farm tours. Farm accommodation with pictures of views/cows possibly. Make video blogs;
- More food links. Get any kitchen geared for farm food experiences. Make more social media videos/join Twitter.

What did you enjoy about the meeting?

- Time to chat to likeminded people;
- Sascha's talk;
- Brainstorming/new ideas;
- Networking – hearing other thoughts;
- Meeting and talking with people;
- Good to meet other businesses and discuss opportunities. Presentation from Sascha was good with lots of ideas;
- Everyone engaging. Excellent speakers;
- Great to see the farm and discuss with a big group about the options and challenges;
- Sascha was an inspiration;
- Good balance of different activities;
- Enlightening, good camaraderie, lots of information;
- Talking to lots of interesting people and hearing and seeing about what Jo and Stuart are doing. Always lots of good discussion;
- Other people's experience;
- Meeting participants. Getting new ideas;
- Good craic;
- Lively chat, interesting people, lots of good ideas going about and interaction with visit Scotland => helpful;
- Enjoyed listening to speaker and Stuart's farm tour;
- Meeting people and listening to ideas.

Are you more aware of the importance of putting 'Agri' into agritourism in your business?



Comments

1. Yes – if you develop the mindset of ‘Agri’ first and ‘tourism’ second, it’s easier.
2. Not as such, but great to hear different perspectives – the ‘Agri’ in agritourism is something I’m very passionate about.

DRIFT. MEETING THREE ATTENDEES

There were 27 attendees at the main meeting from 2pm to 6pm. In addition, there were the monitor farmers (3) and delivery team (2), so 32 in total.

No.	First Name	Surname	Ticket Type	Company	Website
1	Stuart	McNicol	Agritourism/Monitor Farmer	DRIFT./Castleton Events	
2	Jo	McNicol	Agritourism/Monitor Farmer	DRIFT./Castleton Events	
3	Bill	McNicol	Agritourism/Monitor Farmer	DRIFT. Castleton Farm	
4	Bobby	Lennox	Agritourism/Monitor Farmer	Shemore/Shantron Self-Catering	http://www.shemoreonlochmond.com
5	Anne	Lennox	Agritourism/Monitor Farmer	Shemore/Shantron Self-Catering	http://www.shemoreonlochmond.com
6	Robin	Austin	Agritourism business	Barstobrick and Fellend Farm	https://www.barstobrick.co.uk/
7	Elaine	Lamont	Agritourism business	The Busstop	https://www.thebusstop.scot/
8	Balfour	Stewart	Agritourism business	The Busstop	https://www.thebusstop.scot/
9	Robert	Wilson	Agritourism business	JRB Wilson & Sons	http://www.fluffymoos.com/
10	David	Scott-Park	Agritourism business	Portnellan Farm LLP	http://portnellanfarm.co.uk/
11	Chris	Scott-Park	Agritourism business	Portnellan Farm LLP	http://portnellanfarm.co.uk/
12	Freda	Scott-Park	Agritourism business	Portnellan Farm LLP	http://portnellanfarm.co.uk/
13	Jenny	Cowan	Agritourism business	Eastside Cottages	www.eastsidecottages.co.uk
14	Sascha	Grierson	Agritourism business	Hugh Grierson Organics	http://www.hughgrierson.co.uk
15	Helen	Smith	Agritourism business	Byres Farm	https://byresfarm.co.uk
16	Bill	Smith	Agritourism business	Byres Farm	https://byresfarm.co.uk
17	Jasmine	Jackson	Farmer looking to diversify	Kersheugh	
18	Fenwick	Jackson	Farmer looking to diversify	Fenwick G Jackson	
19	Sally	Williams	Farmer looking to diversify	R & A Wilson Ltd	
20	Kelvin	Pate	Farmer looking to diversify		
21	Lesley	Mitchell	Farmer looking to diversify	R Mitchell & Son	
22	Robert	Mitchell	Farmer looking to diversify	R Mitchell & Son	
23	Andrew	Dunlop	Farmer looking to diversify	Corstane Woodchip	http://corstanewoodchip.com
24	Sheila	Bannerman	Farmer looking to diversify	Old Manse Farm	
25	David	MacTaggart	Farmer looking to diversify	Hallrule Farm	
26	Claire	MacTaggart	Farmer looking to diversify	Hallrule Farm	



27	Carla	Coghlan	Industry Leader/Organisation	SRUC	https://www.sruc.ac.uk
28	Neil	Christison	Industry Leader/Organisation	Visit Scotland	https://www.visitscotland.com
29	Sharon	Flanigan	Industry Leader/Organisation	James Hutton Institute	https://www.hutton.ac.uk
30	Mary-Jane	Lawrie	Industry Leader/Organisation	SAC	https://www.sruc.ac.uk/info/20005/sac_consulting