

ROYAL NORTHERN AGRICULTURAL SOCIETY

PRESS RELEASE

SUSTAINABLE FARMING SYSTEMS THE FOCUS OF ECOAGRI TECH EVENT AT KNOCK FARM

The Royal Northern Agricultural Society's on-farm technical event in 2018 will focus on sustainable agricultural techniques on the beef and sheep farm of Knock, Huntly, Aberdeenshire, where farmers, Roger and Beth Polson, have been farming organically since 2006.

The event, EcoAgri Tech, will be held on the afternoon of Wednesday, July 18, and will take the form of a farm tour followed by a barbecue and panel discussion.

It will replace the society's StockTech event at Dunscroft, Huntly, in June which has had to be cancelled because of the effect on the farm of recent wet weather.

"We don't have enough time to set up another major open day like the one planned for Dunscroft and we are grateful to Roger and Beth for kindly agreeing to host a smaller specialist event which will be of interest to all mainstream farmers as well as those seeking to adopt a more ecological approach to their farming," said RNAS president, Robbie Newlands, Cluny, Forres.

"The theme of the event very much chimes with current thinking in agriculture and recognition of the need to develop agro ecological solutions leading to increasingly sustainable systems of agricultural production."

Organisation of the event is in the hands of an RNAS committee under the chairmanship of John Gordon, Wellheads, Huntly. The event will provide a platform for research institutes and other organisations to promote and discuss some of the current developments in agroecology and its application to mainstream farming.

Although Knock is managed organically, the event will look at the broader application of sustainable principals and their possible place in the future of Scottish agricultural production and land management in general.

"The drive to change our approach from striving for physical output to a more holistic appreciation of agricultural production is gathering momentum and there is a growing recognition of the place for an agroecological approach as the way forward for a sustainable agricultural industry," Mr Polson says.

Reducing the industry's dependence on quick-fix solutions such as processed fertilisers, synthetic pesticides and antibiotics, will, he suggests, allow producers to improve their ability to

exploit in a sustainable way the natural resources of soils, climate, microbes, plant and animal life.

“It will require a real mind-set change but research is showing that output is not necessarily compromised by this approach, ecosystems costs are significantly reduced and overall productivity - which is not the same as production - can be significantly improved,” he says.

And he adds: “The challenge which farmers face is to produce output from this environment without unduly compromising the many other forms of life that exist there and thus degrading the balanced environment in which we live.”

Knock is a 434ha mixed farm lying between Huntly and Keith. The farming enterprise comprises a herd of 75 Simmental and Aberdeen-Angus cross suckler cows and 400 Blackface and Scotch Mule breeding ewes, with all progeny finished on the farm. Both herds have been closed since 1996 except for breeding bulls, rams and 45 replacement Blackface ewe lambs purchased annually from one source.

Cropping includes 140 acres of spring crop and about a quarter of the farm is now committed to commercial forestry and permaculture such as grazed woodlands and conservation areas.

The business also operates a livery and provides cross country training facilities as well as hosting occasional equine competitions.

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