



RNAS ANNOUNCES WINNING CROP GROWERS

Willie Ritch of East Fingask, Inverurie has been named as the winner of the neep section in the annual growing competition organised by the Royal Northern Agricultural Society (RNAS) whilst Robert Anderson, Corskellie, Rothiemay triumphed in the fodder beet category.

The competition was judged by Graeme Christie and Ian Moir of Murray Duguid Ltd, Oldmeldrum who have been sponsors for over 25 years.

“The very dry summer had a significant impact on yields this year. The conditions resulted in lower yields than normal and some crops suffering from growth cracks, less so in the fodder beet.” noted judge Graeme Christie. “However, weed control is getting so much better, with agronomists really getting on top of it, resulting in better crops and yields.

After competing for the past 30 years and often in the prize list, Mr Ritch submitted two entries and triumphed with his crop of Invitation, which yielded 154.19 tonnes per acre.

About 30 acres of neeps are grown for winter feed, in three blocks for ewe hogg replacements, breeding ewes and feeding lambs. Half of last year’s crop is still on the farm as the ewes lamb in May and lambs will be finished on the neeps.

Willie usually grows Lomond but was unable to get seed from his supplier, Murray Duguid Ltd so he grew Invitation for the first time.

“I’ve grown Lomond neeps for years so I wasn’t sure what to expect with Invitation but so far it has done us well,” said Willie.

The neeps are grown on the flat and a stale seed bed is used for weed control. The seed bed is made when Willie is sowing spring barley to allow the weeds to grow. Weeds are sprayed off before the neeps are sown and he aims to have them sown by May 12.

As soon as the neeps are through the ground, he walks through them each day to look out for flea beetle which he had to spray for twice this year.

“This year’s crop were sown in the first few days of May due to the dry spring and two out of the three blocks of neeps have been very strong so far,” he said.

While the drought affected many farmers last year, Willie said the dry weather did work in favour for the type of soil.

Although Lomond has been the preferred variety at East Fingask, Willie said he would definitely consider using Invitation again, adding that the variety has grown very well.

“But I guess we will just need to see how they stand through the rest of the winter and how fast the sheep eat through them.”

Regular competitor and 2025 champion, Rodney Blackhall from The Green, Raemoir, Banchory, stood reserve in the neep section, also taking the prize in the LFA category.

His 2.5-acre block of Lomond – which Rodney says suits their ground and always yields well - recorded a yield of 159.63 tonnes per acre.

Robert Anderson, Corkellie, Rothiemay swept the boards in the growing fodder beet section, taking the championship, reserve, under-30 and LFA category prizes.

Robert won with a crop of Brigadier which produced a yield of 153.71 tonnes per acre and he then took reserve with a block of Feldherr, producing 145.33 tonnes per acre.

The Robertsons moved from Northern Ireland eight years ago and Robert and his parents Michael and Gale have built up their stock on the 410-acre unit to 140 suckler cows and 750 breeding ewes.

Robert is a regular competitor in the fodder beet competition, having grown it for six years and previously taken the reserve championship and under 30 prize.

“We started off growing six acres of fodder beet and now we are up to 12 acres,” said Robert. The ewes – which lamb from the end of March onwards - feed on the fodder beet in the run up to lambing once they have come home from winter grazing.

“The sheep are usually grazing it by now but due to the recent snow, they’re grazing it a bit later. The sheep love it and it’s packed with nutrients.”

This year’s crop was sown on April 27, earlier than usual which Robert says resulted in a bigger yield due to a longer growing season. “We also spread fairly powerful muck on the field before it was ploughed in and that helped too,” he said.

“Two groups of sheep graze the crop, with gimmers and ewe hoggs on one side and the main batch of ewes on the other.

“Triplet bearing ewes come inside a month before lambing and are fed a TMR ration, followed by twins a fortnight later. The singles come off one week before they are due.”

Robert commended both varieties, growing Brigadier around the outside of the block because it’s more attractive to start with, with Feldherr being sown in the centre.

The next RNAS event is Royal Northern Spring Show to be held at Thainstone Centre, Inverurie on Wednesday February 25.

More information from secretary Fiona Davidson on 07795 570359 or secretary@rnas.info.

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