

Farm Woodland Forum Annual Meeting 2025 Field Report

University of Aberdeen

9th – 10th July

This year's annual meeting was held in the stunning King's College Centre at the University of Aberdeen. While the trip up for some was long, the number and varieties of attendees was excellent as usual. Farmers, researchers, policy makers, students, consultants, all of whom gathered to present and discuss the latest in UK agroforestry on day 1 and explore the iconic Glensaugh research site on day 2.

9th July

The first day kicked off with presentations focused on updates from existing agroforestry sites, the latest in experimental research, and insights into farming networks. John Holland (SRUC) summarised the extensive history and changes to the Kirkton & Auchtertyre farms, noting particularly the economic cost of different fencing methods. Following on, Mike Perks (Forest Research) gave insights into the latest results to come out of their organisation. Of note were the extensive database of agroforestry examples they have built up (not public yet) and findings that soil carbon loss through disturbance when tree planting is mitigated by the tree itself.

Andrew Ormerod (Cornwall and Southwest Fruit Focus) provided a summary of apple tree phenologies, noting that cider varieties from Hereford tended to be delayed by a month compared to local Cornish varieties. Heather Gibbard (Forestry Commission/Bangor University) gave a whistle-stop tour of the predatory insects that are associated with agroforestry systems.

Following a short break, Stephen McConnachie (Forest Research) summarised a report produced by Forest Research which explored 8 case studies of agroforestry and tree planting from farmers around England and Wales. Complementing the previous

presentation nicely, Colin Russell (Ramstane Farm) then gave a case study of his own farm, running through the detailed design and how he utilised his prior experience as an engineer to develop and implement the tree planting system. Ian Moss (Woodland Trust Scotland) followed with reflections on his learnings from travelling around Scotland speaking to



farmers who want to implement trees, noting that beavers are becoming an increasing concern.

Further farmer-research collaborations were presented by Clive Thomas (Soil Association) with their Whole Farm Tree Plan project giving farmers the insight to manage and plan new agroforestry to suit their system. Next, Lyn White (Scottish Forestry) gave a run-through of the Integrating Trees Network, a fantastic community that the Farm Woodland Forum can aim to replicate for the rest of the UK. Just before lunch Maureen Kilgore (Irish Agroforestry Forum) summarised the progress of their efforts across the sea, again providing a role model for the Farm Woodland Forum.

During lunch attendees perused a wide selection of posters covering topics such as how agroforestry can be an opportunity for new entrants into farming, sharing UK silvopasture insights for advancing agroforestry in Africa, carbon sequestration and ammonia mitigation of shelterbelts for poultry systems, and competitive water usage in Cacao agroforestry systems, to name a few.

Post-lunch the presentations covered governance and policy, starting with Rosemary Venn (Coventry University) providing insights into how national and regional policies support agroforestry in England. David McKay (Soil Association) explored different payment options to support low-density tree planting in Scotland, while Julie Rostan (University of Aberdeen) summarised work on how policy should balance the socio-economic and environmental factors of agroforestry in Scotland. To conclude this topic, Ulrich Schmutz (Coventry University) shared the results on bio-physical, economic, and policy recommendations from the EU AGROMIX project.

To finish the day off speakers covered tools, models, and decision support systems for agroforestry. Alessandro Gimona (James Hutton Institute) gave a tour of the FARMTREE landscape tool which has been used to highlight potential tree planting areas which will maximise benefits around western Scotland. Paul Burgess (Cranfield University) provided a look at the DigitAF tool and data repository for agroforestry, and Tom Staton (Reading University) presented their results on estimating the production impacts of scaling up agroforestry across England and Wales. To finish the day, David Burslem (University of Aberdeen) gave an incredibly insightful presentation on Scottish Tea production with an element of crime investigation!





10th July

The second day started with an introduction to Glensaugh from Alison Hester, Mark Wilkinson, and Scot Ramsay. The site was part of the original UK Silvopasture Network with agroforestry planting in 1988 at multiple densities. Subsequent tree planting has taken place across the whole site, both in a new agroforestry area and as new woodland. Within the new woodland there is



ongoing hydrological monitoring with an innovative implementation of leaky barriers. The old and new agroforestry planting formed the first stop with Alison and Scot, followed by a visit to the leaky barriers with Mark.

The older agroforestry sites were planted with either Larch at 100, 200, 400, or 2500 trees/ha, or Sycamore at densities of 100 trees/ha, 400 trees/ha and 2500 trees/ha. The difference in timber quality and grass undergrowth was telling. At 100 trees/ha there was still plenty of undergrowth to support grazing however, the trees had little clean stem and according to the farm manager would cost more to fell and clean than the income gained from timber they would produce. On the other end of the scale, at the highest density there was no undergrowth but long, straight, branchless stems. There was also discussion on the potential for the denser plantings to be utilised as winter housing with bale grazing on the surrounding pastures.



A view under the sycamores planted at 400 trees/ha and looking beyond into the 100 tree/ha plot.

We also stopped by the new agroforestry planting that was based off the system at Mains of Fincastle, managed by Andrew Barbour who also joined us for the day. The new planting uses blocks of trees with alleys of grass for grazing in between. The tree blocks contained three inner rows of oaks for timber production and two outer rows of various tree species for browse, and wood production. Andrew Barbour's system is now well established so he was able to provide some later management ideas such as pollarding the outer trees to get around felling licensing and browsing concerns.



After stopping for lunch, the group continued onto the new woodland planting higher up on the farm in the heathland with Mark. Passing by the Luing cattle, we made our way into the gorge to see and discuss some innovative timber usage in the form of leaky barriers. Logs were laid end-to-end and stacked two high to create a loose dam either across the stream itself or in areas of floodplain adjacent to the stream. The concept behind these structures is to slow the water flow, particularly at peak times, and divert excess flow to designated areas where it can be stored and soak through over time.



This work is investigating which materials may be best suited for this structure and how they can be designed optimally. One note raised was that it can become expensive to replace the holding stakes once they wear out. A possible solution was to add in willow whips to act as a holding stake, keeping the timbers in place in the long-term. The willow may also provide browse for any livestock however, at this site they were excluded due to the surrounding newly planted woodland.

Both days were a great experience, and our thanks go to all those who attended and the University of Aberdeen and James Hutton Institute for hosting us.

