CASE STUDY

FWAG Silver Lapwing Award finalist 2012

GRAHAM DIXON, ALWINTON FARM, MORPETH, NORTHUMBERLAND

Alwinton Farm comprises 413 ha of Severely Disadvantaged tenanted land located in Harbottle in the Northumberland National Park, 1,200 ft above sea level. Stocking comprises 1,000 traditional Northumberland type Blackface ewes, 300 of which are bred pure with the remainder crossed with the Bluefaced Leicester. Graham Dixon also runs a herd of 12 registered Galloway cows which graze the hill and are an integral part of managing the upland grazing to comply with the farm's involvement with the higher level stewardship scheme.

Features on the farm include a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) on the flood plain of the River Coquet and hay meadows with a rich biodiversity of plants which attract numerous birds including barn owl, golden plover, oyster catcher, curlew and skylarks. The holding also includes important archaeological sites, including a medieval village. The 70 acres of woodland are managed with an on-going tree and hedge planting programme to enhance wildlife habitats.

In order to maximise profitability Mules are crossed with the Texel and all lambs are finished off the farm by December. And in an effort to cut protein inputs for feed Graham became involved in a project with Natural England to trial home-grown sources of protein from legumes.

Keen to reduce costs for other inputs such as electricity Graham co-ordinated a study on micro hydro power, commissioned on behalf of seven farmers in the Northumberland uplands, which showed that hill farms which operate on tight margins and face a challenging economic future, can achieve substantial cost savings and reduced carbon emissions with on-farm power generation. The study, funded by the Northumberland Uplands Local Action Group and Northumberland National Park Authority, showed the potential contribution of 5-10% towards core farm costs.