

# Thistleyhaugh



# What made us move to an all forage based system?

- Financial – control of direct costs
- We ran an unsustainable high input system (vulnerable to market forces)
- We thought that the system complimented our skill set
- Ruminants are inefficient users of grain



# What did we need to know?

- Grassland management
- Dry matter requirements of different stock classes
- Feed budgeting
- Did we have functional genetics
- Trial and error (learn to fail well)
- Lots of peer to peer learning



# What does it look like?

## Summer

Legumes are the key drivers in performance



Cattle helping to enhance biodiversity on marginal land



## Winter

Using marginal areas of stockpiled grass for the maintenance of dry breeding stock



# Collaboration

15 year working relationship with an organic arable farm

## For them

- Manage clover lays without the need to spend time and money without causing compaction
- Add an income stream from the clover lays
- Grazing weeds out of stubble post harvest
- Including sheep helps insect biodiversity and soil health

## For us

- Allowing us to upscale without costly land investment
- Parasite free pastures due to clean grazing
- Very high performance levels due to legume lays



# Sustainability starts with profitability

- Benchmarking for the last 15 years has shown us we are consistently in the top 25% of producers when it comes to whole farm margins

The profitability of our business is not effected by: purchased feed  
fertiliser costs or  
chemical costs

The profitability of our business is effected by our management decisions

- Most of the time there is nobody else to blame if it does go wrong
- We go by the motto – you never fail, you only learn

# Data and Genetics



Collecting data helps us to ensure we are using the right genetics for a forage based system

## Targeted performance

### Cattle

- 1kg per day lifetime gain

### Sheep

#### Terminal sired lambs

- 360g daily liveweight gain
- Avg 92 days to slaughter
- Avg 18.8 kg carcass



# What is stopping it from becoming mainstream?

Who is promoting the system?

- Not the supply industries, as there is nothing to supply (sell)

Grassland management is a skill that has been lost

- Agricultural educational establishments still do not recognise it as a mainstream system for beef and lamb production in the UK

