

Date : 23 April 2014
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RURAL AFFAIRS AND ENVIRONMENT CONSULTATION ON THE RESEARCH STRATEGY FOR 2016-2021

1. Question 1 – Do the 2011-2016 strategic priorities remain robust and relevant for the period 2016-2021?

Although NFU Scotland believes that the three strategic priorities ('Supporting policy and practice', 'Supporting innovation and the economy', and 'Scientific resilience') remain broadly suitable, it advocates a more explicit and substantial focus on research that can be more readily applied at farm level.

2. Do [the] 'enabling principles' set the right context or should additional principles be adopted?

NFU Scotland considers that the 'enabling principles' ('Exchanging knowledge', 'Inspiring innovation', and 'Maintaining national and international capability') set the right context, but that the first principle ('Exchanging knowledge') should have a greater focus on engaging end users (e.g. farmers) in the earlier stages of the research process.

If Scotland is to have research that end-users need and which will deliver real value to the country (accepting that some research will be, and should remain, 'blue skies'), then exchanging knowledge is not something that should simply happen at the back end of a research project. This engagement should happen at a strategic level on an ongoing basis (e.g. via a rural and environment research stakeholder group that includes Scottish Government, the Main Research Providers, and end-users), and on a more ad-hoc issue-specific basis via a domestic version of European Innovation Partnership (EIP) model.

3. Are the high level outcomes sufficiently clear, if not, what changes would you propose?

NFU Scotland welcomes the shift to 'systems thinking' and supports the high-level research themes.

4. Are the three broad themes identified an appropriate way of structuring our work? If not, what alternatives should be considered?

Although NFU Scotland supports the policy outcomes, it strongly believes that 'Productive and Viable Land Use' and 'Ecosystem Services' and their associated policy outcomes must have a stronger and more explicit focus on improving the efficiency of farming. Research that contributes towards making Scotland's farms more efficient will not only help farmers and the wider economy, but also the environment and climate, and Scotland's global reputation for excellence in applied research.

6. What are your views of the performance and operation of the CoEs to date, are there any additional areas that would benefit from such support?

NFU Scotland is supportive of the work of the Centres of Expertise (CoEs) to date, but feels they could make more of an effort to consult with farmers and other stakeholders in the earlier stages of the research process, to ensure that wherever possible the research being commissioned is what end-users need and will deliver value for Scotland.

Furthermore, NFU Scotland is of the opinion that there is a strong case for the establishment of a CoE in the area of soil science. This is an area where Scotland has a strong history and global reputation, a research community that must be retained and developed, and obvious and pressing challenges with regard to land management under a changing climate.

15. Are the research outputs from the RESAS portfolio of research readily accessible or can this be further improved, if so how?

Although largely supportive of current efforts (especially stakeholder events and knowledgescotland), NFU Scotland considers it vital that greater effort is put into producing and communicating more applied and concise research outputs (e.g. as articles in the farming press). Furthermore, NFU Scotland believes that Scottish Government should assess willingness and ability to build this type of knowledge transfer into projects, and factor this into spending decisions.

There should also be an effort to use the proposed Knowledge Transfer and Innovation Fund (KTIF) under the 2014-2020 Scottish Rural Development Programme (SRDP) to push the results of research out to end users as quickly and comprehensively as possible.

Consideration should also be given to more emphasis on using the levy boards to bridge the gap between research and agriculture.