

## SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT

### ORAL ANSWER 6

**Liz Smith (MSP for Mid Scotland and Fife (Region), Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party):** To ask the Scottish Government what measures it is putting in place to attract younger people into the farming sector.

S6O-00915

**MAIRI GOUGEON:** We recognise that getting young people into the sector is key to driving our rural economy forward. We know that younger people face a number of obstacles getting into the sector which can be off putting.

That is why this government is continuing to support them by developing skills and talent through our Skills Action Plan for Rural Scotland and through the Skills for Farming Group to guide employers on apprenticeships and work placements.

Additional support will continue to be provided by our Farming Opportunities for New Entrants group, Scottish Land Matching Service and Farm Advisory Service.

## **SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTIONS**

**Liz Smith: Can the Cabinet Secretary advise Parliament about the Skillseeder programme, what it does and how it is being funded?**

**MAIRI GOUGEON:** The SkillSeeder company are delivering an easily accessible rural land based training and skills Skillseeder IT platform. Breaking down barriers for people throughout rural Scotland making it easier for people to find the right training for them and for skill sharers/trainers to easily reach people who need their training. There are 5,000 courses on there already, including from colleges, machinery rings, renewable companies and forestry. Skillseeder supports the delivery of the Skills Action Plan for Rural Scotland including the commitment to provide individuals with accessible skills provision (to secure sustain and progress careers in rural areas) and the development of the current workforce in rural areas through upskilling and reskilling.

Skillseeder was developed in response to one of the Women in Agriculture Taskforce recommendations; delivered through Scottish Government's CivTech 5 Challenge programme. It's development is being funded by the Scottish Government, Lantra Scotland and SDS and £244k funding has been provided for the development of the platform.

**Q: What is the Cabinet Secretary's view on the outcome of the New Entrant and Young Start-up Grant Scheme evaluation published on Friday 18 March?**

**MAIRI GOUGEON:** I welcome the publication of this evaluation. I was pleased to read that the grants were successful in encouraging 254 new younger entrants into the sector by granting over £11.6M. However, the review highlighted that challenges relating to land availability and profitability of agri businesses still remained considerable barriers to new entrant which grants alone cannot address.

We will use this review to help shape future plans for new entrant support as in line with our 2021 manifesto commitment.

**Q -** The fishing and seafood industries are also working hard to attract young people to their sectors. This includes fish processors in my constituency, who are working with Seafish and the Scottish Seafood Association through campaigns such as "Sea a Bright Future. Can I ask the Scottish Government for an update, in a similar vein to Liz Smith's

question, in relation to its work to support young people moving into the fishing and processing sectors?

**MAIRI GOUGEON:** The Marine Fund Scotland has supported new entrants to secure their positions in the fishing industry, for instance, in assisting young fishers to purchase their first fishing boat (or share in a fishing boat).

To date we have awarded £2m of funding to assist entry of young fishers to the sector. The Fund has also supported new entrants by providing grant support to Seafish to deliver training in Scotland.

Additionally, the National Transition Training Fund is supporting training for up to 175 individuals in the seafood sector. This year, training is available in four key areas:

- Upskilling and multiskilling staff through training for employees and teams.
- Career recruitment and retention toolkits for businesses, aimed at helping firms to develop recruitment and retention policies.
- Process automation and business implications.
- Women in the Scottish seafood industry.

## **POSSIBLE SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTIONS**

**Q: Will the Cabinet Secretary confirm she will meet the SNP Manifesto commitment to provide additional funding for new entrants?**

**MAIRI GOUGEON:** Absolutely. Myself and officials have discussed on a number of occasions and fully recognise the importance of attracting new entrants into the sector. Various options that add to our existing support measures are actively being considered. Any suggestion that we are not supporting new entrants into the sector is simply not true. This government has arguably invested the most in new entrant support compared to other parts of the UK.

- We added provision to allocate direct payments to new entrants and young farmers in excess of £7.2m;
- Our start-up provision alone under the SRDP totalled nearly £13m;
- Under the FONE group we have helped facilitate entry to 76 new entrants by providing 112 land opportunities across 7,070 hectares of land;
- And in conjunction with the NFUS, the Scottish Land Matching Service has got off to a very promising start despite the impact of Covid.

**Q: Will the Cabinet Secretary look to offer further new entrant capital support in the future?**

**MAIRI GOUGEON:** We are not ruling out any potential new entrant support for the future. That being said with land prices soaring and without support for the EU government will struggle to offer substantial and meaningful capital support. We have to identify alternative routes into the industry. New entrants can access excellent government support through the Farm Advisory Service, the Farming Opportunities for New Entrants group and the Scottish Land Matching Service supported by the NFUS too.

**Q: Referring to the recent publication of the New Entrants & Young Farmers Start-up Grant Scheme evaluation. Is it the Cabinet Secretary's opinion that new entrant capital grants have been a failure?**

**MAIRI GOUGEON:** No the capital grants have had some successes which should not be overlooked. The evaluation notes that these grants have contributed to an increase in new, younger entrant to the sector and has been an useful exercise to highlight new entrant issues in the sector, which I might add are felt across the UK and EU and not unique to Scotland.

**Q: Why hasn't Cabinet Secretary announced additional new entrant support as per the SNP 2021 manifesto?**

**MAIRI GOUGEON:** I would remind the member that the new entrant capital scheme evaluation was only publish on Friday last week. Now that this work has been completed we are in a more informed position as how to proceed. We already have high quality new entrant support and we will build on this as per our manifesto commitment.

**Q: Will the Cabinet Secretary confirm she will meet the SNP Manifesto commitment to provide additional funding for new entrants?**

**MAIRI GOUGEON:** Absolutely. Myself and officials have discussed on a number of occasions and fully recognise the importance of attracting new entrants into the sector. Various options that add to our existing support measures are actively being considered. Any suggestion that we are not supporting new entrants into the sector is simply not true. This government has arguably invested the most in new entrant support compared to other parts of the UK.

- We added provision to allocate direct payments to new entrants and young farmers in excess of £7.2m;
- Our start-up provision alone under the SRDP totalled nearly £13m;
- Under the FONE group we have helped facilitate entry to 76 new entrants by providing 112 land opportunities across 7,070 hectares of land;
- And in conjunction with the NFUS, the Scottish Land Matching Service has got off to a very promising start despite the impact of Covid.

**Q: What is the reason for the delay?**

**MAIRI GOUGEON:** There is no delay but we must be certain that new support enhances that already available. Also, it has been important to await, for example, the evaluation of the New Entrants and Young Farmer's Start-Up Grant Schemes. That has only recently concluded and we will take on board its findings once the current peer review concludes.

**Q: Why has FLS discontinued its Starter Farm Programme?**

**MAIRI GOUGEON:** FLS have advised that Starter Farms no longer fit well with the organisations aims and business sustainability plans. While they will not be offering any new starter farm opportunities on their equipped holdings, they will (as members of the FONE group) continue to let land that is suitable for agriculture, giving priority to new entrant applicants. In 2021 FLS let around 150ha and intend to offer even more in 2022.

All existing Starter Farm tenancies have been extended for three years beyond the original fixed contractual ten-year term. The tenancies will, therefore, end between 2025 and 2028. FLS are carrying out strategic reviews of the nine farms and appraising options for the long term future of the units beyond the existing tenancies.

**Q: What about practical measures?**

**MAIRI GOUGEON:** Neither should we forget the vital role played by the Farm Advisory Service, which offers a range of free generic and bespoke advice for new entrants too. This includes a mentoring programme, free support through specialist advice and a New Entrants to Farming Programme includes numerous activities to aid potential and aspiring new entrants to the agricultural industry. Many will also know that we are about to launch new FAS contracts. Let me take this opportunity to assure that new entrants will remain a key priority.

**Q: What about the loss of farming opportunities for new entrants to farming that might arise as a result of plans to increase forestry cover.**

**MAIRI GOUGEON:** Around 80 per cent of applications for forestry grants come from smaller land owners, including farmers, who are seeing many benefits to integrating trees as part of their business. Scottish Forestry has an active engagement programme with farmers and their trade associations to help them get more benefits from tree planting. Its goal is to work alongside the agricultural community and ensure an integrated approach to getting the right tree in the right place.

**Q: Additional lines if needed: Are there any potential benefits for farmers? If so, what are they?**

**MAIRI GOUGEON:** All woodland creation proposals in Scotland are subject to rigorous assessments and consultations. Part of this includes consulting with Scottish Government agriculture colleagues to determine if there is potential for impact on better quality agricultural land.

Creating new woodlands delivers a wide range of benefits which, in addition to carbon sequestration, include timber production, nature conservation and flood prevention. Trees also offer benefits to farmers including livestock shelter and amenity.

It has always been our guiding principle that we get the right tree in the right place.

It is already clear that many farming businesses are looking to diversify into a range of non- agricultural opportunities. There are many benefits for farming businesses to grow trees – not only does it give them a future income, it also has many advantages for livestock. And as farmers are well aware, we all need to play our part in reducing the effects of climate change and planting trees does exactly this by locking up carbon for many years.

To achieve this, we want to see more integration of land use, and we continue to explore a number of initiatives to try to promote more effective land use in Scotland, where farming and forestry are better integrated and understood, and we optimise the way that land is used to deliver these important goals.

**Q:** Is it the Cabinet Secretary's opinion that new entrant capital grants have been a failure?

**MAIRI GOUGEON** - No the capital grants have had some success which should not be overlooked. The survey notes that these grants have contributed to an increase in new, younger entrants to the sector and has been a useful exercise to highlight new entrant issues in the sector, which I might add are felt across the UK and EU and not unique to Scotland.

**Q:** Will the Cabinet Secretary look to offer further new entrant capital support in the future?

**MAIRI GOUGEON** – We are not ruling out any potential new entrant support for the future. That being said with land prices soaring and without support for the EU government will struggle to offer substantial and meaningful capital support. We have to identify alternative routes into the industry. New entrants can access excellent government support through the Farm Advisory Service, the Farming Opportunities for New Entrants group and the Scottish Land Matching Service supported by the NFUS too.

**Q:** Without capital grants, how does this government intend on supporting new entrants into the sector?

**MAIRI GOUGEON** – We will continue to support new entrants into the sector by offering quality advice and bespoke support through the Farm Advisory Service, identifying land for new entrants through the Farming Opportunities for New Entrants (FONE) group, supporting succession and joint ventures through the Scottish Land Matching Service (SLMS).

**Q:** Capital support is an absolute necessity for new entrants into farming and crofting. How can withdrawing this support be considered anything but a failure to support new entrants?

**MAIRI GOUGEON** – This government has provided just under £20m of capital support for new entrants, which is more than any other part of the UK. To suggest we've failed to give new entrants capital support is not true or fair. For clarity, we are not ruling out new entrant capital support in the future. We're just not considering using these historic funding mechanisms and will look to use other avenues to support new entrants.



## **BACKGROUND NOTE FOR S6O-00915**

1. Liz Smith is the Scottish Conservative MSP for Mid Scotland and Fife (Region) since 2007.
2. She is the convener for the Cross-Party Group on Outdoor Education, Sport and Colleges and Universities.
3. It is not clear why Liz Smith is asking this question. However, the SNP 2021 manifesto noted a commitment to provide more support for new entrants into farming. **Annex A** offers a FMQ styled brief on New Entrants in to the agricultural sector.
4. The Cabinet Secretary will be aware that the New Entrants and Young Farmers Start-Up Grant Scheme evaluation was published on Friday 18 March 2022. **Annex B** offers FMQ styled brief on this.
5. **Annex C** offers a FMQ styled brief on rural economy and skills.
6. Opposition MSPs have recently asked a number of questions around support for new entrants. These have been noted under **Annex D**.

**Contact:** (Redacted text) - Agricultural Development and Crofting Branch  
(Redacted text)

### NEW ENTRANTS TO FARMING

#### ISSUES:

- SNP 2021 manifesto committed to provide more support for new entrants into farming.
- Recent negative press activity around Forestry and Land Scotland (FLS) discontinuing their Starter Farm Programme.
- There are numerous barriers to entering agriculture including: lack of capital, access to land, competition from established farmers, access to finance and servicing debt etc.

#### Top Lines

- The Scottish Government has invested the most in agricultural new entrants compared to other parts of the UK.
- We added provision to allocate direct payments to new entrants and young farmers in excess of £7.2m. We have also offered Young Farmer Start Up Grants which totalled over £12m and New Entrant Start Up Grant totalling over £600,000.
- Since 2017, the Farming Opportunities for New Entrants group (FONE) has helped facilitate entry to 76 new entrants by providing 112 land opportunities across 7,070 hectares of land.
- The Scottish Government recognises new entrants to be vital for the future of the industry as they drive innovation, best practice and improve efficiencies.
- Despite the profound impact of Covid-19 following the launch of the **Scottish Land Matching Service (SLMS)**, the service has received in excess of 300 enquiries and most importantly concluded 11 agreements with others under negotiation.
- The **Scottish Farm Advisory Service (FAS)** has three separate and dedicated measures for new entrants these include: free support through a mentoring programme, free support through specialist advice and a New Entrants to Farming Programme includes numerous activities to aid potential and aspiring new entrants to the agricultural industry.
- Additionally, the Scottish Government support and facilitate the **Farming Opportunities for New Entrants (FONE)** group to maximise starter opportunities on publically owned land to provide a business opportunity to a new entrant. FONE has been a success story facilitating 112 business opportunities across 7,000 hectares of land to mainly New Entrants since 2017.

- We are also looking at extending the popular and highly regarded **Ringlink pre-apprenticeship programme**. We hope to report back on that soon.
- Later this year we will announce additional support for new entrants in line with the manifesto commitment on the SNP 2021 Election Manifesto but it is unlikely to include funding mechanisms we witnessed in and around 2016.

## NEW ENTRANTS & YOUNG FARMERS START-UP GRANT SCHEME EVALUATION

### ISSUES:

- The RESAS on NE & Young Farmers Start-up Grant Scheme Evaluation report was published Friday 18 March 2022.
- The conclusion of the report states that no evidence had been found to support the continuation of start-up grants as they operated in the 2016-2020 SRDP.

### Top Lines

- Key findings:
  1. The evaluation finds that the schemes have supported new entrants to agriculture, fulfilling the New Entrants Start-Up Grant Scheme aim of increasing the number of entrepreneurs who farm. The majority of grants provided were Young Farmers Start-Up Grants, suggesting that the scheme was successful in its aim to increase the number of young entrepreneurs who farm.
  2. The survey identified that the availability of land was a considerable challenge for grant recipients. While it was a requirement of the New Entrants Grant that applicants must already have land, the majority of survey respondents rented some or all of their land.
  3. Approximately 40% of survey respondents did not turn a profit. Excluding financial support (i.e. BPS, LFASS, etc.) this proportion increased to 75% failing to turn a profit. It suggests that the grants' impacts were limited in their shared aim to encourage new entrants to build profitable, innovative businesses that respond to the industry's changing economic environment.
- It is important to note that this evaluation was conducted only 2 years after the closure of the schemes. Struggles with profitability of farming businesses are also not unique to recipients of these grants. Across Scotland, around a quarter of farmers are not profitable even with CAP payments and other support.

- The evaluation found limited evidence to support the continuation of the start-up grants as a method to encourage generational renewal or the creation of new, profitable farming businesses.
- Later this year we will announce additional support for new entrants in line with the manifesto commitment on the SNP 2021 Election Manifesto but it is unlikely to include funding mechanisms we witnessed in and around 2016.

## RURAL ECONOMY SKILLS & LEARNING

### ISSUES:

- People are key to driving forward our rural communities – making them sustainable and inclusive places to live, work and thrive.
- We recognise that rural areas face particular skills challenges and Scottish Government provides a range of support to address these challenges.

### Top Lines

- We are committed to developing the economy across rural Scotland economy to its full potential and are progressing a range of activity backed by significant SG investments to achieve that.
- People are key to driving forward our rural communities – making them sustainable and inclusive places to live, work and thrive.
- We recognise that rural areas face particular skills challenges and Scottish Government provides a range of support to address these challenges.
- We have set up an independent Commission to review learning in our land-based and aquaculture sectors. The Commission will provide recommendations to Ministers on how to attract more people – especially women and young people – into these sectors.
- Our Skills Action Plan for Rural Scotland has driven forward a partnership approach to developing the skills and talent needed to make sure that Scotland's rural economy and communities continue to flourish and grow.
- Through the actions identified under the Plan's five priority areas it ensures that we have the right people with the right skills.

### Background Briefing

#### Commission to Review Land-Based Learning

- We have set up a Commission to undertake a review of learning in Scotland's land-based and aquaculture sectors, to provide opportunities and qualifications through early years, school, college, university and work-based learning for more people, and specifically more women and young people, to work with and on the land, particularly in green skills.
- The review will look at how learning systems equip people with the skills and knowledge needed to work in Scotland's land-based sectors,

including any new and emerging green occupations in land-based sectors.

- The Commission will provide Scottish Ministers with independent, evidence-based advice and recommendations on how to attract more people into these sectors.

### Skills Action Plan for Rural Scotland

- The Skills Action Plan for Rural Scotland sets out our partnership approach to developing the skills and talent needed to make sure that Scotland's rural economy and communities continue to flourish and grow.
- Scotland's rural economy has an important role to play both through the significant contribution it makes to national economic output but also in providing employment opportunities for people living in our country's rural, remote and coastal communities.
- We know that people are key to driving forward our rural communities – making them sustainable and inclusive places to live, work and thrive.
- Our Skills Action Plan for Rural Scotland seeks to ensure that we have the right people with the right skills and to support inclusive growth through five priority areas of action:
  - Taking a coordinated strategic approach to tackling skills in rural areas
  - Better understanding of the skills that rural employers need and align provision to support this
  - Providing individuals with accessible education and skills provision to secure, sustain and progress in their careers in rural areas
  - Developing the current workforce in rural areas through upskilling and reskilling
  - Building a secure pipeline for the future

### Support for Lantra Scotland

- SG provides funding support to Lantra Scotland who aim to ensure that Scotland's land-based, aquaculture and environmental conservation sectors meet their skills needs, have the right people and promote learning opportunities for new entrants.
- Lantra promotes the land-based sector as a rewarding career choice and help to ensure that learning and training provision address industry requirements and skills gaps.
- Lantra's "#NoTwoDaysTheSame in Land-based and Aquaculture" provides the opportunity for school students to find out about the wide range of careers available in the land-based and aquaculture sectors

and how young people can get there. It is delivered in partnership with Developing Young Workforce Live.

### Support from Skills Development Scotland

- SDS provides information and support on agriculture apprenticeships through the Apprenticeship Scotland website. This includes information on qualifications and career opportunities.
- SDS's MyWorldofWork website provides job profiles, case studies and information on availability of jobs in agriculture and land in Scotland.

### Support for Agricultural Employers

- Skills for Farming group, with the support of Skills Development Scotland and Lantra Scotland, produced an Employers' Toolkit for Agricultural Apprenticeships, Training and Placement Support, which was launched at the Royal Highland Show in June 2019.
- The toolkit guides employers through apprenticeships, work placements and farm visits. Areas covered include the different types of apprenticeships, costs, responsibilities, health and safety, insurance, funding, useful contacts, case studies, mentoring and other training.
- The toolkit was well received and is currently being reprinted.

### Developing the Young Workforce (DYW)

- DYW Live is an exciting partnership between employers and organisations from around Scotland and delivered by e-Sgoil and Education Scotland.
- DYW Live provides live sessions that support learners' development of employability skills, career pathways and industry connections.
- DYW Live in partnership with Royal Highland Education Trust (RHET) delivered 28 sessions across the **Talk to a Farmer Week** with over 20,000 estimated learners in attendance.
- DYW Live also has the following programmes with a Rural Focus:
  - Career Options in Aquaculture.
  - Land-based Careers: Information for Teachers and Influencers.
  - #Notwodaysthesame in land-based and aquaculture careers.
  - DYW Live also has CLPL courses with The John Muir Award and Heritage Hero award which contribute to our promotion of rural skills.

**Contacts:** (Redacted text) – Rural Economy Policy Branch – (Redacted text)



(Redacted text) – Rural Economy Policy Branch – (Redacted text)

## LINKED QUESTIONS

In February 2022 Murdo Fraser asked (S6O-00711).

**Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)**: To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on how it is supporting new entrants into agriculture.

**Mairi Gougeon**: We are supporting new entrants to agriculture through the Farm Advisory Service, the Scottish Land Matching Service, the farming opportunities for new entrants group and direct payments. I am also exploring options to further develop support for new entrants in line with our manifesto commitment.

**Murdo Fraser**: There is currently a serious issue in rural Scotland with soaring land prices, which is mainly driven by corporate entities buying up large tracts of property for the planting of trees in order to meet environmental obligations. Encouraging tree planting is clearly good for tackling climate change, but that has the effect of taking marginal land that could be used for food production out of agricultural use. It is also making it harder for new entrants to agriculture to either purchase land or expand holdings. Is the Scottish Government aware of that issue? Does it have any concerns about what is going on?

**Mairi Gougeon**: I thank the member for raising that really important point. The issue has been raised directly with me by NFU Scotland, and I and the Minister for Environment, Biodiversity and Land Reform had a meeting with its president and vice-president to talk it over. I highlight to members that the Scottish Land Commission was tasked with undertaking an urgent piece of work to examine the issue and look into it in more detail. We are currently awaiting the outcome of that.

In June 2021, Dr Gulhane asked (S6O-00011) what support (SG) is providing to encourage new entrants into farming?

**Answer lifted from the Parliamentary report:**

“The Scottish Government continues to implement a programme of initiatives to help generational renewal in the agriculture sector. Key initiatives include facilitating land opportunities through the farming opportunities for new entrants group; providing a Scottish land matching service for those who are considering joint ventures; providing basic

payment scheme entitlements for new and young farmers; delivering a free farm advisory service; providing a network of new entrant groups; offering a free mentoring programme; and supporting partners that are delivering pilot apprenticeship schemes. To add to that package, and in line with our manifesto commitment, we plan to provide support through a specific new entrants fund.”

**Follow-up Q:** (and perhaps linked to the Tory manifesto commitment to re-open young farmer and new entrant start-up grants)

“In August 2018, the Government stopped the capital grants scheme for new agricultural businesses. Now, three years later, there is no detail or funding. The importance of new entrants and young farmers cannot be overstated. Research that was published by the James Hutton Institute in March 2020 showed that new entrants are notably more active in their intentions for diversification and renewable energy on their land. With all that in mind, will the Cabinet Secretary commit to reintroducing a fully funded scheme for new entrants to help harness that potential and to address the three years of missing funds for new entrants?”

**Follow-up A:**

“As I said in my initial answer, establishing a new entrants fund is exactly what we are looking to do. I absolutely agree with some of the points that the member made about the importance of getting new entrants into farming. That is why we made the commitment in our manifesto. The previous schemes that the member talked about were successful. Both of them were popular, but that was particularly the case with the young farmers scheme. Despite the fact that the budgets were topped up twice, both schemes closed to new applications in 2018 because available budgets were exhausted. However, that was not before the schemes had supported more than 205 young farmers’ new businesses with the associate funding, as well as 49 smaller new enterprises. The evaluations of those schemes are underway, and those will assist our thinking in planning for a specific new entrants fund, as included in our manifesto.”

In September 2021, Pam Gosal asked (S6O-00085) whether the Scottish Government will provide an update on its plans to support new entrants to the agriculture sector.

**Answer lifted from the Parliamentary Report:**

“Reports such as “Farming for 1.5°—From here to 2045” underline the stark challenges that Scottish agriculture faces. They highlight the continuing role for skilled and innovative young and new-entrant farmers

and crofters. We agree with that view and we continue to support new entrants through a number of measures, including the farming opportunities for new entrants programme and the land matching service, which we fund the NFU Scotland to deliver.

The national reserve provides new farmers and crofters with an allocation of payment entitlements under the basic payment scheme, as well as the young farmers basic payment top-up. In line with our manifesto commitment, I will announce how we intend to support new and young entrants through a specific fund during this parliamentary session.”

**Follow-up Q:**

“The importance of new entrants and young farmers cannot be overstated, nor can the importance of attracting applicants from all walks of life. With that in mind, what action is the Scottish Government taking to encourage black, Asian and minority ethnic applicants to the agriculture sector?”

**Follow-up A:**

“Pam Gosal has raised a vital point. It is right that we try to encourage diversity where possible. I would be more than happy to meet her to discuss actions that we can take in that regard.”

In December 2021, Sandesh Gulhane asked (S6O-00511) the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on its work, outlined in the programme for government, to determine how best to support new and young entrants into farming?

**Answer lifted from the Parliamentary report:**

“We are continuing to work on options that will best add to the existing support provided by our farming opportunities for new entrants group, the Scottish Land Matching Service, the Farm Advisory Service and direct payments. Our aim remains that the outcome will be announced soon

**Follow-up Q:**

“Despite the Scottish National Party throwing taxpayers’ money at encouraging young women to join the agriculture industry, the young farmers start-up grant scheme handed out funding to only 62 women across Scotland in four years. In 2019, there was only one successful applicant. Young farmers deserve better than that, especially young women in rural areas. Does the cabinet secretary believe that a single successful applicant in one year is an acceptable return on the investment? Will she outline exactly what measures she is taking to improve on that abysmal record?”

**Follow-up A:**

“We are absolutely committed to ensuring that we have more new entrants to farming. Just this week I visited an opportunity that has been made available through the farming opportunities for new entrants programme, and we are looking at the opportunities that could be offered through public land to encourage new entrants.

Can we do more about getting more women and more diversity into agriculture? Absolutely; I agree with that. That is why we made specific commitments in our manifesto to getting more women into agriculture and to making Scottish agriculture more inclusive. Women living and working in Scottish agriculture are an essential part of the future of the rural economy, and developing and expanding their skills will ensure the long-term sustainability of the sector.

This financial year, we have committed £300,000 to finding practical solutions to support women, including the wider roll-out of the “Be your best self” programme, personal development training, a pilot of agricultural business skills training, a project to test innovative solutions for childcare, and the development of SkillSeeder, which is a skills-sharing app that encourages greater participation in rural and land-based learning. During the current parliamentary session, we will double to £600,000 funding to support women in agriculture.”