

SCOTTISH RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME 2014 – 2020

RURAL DEVELOPMENT OPERATIONAL COMMITTEE (RDOC) - May 2020

COVID-19 RESPONSE AND RECOVERY

Timescale

The Scottish Government is required to review social distancing regulations at least once every 21 days. As of 16 April the Scottish Government announced that the lockdown would be extended until at least 07 May. When, the lockdown will be reviewed again, and we will find out whether it is extended further or reduced. There has been consistent messaging on this across the UK.

The First Minister said in her speech when extending the lockdown that:

“Early indications are that the lockdown restrictions have resulted in a slowing down in the rate of community transmission of the virus. And while we of course can’t be complacent, that slow down appears to be reflected in a stabilisation of the numbers being admitted to hospital and intensive care.”

Exiting lockdown

On 23 April the First Minister discussed “COVID-19: A Framework for Decision-Making” that sets out the position during this ongoing period of lockdown and outlines the factors that must be considered as we move gradually to ease restrictions. She stated:

“Physical distancing and limiting our contacts with others will be a fact of life for a long time to come - certainly until treatments and ultimately a vaccine offer different solutions. But if we all keep doing the right things, there will be a way through – and we will find it, together.”

www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-framework-decision-making

Physical Distancing

The latest guidance on Social Distancing was issued 21 April 2020. This guidance restricts work that may be permitted to continue to only that which is part of the Critical National Infrastructure (CNI) and places emphasis on all other work being closed, which has been the case since 07 April.

The revised guidance is clear that all non-essential work (not considered part of the CNI) should now stop on a precautionary basis.

In Scotland we do not propose to provide generic social distancing guidance for the sector or businesses, the industry is best placed to design these. The provision of

letters of comfort has been raised, however it is not considered helpful for Government to provide these for businesses. The actions described at above are considered the appropriate role for government.

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-business-and-social-distancing-guidance/pages/overview/>

A number of amendments have been made to protect workers and provide further guidance. The adjustments to the regulations include:

- Formalising the two metre distancing rules to all businesses that remain open. Businesses that do not take all reasonable measures to enforce those rules could be fined or ultimately prosecuted.
- The legislation will also make clear that livestock markets and money advice services such as foreign exchange services can continue to operate, while holiday accommodation businesses can manage online and telephone services for bookings related to future dates.
- A technical change to clarify that burial grounds can stay open.

www.gov.scot/news/social-distancing-regulations-strengthened

Horticulture, Fruit and Vegetables Sectors – additional guidance on social distancing in relation to the horticulture, fruit and vegetable industry sector has now been provided by SASA..

<https://www.sasa.gov.uk/covid-19-guidance>

Guidance on Face Masks (28 April)

SG announced their stance on wearing face coverings, suggesting that there may be some benefit in wearing a facial covering when you leave the house and enter enclosed spaces, especially where physical distancing is more difficult and where there is a risk of close contact with multiple people you do not usually meet e.g. public transport or entering a food shop. There is no evidence to suggest there might be a benefit outdoors, unless in an unavoidable crowded situation, where there may be some benefit.

By face coverings we do not mean the wearing of a surgical or other medical grade mask but a facial covering of the mouth and nose, that is made of cloth or other textiles and through which you can breathe, for example a scarf. We are recommending that you consider using face coverings in the limited circumstances described above as a precautionary measure.

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-public-use-of-face-coverings/>

Testing for eligible key workers

SG has announced its approach to testing for eligible key workers. It allows for key workers who are in Critical National Infrastructure posts, and cannot work from home, who are symptomatic (or those who share a household with a symptomatic

person) to access a test for Covid 19. The purpose of the test is to allow those who are not ill with the virus and are well enough to work to return to their duties in their CNI roles.

Details are on the website. Officials have fed into the process and are content it has the correct balance. Most workers from farming and animal health are in category 2.

On the delivery side UK wide uptake is outstripping demand but the sites in Scotland (Glasgow, Edinburgh, Inverness, Aberdeen and Perth) are currently under capacity (prior to launch) and there are a number of mobile testing sites. Postal testing is also available however demand of this far exceeds supply. Islands cover is a known issue with the main constraint being the short turnaround time required for the test reagents.

www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-testing-for-key-workers-in-Scotland

Test, Trace, Isolate, Support Strategy (04 May)

On 4 May the First Minister gave further detail on plans that will help to ease lockdown restrictions. A key aspect of this next phase, is the "test, trace, isolate, support" approach. We will test people in the community who have symptoms consistent with COVID-19. We will use contact tracing, a well-established public health intervention, to identify the close contacts of those cases, who may have had the disease transmitted to them.

However, it is important to stress that "test, trace, isolate, support" will be most effective when levels of infection are low – lower than now – and stay low, and that its success relies on all of us knowing and agreeing what to do if we have symptoms, and being prepared to self-isolate when advised to do so.

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-test-trace-isolate-support/>

Letter from Minister for Rural Affairs and the Natural Environment on garden centres (22 April)

Mairi Gougeon MSP issued a letter to stakeholders thanking garden centres and nurseries for closing to help prevent the spread of the virus, noting the challenges this has created and supporting the use of home delivery services for the sector:

“I believe that allowing garden centres in Scotland to operate a home delivery service for seeds, plants, equipment, tools, pots and other essential gardening materials has the potential to promote physical and mental health and keep us active whilst also providing some much needed revenue for a pressured sector of our economy.”

www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-garden-centres---minister-for-rural-affairs-letter

£100m Funds to Help Business (30 April)

A £100 million package of additional grant support for small and medium sized businesses (SMEs) and newly self-employed people opens for applications later today.

The three separate funds will be administered by local authorities and Scotland's enterprise agencies and will begin to pay out grants in early May.

They include a £34 million hardship fund for the newly self-employed, a £20 million fund for small and micro enterprises in the creative, tourism and hospitality sectors and £45 million for viable SMEs crucial to the Scottish economy which are vulnerable.

<https://www.gov.scot/news/gbp-100m-funds-to-help-business>

CAP Flexibilities and Support – SAF Deadline Extension

To support farmers and crofters during the current COVID 19 crisis, the European Commission has proposed a number of flexibilities to CAP regulations. This includes the option to delay the SAF submission deadline to 15 June 2020. At present, the SAF deadline in Scotland remains 15th May 2020. This is to ensure that the timeline for the delivery of 2020 payments, taking place later in the year, is not disrupted.

CAP Flexibilities and Support

Officials are looking closely at the other flexibilities offered and monitoring the situation closely, and keeping all options under constant review. They are also working with UK counterparts to ensure a consistent approach where appropriate.

In relation to Pillar 2 the EC have highlighted the existing opportunities afforded by the Rural Development Program (RDP) to mitigate the socio-economic impact of the crisis, such as re-directing support for the development of basic services and health care facilities, co-operation, re-allocating unused funds; and, flexibility for loans for farmers and other rural development beneficiaries at favourable conditions.

Where there are specific requirements for schemes under the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), officials can show flexibility on a case by case basis under exceptional circumstances. However, it would not be appropriate to remove all environmental restrictions and compliance as it is important that wider environmental standards are maintained.

There has also been a number of adaptations put in place, in light of the COVID restriction for both customers and staff, to make the claim process as accessible as possible to allow payments to continue and to also ensure that we continue to deliver against the objectives of the SRDP.

Farmers and crofters who find themselves having difficulty in meeting scheme requirements should contact their local RPID office by phone to discuss their specific circumstances.

The Farm Advisory Service (FAS), one to one advice available as webinars, virtual meeting have been taking place and the scope has been expanded to provide farmers and crofters with advice on resilience and adaptability in the face of COVID-19.

The Scottish Rural Network has established a [COVID-19 Information Hub](#) which will be updated daily with the latest official guidance, helpful resources, funding support and news relevant to Scotland's rural communities.

Coronavirus Guidance for Livestock Keepers (03 April)

Guidance on statutory testing of livestock from Sheila Voas, Chief Veterinary Officer Scotland. This guidance advises that statutory testing should continue for now, providing you can carry out safe social distancing and hygiene measures.

www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-advice-for-livestock-keepers

Ministerial statement on access rights during COVID-19 (09 April)

A statement on what exercising rights of access responsibly under the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 means during the COVID-19 emergency.

www.gov.scot/publications/ministerial-statement-on-access-rights-during-covid-19

Skills matching service to help rural business (09 April)

The Skills Matching Service (SMS) setup by Lantra Scotland is open. It focuses on providing skilled and semi-skilled paid and unpaid labour for livestock and animal welfare purposes to land based businesses, animal welfare organisations, animal charities, zoos and others in need of help during COVID-19, while maintaining essential social distancing requirements. Details are available on their website www.scotland.lantra.co.uk/skills-matching-service and be contacted them.

www.gov.scot/news/skills-matching-service-to-help-rural-business

CAP Payments

Payments started in February this year and to date we have paid out over £325m of those 2019 claims. Additionally, in March, we made Convergence payments to 17,900 farmers and crofters with the total value of payments processed over £88 million, with individual payments worth on average £4,894.70. To ensure continuity the application window for next year's payments is currently open and we are actively encouraging applicants to submit their SAF at the earliest opportunity. This is not funding to address any co-vid 19 related impact.

Supporting agriculture (04 April)

Around 7,000 specialist beef producers will benefit from payments worth around £40 million in the coming weeks, ensuring money is still going to farmers and crofters during these unprecedented and challenging times.

A further 469 convergence payments worth £768,500 have also been processed this week, mainly for new entrants to farming.

www.gov.scot/news/supporting-agriculture

Extra financial support for Scottish farmers (08 April)

Payments worth £19.1 million have been made to almost 6,000 farmers and crofters in Scotland's most remote and rural areas from the Less Favoured Area Support Scheme (LFASS). The majority will receive balance payments on top of the 95% loan paid between January and March this year.

www.gov.scot/news/extra-financial-support-for-scottish-farmers