

A Future Strategy for Scottish Agriculture



Final Report by the Scottish Government's Agriculture Champions

May 2018

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CHAPTER 1

This report presents our recommendations as the Scottish Government's four Agriculture Champions.

Background

This is an opportune time to position Scottish agriculture in the minds of the Scottish public as a key part of the Scottish landscape and economy and we want to get it right.

No change is not an option. Even if Scotland were to remain in the EU, there would be a new version of the CAP for 2021-27, for which there are already proposals for a lower overall budget and reform in some of the same key areas we have considered.

Brexit amplifies and makes more urgent some fundamental challenges that farming was already facing, and it cannot be ignored. But we have aimed to look beyond Brexit and set out a strategy for the long term that will hold up however the immediate uncertainties turn out.

Many reports have been published in the past with excellent recommendations, but they have not always been actioned. This time the Scottish Government, with potentially fewer restrictions on its actions in future, has the opportunity to take forward our recommendations and, working with the industry, make a real difference.

Process so far

In November we set out our emerging thinking in an interim discussion document¹ in which we identified six strategic themes, underpinned by the concept of Public Value which is relevant to them all. This followed a programme of work with our working groups of individual specialists and business people. The six themes were:

- Continuity over the next five years, including securing the payments to which Scotland is entitled.
- Assisting the Scottish agricultural industry through a period of major transformational change.
- Enhancing Scotland's Natural Capital.
- Helping to improve the productive efficiency of Scottish agriculture.
- Illustrating the huge opportunities for careers in the rural sector.
- Improved integration of the whole supply chain for the benefit of all.

We are also members of the National Council of Rural Advisers, which is looking more broadly at future rural support, and our recommendations should be read alongside theirs.

This document

¹<https://beta.gov.scot/publications/interim-discussion-document-scottish-governments-agriculture-champions/>

Our strategy envelopes these themes, and needs to be cohesive to be effective across different sectors and policies.

The rest of this document is in two parts. In Chapter 2 we set out the strategic ambitions for Scottish agriculture that we are recommending. Then Chapter 3 lists our detailed recommendations for the actions that all concerned should take – the Scottish Government, industry bodies, individual farmers and crofters and others. We have made our list as comprehensive as possible but there are bound to be other potentially useful actions which we have not identified in our process.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all those who have contributed to our thinking in whatever way, including those who we spoke with at meetings and those who commented in writing.

We would like to thank in particular the nearly 60 individuals who sat on our working groups and gave a great deal of their time and expertise in helping the Scottish agricultural industry.

MARION MACCORMICK, PUBLIC VALUE CHAMPION

JOHN KINNAIRD, SUSTAINABILITY CHAMPION

ARCHIE GIBSON, FOOD AND DRINK CHAMPION

HENRY GRAHAM, EDUCATION CHAMPION

CHAPTER 2

This chapter sets out our strategic ambitions for Scottish farming, and our headline recommendations for delivering them.

Einstein, inspired by a farming observation, said ‘The world we have created is a product of our thinking. It cannot be changed without changing our thinking’.

There is an opportunity to evolve agricultural activity and support in Scotland to suit the pressures of our time, as part of a more holistic system across the rural and agricultural ecosystem.

Agricultural policy has to be repositioned and seen for its interrelation with food production and the wider food industry, environmental sustainability, regional and national economic development, education, employability and skills development, community resilience, and tourism. The value system on which past policy was based is no longer appropriate; a new one cannot be plucked from a shelf but will need to be constructed.

Ambitions

The strategic ambitions we recommend for Scottish agriculture are:

- Scotland’s form of agriculture will be enviable for its alignment with our land and other assets, in all their biophysical diversity, supported by tailored policies that lead to real commercial results.
- Scottish farming will take the actions that forearm it for difficult times and justify its support from the public purse.
- Scottish farming’s stewardship of the countryside will protect and enhance our natural assets and will be valued and supported by society.

Headline recommendations

1. Unprecedented changes are coming, on top of longstanding problems. Past policies have led to dependency, inefficiency and inequality in many cases and will not work for the future.
2. Government, parliament, industry and others must cooperate on a 10-15 year strategy for Scottish farming including the transition from the current support system. All must work together to get the best outcomes, facing up to harsh realities.
3. The public must be better informed about Scottish farming and what it delivers, and policies must be guided by real evidence about what the public values. A civic conversation, both informing and listening to the public, must start now.

4. Farm support is not a right, it's an asset given by the public to help farmers and crofters improve their businesses and deliver what the marketplace does not fund. We recommend that a top priority starting immediately is mindset change, to help farmers and crofters to become more progressive, entrepreneurial and resilient in a way that is already the culture in the unsupported sectors. All businesses must keep pace with the evolution of demand and societal preferences, and farming is no different.
5. There must be a transition period of no more than 3-5 years. During the transition, policies should not be changed radically. But industry must not sit back – businesses must use that period of relative continuity to start evolving and making the changes that are needed, while the farm support budget should still be at current levels. We recommend that government cap payments and release money so that new policies and schemes can be trialled and evaluated during the transition period with adequate funding.
6. During the transition period and beyond, Scottish agriculture must ensure it receives everything it is entitled to, whether this is financing or policy-making powers.
7. After the transition period, we recommend that there continue to be an element of basic income support, but at much lower levels. Future farm funding must go on a menu of schemes to boost production efficiency, improve skills and training, and enhance natural capital and biodiversity – capped per farm, and tailored to regional or sectoral needs because one size does not fit all. The cap should be based on current receipts for small/medium recipients but reduced from current levels for big recipients. Detailed policy must evolve, including how new entrants are supported.
8. Farmers, crofters and stakeholders must be involved in the regional tailoring of policies, which should reflect the huge diversity of Scotland's farmland and the resulting regional differences in public value needs and priorities. Scotland has some very high quality land, and also vast amounts of permanent grassland and rough grazing. The specific needs of agriculture in less favoured areas, which is often high nature value farming, must be catered for.
9. Stewardship of the countryside should be a key part of future policy. The policy priorities to be supported must cover purely public goods such as wildlife and carbon sequestration for which there is no market mechanism, at least at present, but can also include joint public-private benefits – such as reducing waste and improving soils which are good for the individual business as well as the environment and society.
10. Support schemes must be kept simple with clear objectives – and must not fall into the trap of trying to please everyone. Existing delivery infrastructure will be able to be used, with the necessary adjustments, but having less complex schemes may release some government resources which can be repurposed.

11. Those schemes must work with, not compete against, other land use schemes and policies. In the long term we recommend that the aim must be integrated land management planning, where diverse activities such as farming, stewardship of the countryside and natural assets, forestry, and tourism are planned and carried out through a single joined-up approach. Farm support policies must be consistent with other relevant government policies and legislation.
12. Farming, like the rest of the economy, will be under increasing scrutiny from a climate change perspective. The international accounting methodology is misleading, because farm emissions are classed as 'Agriculture' but some of farmers' actions to reduce net emissions are hidden under 'Energy' or 'Land Use, Land Use Change and Forestry'. Scottish Government policies for farming and climate change must give credit to farmers for all their positive actions.
13. Scottish farmers must grasp the benefits of working collaboratively which will, among other things; strengthen their arm in the supply chain. Uptake of farm assurance and health schemes, which is widespread but not universal, must be encouraged.
14. The supply chain must be properly regulated by government, noting the role of both devolved and reserved powers, to make it operate more equitably. Government and industry must make companies more aware of the various avenues available for tackling supply chain issues, which are not limited to those parts of the chain that are regulated statutorily.
15. Scottish farming must be more visible as a career option and must attract more young people, which will need a huge increase in focus from schools onwards.
16. Generational renewal has been an issue for a long time and the opportunity to address it now must be taken.
17. It must be accepted that some farm businesses won't survive even if current policies were to remain.
18. All forms of technology are moving so fast that Digital Skills Training is absolutely crucial for operational purposes. Also all efforts must be made to assist those with specific difficulties to fulfill their potential.

CHAPTER 3

In this chapter we list the actions we recommend, for government, industry bodies, individual farmers and crofters and others, in order for our strategy to be delivered.

This is not an exhaustive list; further actions are bound to be identified over time following wider consultation.

We have listed the recommendations according to the themes in our interim report.

Public value

- There is inadequate information on the state of public attitudes to farming in Scotland, and therefore on the baseline from which any campaign is starting. The recent poll by Survation on behalf of Scottish Environment LINK is a positive contribution but we recommend that government commission a baseline survey on public attitudes which should include testing the impact on attitudes of the level of information the public has.
- Government, in partnership with industry, should establish an information campaign and communications strategy, so that over time the public gains a better understanding of the industry.
- Government and industry should also invest in developing a societal brand which shows taxpayers how their money is invested, producing safe, healthy food from sustainable farmland but also sequestering carbon, helping adapt to climate change and safeguarding wildlife. Ireland has been investing in its 'Origin Green' branding. Scotland should investigate our version of such an approach.
- There should be follow up surveys at intervals to check on the evolution of opinion and the effectiveness of the information and branding campaigns.

Continuity

- We recommend a transition stage for 3-5 years, with scope for targeted improvements but with the emphasis on stability. The transition must not be so long that businesses put off starting the process of change – they must use the time productively to prepare for the future.
- We recommend that government, in consultation with industry, must use the transition period to experiment and to pilot the new approaches that will be needed. In the absence of new money, this should be funded by capping payments at a much lower level than at present.

Transformational change

- We recommend that government should introduce schemes as soon as possible to support farmers and crofters in changing mindset and with the adaptation of their businesses, building on the existing one-to-one farm

advisory offer. Topics covered must include collaboration and where appropriate the possibility of retirement or exit. Schemes should reflect regional circumstances and opportunities. The accredited consultants also need training in mindset change as they are among the main agents to facilitate change.

- The mindset needed is one of a professional, modern businessperson who works with the needs and preferences of their customer – whether that is the food supply chain paying for a product, or the government paying for public value on behalf of society, or both.
- Farmers and crofters must take advantage of such schemes and also other options such as business support groups or private sector advice/consultancy. Where change is needed, businesses must begin it during the transition period.
- We recommend that government must continue to support and consider expanding existing schemes such as Rural Leadership, whilst ensuring consistency of approach.
- We recommend that government should review its farm advice offer to see if it can deliver more on mindset change and business skills.
- We are aware that some farmers and crofters, including some of those who would benefit most, do not habitually take part in initiatives aimed at helping them. To address this, government should investigate the possibility of a broad-scope mindset change tool that could be put online and be accessible to every farmer and crofter. The tool could cover topics such as improving production efficiency, producing for the market, diversification, and collaboration.
- Industry bodies must encourage farmers and crofters to face up to the reality of the challenges the sector will face, and to take advantage of all available initiatives whether from government, industry or others. Ongoing support payments must be conditional over time upon recipients accepting and embracing schemes and initiatives designed to enhance production efficiency or education/skills training, or public value or natural capital benefits including biodiversity.
- Consideration should be given to including in farm support policies the option of retirement plans and/or exit strategies for individuals or businesses for whom that is appropriate, potentially linked with bringing in a new entrant with a sound business plan. Examples could be degressive farm payments above an age threshold if no-one has been nominated to take over the business, innovative business models, or tax breaks to encourage generational renewal.
- Support must be given to existing farm businesses to develop succession plans and encourage the earlier involvement of younger generations in decision-making.
- Relaxation in the planning system to allow more housing in rural areas would assist the process of generational renewal on farms.
- New rules on migration will cause a range of issues with future labour availability, both seasonal and permanent, but there is a particular need for a solution for seasonal agricultural workers.

Natural capital

- There is the need for a multi objective set of land use and management policies. The present system is fragmented because of different policy imperatives acting in silo fashion, for example on forestry expansion and timber supply, on renewable energy installations, on biodiversity protection, on protecting wildland, on flood management and on agricultural support.
- Those policies should be aimed at the twin objectives of enhancing Natural Capital and improving Production Efficiency – for instance peatland restoration in conjunction with grazing management.
- Future policies must be based on the best evidence about the challenges that need addressing, and as part of the solutions must encourage data to be collected and acted upon. This can simultaneously support improved nutrient management and water quality, improved performance, reduced greenhouse gas emissions and soil erosion.
- Scotland's Natural Capital varies hugely across the country so future policies must avoid the trap of one-size-fits-all. In particular Scotland has huge areas of less favoured permanent grassland and rough grazing, where high nature value farming is both traditional and common. Future policies must address the specific needs of this type of farming, including the fact that low profitability threatens its very survival. Income support schemes like LFASS and the Scottish Upland Sheep Support Scheme, and improvement schemes such as the Beef Efficiency Scheme, should be retained and built upon, whilst looking for opportunities to simplify them. They should encourage production which matches and evolves with the market.
- Farmers must be encouraged to reduce waste in production systems, for example by testing their animal, crop and soil health. Any funding in this regard must require them not just to collect data but to act on the results with measurable improvements. Reducing waste will lead to lower greenhouse gas emissions per unit of output.
- We recommend that support be delivered through a menu of targeted options which in total are wide-ranging but should be tailored to regional and sectoral needs. These options should be available in addition to basic income support and other schemes, and the overall total should be capped for the individual farm.
- We expect that pressure from lobby groups will put increasing downward pressure on the availability of agrochemicals for crop and livestock production. The industry should therefore be encouraged to engage with the main research providers on strategies to deal with this, which might include new plant varieties benefiting from advanced breeding techniques, animal husbandry best practice, biocontrol technology and products to replace synthetic chemicals.
- Enhancing soil health is vital to safeguarding the capacity of soil to function as a vital living ecosystem for the benefit of plants, animals and humans. Water quality and food security for future generations are underwritten by the capacity of soils to function. Soil testing, analysis and remedial activity combined with the use of technology (e.g. drones and precision farming techniques) aimed at improving production efficiency should be supported in all farming enterprises. Some projects could be conducted at holding level, others on a collaborative basis with the benefits being shared collectively.

- Farming is the bedrock of rural land use but it does not exist in isolation. Scotland needs to increase its area of forestry, for both timber production and climate change reasons, and peatland restoration will become increasingly important for carbon sequestration. Our land must be capable of supporting other activities and objectives as well as farming, whether commercial ones like tourism or public ones such as habitat preservation. Farm support policy must work with, not against, other land uses, and farmers and crofters should see them not as threats but as alternative options.

Production Efficiency

- To address the stagnation of farm productivity, we recommend that income support with little or no requirement for real farming activity should be reduced drastically; support based on farm and regional activity and production should be retained, including headage payments where appropriate; but there should be major new focus on policies and schemes to support production efficiency - such as the expansion of compulsory electronic identification (EID).
- These new policies must include a major increase in knowledge transfer effort, to help the industry reap the benefits of both existing and new research and development on, for example, reducing animal diseases or improving soil organic matter. Communication is key, clearly showing farmers how it can be relevant and meaningful, and adding realism and consistency into the system. Inspiration must be taken from best examples from within Scotland and beyond. Businesses in the farm supply chain deliver a lot of advice via their field staff, and public-private methods of knowledge transfer should be explored.
- There should be more advice and training, and in particular greater emphasis on business skills as well as technical farming and land management skills. Where current initiatives have been successful, such as Monitor Farms which provide a valuable link with up-to-date research, they should be built on or expanded.
- Production efficiency schemes must not be one-size-fits-all but must be tailored to the different needs of agricultural businesses in different regions and sectors.
- Government must encourage participation in performance measurement and improvement schemes such as benchmarking.
- More businesses should be encouraged to take part in assurance schemes, uptake of which is widespread in some sectors but not universal. Assurance schemes must evolve to keep pace with changing market conditions and legislation. Assurance should be aligned with the aspiration to create a societal brand which ties into the economic contribution of agriculture, as promoted by Scotland Food & Drink in their Ambition 2030 document.
- We recommend that compulsory EID must be expanded, at the earliest opportunity, and in the long term the data it generates should be integrated into farm assurance schemes.
- Government and industry should consider the potential to make future support payments contingent on participation in business or enterprise improvement schemes or training – noting that many industries have compulsory Continuing Professional Development (CPD).

- Even if the farm support budget is successfully retained at current levels, there will always be more potential demand than there is money. To squeeze the most benefit for the industry out of whatever budget is available; government must look at the use of loans/financial instruments in situations where investment will benefit the individual private business as well as the public.
- Financial support must be made available for investments on farms: to improve production efficiency and marketable yields through innovation and new technology, to support basic farm investments such as drainage, fencing and livestock handling facilities, to enable environmental projects such as recreating wetlands, and to underpin shared and collaborative use of capital items such as mobile abattoirs or handling facilities.
- Collaboration should also be encouraged in the area of collective purchasing, to reduce costs through the procurement of consumables, such as fuels and oils, fertilisers and medicines.
- Farmed deer is a specific area where there seems to be potential for growth, which should be supported – subject to the normal identification, traceability and food safety rules.
- Where public money is being spent there will always be a need for audit and inspections. Government should explore making greater use of new technology, such as drones, to reduce physical inspections and save administrative costs. Inspections should be co-ordinated, integrated and streamlined.
- Producers and industry bodies should consider a carcass classification scheme for sheep, to primary producers and the whole supply chain to supply product well matched to the market(s).

Careers

- At school level there should be:
 - A coordinated approach to support Skills for Work so that there is genuinely a “Career for All”, illustrating the very large number of qualifications which can emanate from a Rural Skills Course.
 - A coordinated approach to identify best practice at schools teaching Rural Skills at Level 4 so that it can be rolled out nationally.
 - A method of supporting regions such as Aberdeenshire, Dumfries & Galloway who are piloting Rural Skills at schools.
 - Continued work to develop a National Progression Award at Level 5 at schools so that it can be rolled out nationally.
 - A focus on building on Rural Skills Level 4, and Rural and Environmental Studies Level 5, and in due course a Needs Analysis for a Foundation Apprenticeship for rural skills.
 - A focus on increased vocational training, and in due course a Needs Analysis for Graduate Apprenticeships for agriculture, forestry, and other land-based industries.

- To improve the way in which career opportunities in farming and related sectors are illustrated and communicated in schools, there should be:
 - Development of the various existing initiatives, for example in Moray and Dumfries & Galloway, to leverage off them.
 - More industry involvement with the 21 existing Regional Leads and coordination of activities.
 - More training of teachers and the various types of industry Ambassador, in what the career possibilities are, and a Toolkit to illustrate course content, qualifications and career opportunities.
 - Coordination of the work done by various bodies and organisations on resources including videos showing career opportunities (My World of Work, Scottish Association of Young Farmers Clubs, Lantra, Chartered Institute of Forestry, Food & Drink Federation of Scotland), to ensure consistency and availability.
 - More detailed labour market intelligence for all of the sectors involved.
- At pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship level there should be:
 - work to develop the principle of a pre-apprenticeship, building on existing initiatives such as the Ringlink internship programme, including how best it can be funded sustainably (including the potential for wider industry funding), the possibility of a new qualification, and how it can be rolled out nationally.
 - National roll out of existing Modern Apprenticeships and National Occupational Standards, and continued work to develop the new Technical Apprenticeship.
 - Expansion of the Rural Skills Modern Apprenticeship with new pathways as well as estate maintenance and environmental management.
 - Centres of expertise where skills' training is done and research and imaginative training methods are used.
 - A re-examination of the costs of training to ensure initiatives are fully costed.
 - The inclusion of self-employment skills.
 - Recruitment of new trainers, instructors, assessors and verifiers.
 - Consideration of Shared Apprenticeships, which have the potential to help where rural microbusinesses have insufficient time for mentoring and supervision of an apprentice, building on pilots under Opportunity North East (ONE) and the Fife Rural Skills Initiative and including the need for sustainable funding.
- We recommend particular policies are implemented by government to address the difficulties of form filling by those with dyslexia.
- To address the age demographic of Scottish farming, existing new entrant initiatives such as Farming Opportunities for New Entrants, the Farm Advisory Service's New Entrant Programme and the SRDP new entrant grants and establishment grants must be continued with and built upon.

Supply chain

- Government and industry bodies including SAOS must encourage more businesses to take part in collaboration, which should become embedded in training and business practices. Government should consider investing in supply chain improvement programmes, through both vertical and horizontal collaboration. Such programmes should include expert knowledge and facilitation, particularly in the most challenging sectors such as those currently unsupported under the CAP.
- Government must continue to provide grants towards collaborative capital investment in buildings and plant in the food and drink industry.
- Scottish businesses must think globally and benefit from the knowledge developed by farmer cooperation around the world.
- In order to build a stronger, sustainable and resilient supply chain, there is the need to build open and collaborative relationships where the relevant players understand each other's needs and challenges. Producer groups must share data and collaborate to generate product that meets market demand.
- Food fraud includes both selling food which is unfit and potentially harmful, and the deliberate misdescription of food. Food producers should seek support to ensure that they can map their supply chain; identify risks and prioritise their findings; make a plan, implement measures, review and communicate success. Agricultural stakeholders must be more alert to the growing prevalence of food fraud, and capitalise on Scotland's robust position in conjunction with Food Standards Scotland and existing HACCP standards.
- We recommend that globally recognised geographical indicators are further investigated to protect the provenance and integrity of Scotland's natural larder.
- The supply chain must be regulated effectively to avoid unfair trading practices, building on the work of the Grocery Code Adjudicator and the Small Business Commissioner, and businesses must be made more aware of the options open to them under the regulatory systems in place.

ANNEX A

National Discussion on the Future of Scottish Agriculture 2015-2016

In 2015 and 2016 the Scottish Government set out and consulted stakeholders on a vision statement for Scottish agriculture and a set of desired policy outcomes.

Vision Statement

Scotland has a green, innovative and profitable agriculture industry which is outward-looking and resilient, supporting our economic growth, environment and communities and contributing to global food security.

Outcomes

1. Strong sustainable growth in profits from agriculture, driven by increased market-orientation, competitiveness and resource-efficiency.
2. Our agriculture industry works as part of our food and drink sector to increase profitability and strengthen Scotland's reputation as a Land of Food and Drink.
3. Agriculture, and the wider agri-food supply chain, is resilient to shocks and to future challenges.
4. High levels of training, education and skills enable farmers to improve their profitability and become greener.
5. Farmers boost their performance by embracing innovative techniques and best practice, underpinned by Scotland's world-leading research institutes.
6. Scotland is a world leader in green farming.
7. Agriculture is recognised as an exciting and rewarding career and there are a range of routes into the industry for new entrants.
8. Agriculture is valued for its contribution to Scottish society
9. Scotland takes a leading role on key issues affecting agriculture on the UK, EU and world stage.

ANNEX B

List of individuals who participated in working groups:

Alan Laidlaw	Ian Hope	Scott Walker
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Duncan Morrison	Peter Wood	
Gail Robertson	Quintin Steven	
Gavin Dick	Rory Christie	
George Jamieson	Russell Ferguson	
Graeme Ligertwood	Sandy Hay	
Graham Young	Sarah Simpson	
Hazel McNee	Sascha Grierson	
Hugh Martineau	Scott Petrie	

ANNEX C

Organisations that responded to the Agriculture Champions' Interim Discussion Document published November 2017

(In addition one response was received from an individual)

Agriculture & Horticulture Development Board

C & D Auction Marts Ltd

Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens

Food and Drink Federation Scotland

Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust

Historic Environment Scotland

Lantra Scotland

National Sheep Association

NFU Scotland

Royal Highland and Agricultural Society of Scotland and Royal Highland Education Trust

Ringlink Scotland Ltd

RSPB Scotland

Scottish Association of Young Farmers Clubs

Scotch Whisky Association

Scottish Association of Meat Wholesalers

Scottish Beekeepers Association

Scottish Crofting Federation

Scottish Land & Estates

Scottish Natural Heritage

Scottish Veterinary Delivery Landscape Project

Scottish Water

Scottish Wildlife Trust

SEFARI (Scottish Environment, Food and Agriculture Research Institutes)

Soil Association Scotland

SRUC (Scotland's Rural College) (2 responses)



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Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at
The Scottish Government
St Andrew's House
Edinburgh
EH1 3DG

ISBN: 978-1-78851-936-6 (web only)

Published by The Scottish Government, May 2018

Produced for The Scottish Government by APS Group Scotland, 21 Tennant Street, Edinburgh EH6 5NA
PPDAS421566 (05/18)

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