Rural Support Plan: 2026-2031

March 2026

Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba

Ministerial Foreword

The publication of the first Rural Support Plan marks a major milestone in the development of future agricultural support policy. The Plan is designed to provide you with clarity and certainty enabling you to have the confidence to invest for the long term.

At the heart of our Rural Support Plan are people. Our farmers, crofters, land managers and rural communities – farming and crofting are part of the life blood of rural Scotland. You are the stewards of our majestic countryside, working in all weathers to maintain our landscapes, producing food sustainably and taking positive actions for nature and climate. You are the bedrock of our rural economy underpinning our wider food and drink sectors. As a government we understand farming and crofting can be difficult with so many factors outwith your control, from increasingly extreme weather events to volatile commodity markets – all of which seek to underline the important role we as government have in providing support and stability. We know that without people and thriving businesses in rural Scotland, we would not have the vital delivery mechanism for many of our ambitions for climate, nature and sustainable food production.

The government remains absolutely committed to working in partnership with industry as we deliver the Vision for Agriculture.

Our future support framework consists of four tiers through which support will be delivered: base, enhanced, elective and complementary. In the near term, existing reformed schemes which are familiar to the sector, will be delivered through the various tiers. Support through the tiers will enable farmers and crofters to undertake actions which will deliver towards the key objectives of the Agriculture and Rural Communities (Scotland) Act 2024.

By working in partnership, we will ensure Scotland becomes a global leader in sustainable and regenerative agriculture, whilst also ensuring agriculture continues to play a central role in driving economic growth including in the wider food and drink sector.

The Scottish Government has committed to providing certainty to 2030 and beyond – that is why we will continue to deliver direct support in stark contrast to policies

elsewhere. In other words, there will be no big bang moment and there will be no financial cliff edges - that is our commitment to you.

Certainty, however, does not mean no change. Whilst we will deliver 70% of funding through direct payments – farmers and crofters will need to do more for climate and nature. Carefully considered incremental changes, developed in partnership with the sector, are underway from new enhanced greening measures to new calving interval conditionality for the Scottish Suckler Beef Support Scheme – all designed to deliver steady progress across key outcomes whilst ensuring stability for the sector.

Over the period that this Rural Support Plan covers we will work with the sector to ensure changes to support work for your business and for nature and climate. Let me be very clear, we will ensure changes work for active farmers and crofters – we are determined to ensure support only goes to active farmers and crofters - those that are delivering key outcomes from sustainable food production and action on climate and nature to supporting and underpinning thriving rural communities.

Importantly that includes ensuring our support mechanisms work for small producers – we will ensure access requirements to support are proportionate and that we are committed to developing piloting innovative mechanisms to support our vital network of small producers.

In conclusion, as we modernise our support we will take a balanced approach – one with the needs of rural people and businesses at its heart. We know that farmers and crofters deliver multiple outcomes – stewarding our iconic landscapes, sustaining rural communities and producing food.

As a government we will walk by your side as we face the challenges of the future – enabling a thriving rural economy which delivers for people, food production, climate and nature.

Jim Fairlie MSP

Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity

Rural Support Plan 2026-2031

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Introduction

Background to the Agriculture and Rural Communities (Scotland) Act 2024

When Scotland was part of the European Union (EU), agricultural support was provided under the EU Common Agricultural Policy (EU CAP).

After withdrawal from the EU on 31 January 2020, EU CAP no longer applied. To avoid any cliff edges in support, the Scottish Parliament enacted the Agriculture (Retained EU Law and Data) (Scotland) Act 2020 (the 2020 Act) to ensure CAP schemes continued to operate and could be simplified and improved where appropriate. The Scottish Ministers publicly committed to a period of stability and simplicity.

In alignment with EU principles and approaches, Scotland is developing an approach to farm and rural support that meets the needs of rural Scotland.

In particular, the Scottish Government announced its Vision for Agriculture, outlining the goal of transforming how the government will support farming and food production in Scotland to become a global leader in sustainable and regenerative agriculture.

The Scottish Parliament unanimously passed the Agriculture and Rural Communities (Scotland) Act 2024 (the ARC Act) to provide the powers to introduce new support, set policy objectives and ultimately deliver the Vision for Agriculture. It also delivers on the Scottish Government’s commitment to continue to support agriculture and rural communities.

To avoid any cliff edges in farm support, there will be a phased transition from legacy EU CAP support to the new framework of support. During the phased transition, changes to legacy EU CAP support will continue to be made using the powers of the 2020 Act whilst the ARC Act will be used for the introduction of new support.

The Rural Support Plan requirements

The ARC Act requires Scottish Ministers to prepare a Rural Support Plan.

The Rural Support Plan must set out:

1. the plan period
2. the Scottish Ministers' strategic priorities for providing support
3. an overview of the support expected to be provided including:
    - an indication of the total amount of support expected to be provided
    - a description of the way support is to be structured
    - an indication of how the total amount of support is to be divided between support schemes
    - an indication of the time periods for support schemes
    - measures that are intended to benefit small producers, tenant farmers and crofters, and
    - any specific outcomes that the Scottish Ministers are seeking to achieve
4. a description of each support scheme in operation/ expected to come into operation, and
5. how the impact of each support scheme will be monitored

The Rural Support Plan must be laid before the Scottish Parliament and published.

The Rural Support Plan overview

2. Plan Period

   This details the period covered by this version of the Rural Support Plan.

3. Strategic Outcomes and Strategic Priorities

   This details Scottish Ministers' strategic outcomes and strategic priorities for providing support. The main objectives are based on Scottish Government's Vision for Agriculture. Support for Scottish Agriculture is structured around the achieving of these outcomes and, in turn, delivery of the Vision.

4. Overview of Support

   This provides an overview of the support expected to be provided during the plan period including:

   a. Support structure

This describes the way support is to be structured. This initial Rural Support Plan introduces the use of the four-tier framework.

b. Support schemes

This outlines the support schemes in operation/ expected to come into operation during the plan period including a description, eligibility, time periods and the outcomes each scheme is looking to achieve.

c. Amount of support

This provides an indication of the total budget allocated and how this will be divided between support schemes.

d. Agricultural Reform Route Map

This is Scottish Government's proposed timeline for reform of agricultural support. This initial Rural Support Plan sets out the initial phase of the transition from legacy EU CAP to the new Scottish four-tier framework.

5. Monitoring and Evaluation

This details how support schemes and the Rural Support Plan will be monitored and evaluated.

6. Matters Considered

This details how Scottish Ministers have had regard to the matters listed in section 3 of the ARC Act when preparing this Rural Support Plan.

7. Approach to Reform and the Rural Support Plan

This outlines Scottish Government's approach to reform and the Rural Support Plan.

Plan Period

The ARC Act requires each Rural Support Plan to cover a period of 5 years.

This Rural Support Plan covers the period 2026-2031 (March 2026 to March 2031 inclusive) (the Plan Period).

Strategic Outcomes and Strategic Priorities

Section 1 of the ARC Act sets in legislation the overarching objectives of Scottish agricultural policy:

- the adoption and use of sustainable and regenerative agricultural practices,
- the production of high-quality food,
- the promotion and support of agricultural practices that protect and improve animal health and welfare,
- the facilitation of on-farm nature restoration, climate mitigation and adaptation, and
- enabling rural communities to thrive.

These objectives will be achieved through the realisation of the Scottish Government's Vision for Agriculture. The Vision for Agriculture sets out Scottish Government's goal of transforming how it supports farming and food production in Scotland to become a global leader in sustainable and regenerative agriculture.

The Agricultural Reform Programme (ARP) (Scottish Government's programme for progressing agricultural reform, covered in section 7) contains a Strategic Outcomes Framework aligned to the ARC Act objectives. It sets out five key outcomes and associated sub-outcomes (detailed below). These outcomes set out what it will mean for Scotland to fulfil the agricultural objectives set out in the ARC Act and Vision for Agriculture. It also provides the basis for monitoring and evaluating covered later in this Plan.

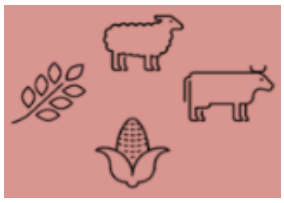
Support for Scottish Agriculture is structured around the achieving of these outcomes. Scottish Government intends to do this through their new four-tier framework and this is covered in the next section.

Section 2(2)(b) of the ARC Act requires the Rural Support Plan to set out Scottish Ministers' strategic priorities for providing support during the plan period. These are:

- the introduction of the four-tier framework;
- advancing the transition from legacy EU CAP support schemes to new and tailored approaches; and
- the achieving of the Strategic Outcomes

Strategic Outcomes Framework

High Quality Food Production



The primary food production sector, including crop and livestock systems, is a productive part of the economy that supports improved livestock health and helps meet more of our own food needs more sustainably

Sub-outcomes:

- **Animal health and welfare:** Continue to improve animal health and welfare standards
- **Value produced:** Increase the aggregate value of output produced
- **Diversity of output:** Increase the diversity of food produced to improve food system resilience, including increased domestic vegetable and fruit production, by building on existing strengths including small scale producers and smallholders, adopting new technologies and supporting integrated land use approaches.
- **Environmental impact:** Improve productivity whilst improving Scotland's natural and historic environment through regenerative and sustainable agricultural practices

Enabling Thriving Rural Communities

Supporting vibrant, sustainable and inclusive rural communities. Agricultural businesses play a critical role in communities by supporting local livelihoods, supply chains and the wider rural economy.

Sub-outcomes:

- **Sustainable and empowered communities:** enable communities to build on their strengths and tackle their local challenges
- **Support payments:** maintain reformed support payments and ensure timely delivery of agricultural support to businesses
- **Workforce diversity:** Increase the diversity in the agricultural workforce
- **Minimum Agricultural Wage:** Ensure that all working in the agricultural sector are receiving an agricultural minimum wage

Climate Change Mitigation and Adaption

Greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) from the agricultural sector are reduced in line with the five yearly carbon budgets, with actions outlined in the Climate Change Plan (CCP), and the ability to adapt to climate change is increased.

Sub-outcomes:

- **Adaptation:** Enhance climate resilience on farms and in rural communities by increasing climate adaptation actions on farms and crofts
- **Carbon stores:** Maintain or increase carbon stores on agricultural land including below and above ground carbon stores and those on peaty soils
- **Livestock emissions:** Reduce emissions from red meat and dairy, in particular by lowering emissions intensity through improved genetics and new technologies
- **Soil emissions and efficiency:** Minimise GHG emissions by reducing reliance on nitrogen fertiliser use and improving nitrogen use efficiency
- **Machinery emissions:** Reduce emissions from agricultural machinery
- **Slurry emissions:** Reduce emissions from the use and storage of manure and slurry.

Nature Restoration

There will be substantial regeneration in, and maintenance of, biodiversity, ecosystem, and soil health on agricultural land. This will developed in a way which works both for people and nature, while being integrated with sustainable food production.

Sub-outcomes:

- **Nature rich habitat (landscape):** Manage farmland as nature rich habitat contributing to nature rich habitat at landscape scale
- **Nature rich habitat (holding):** Manage a proportion of each farm/croft holding as nature rich habitat
- **Air and water quality:** Improve air and water quality

- **Soil health:** Manage all soils to enhance biodiversity and ecosystem health, and minimise loss and degradation
- **Historic Environment:** whilst advancing nature restoration, manage historic sites sympathetically aiming where appropriate to maintain or improve condition

Support for a Just Transition

Farmers and crofters are supported through the climate and nature transition, developing the skills and knowledge needed for sustainable and regenerative farming, to enable innovation, and attracting a new generation to the industry. They are empowered to make decisions about their future, with their social, physical, and mental wellbeing supported throughout.

Sub-outcomes:

- **Skills:** Improve uptake of skills development and increase our understanding of skills gaps
- **Knowledge exchange:** Improve collaborative learning and increase opportunities for knowledge exchange and peer-to-peer learning
- **Wellbeing and mental health:** Improve awareness and accessibility of wellbeing and mental health services
- **Access to services:** Improve satisfaction with customer ability to access and engage with digital services

Relationship between Outcomes and Sub-Outcomes

Rural and island communities are at the heart of our vision for a sustainable and prosperous Scotland, ripe with potential for continued growth in areas such agriculture, renewables, forestry, marine and digital. However, we know our rural and island communities also face significant challenges. While primarily focused on the agriculture and farming sectors, the Rural Support Plan contributes to the Scottish Government's wider efforts to help address these challenges. For instance, our new National Islands Plan, published in February 2026, introduced a set of measures collectively aimed at promoting long-term resilience and prosperity across island areas through a range of targeted actions and investments. In addition, our recently developed Rural Assessment Toolkit supports 'rural proofing' across Scottish Government portfolios. Alongside the statutory Island Communities Impact Assessments, these approaches help to ensure the best outcomes for rural and island residents.

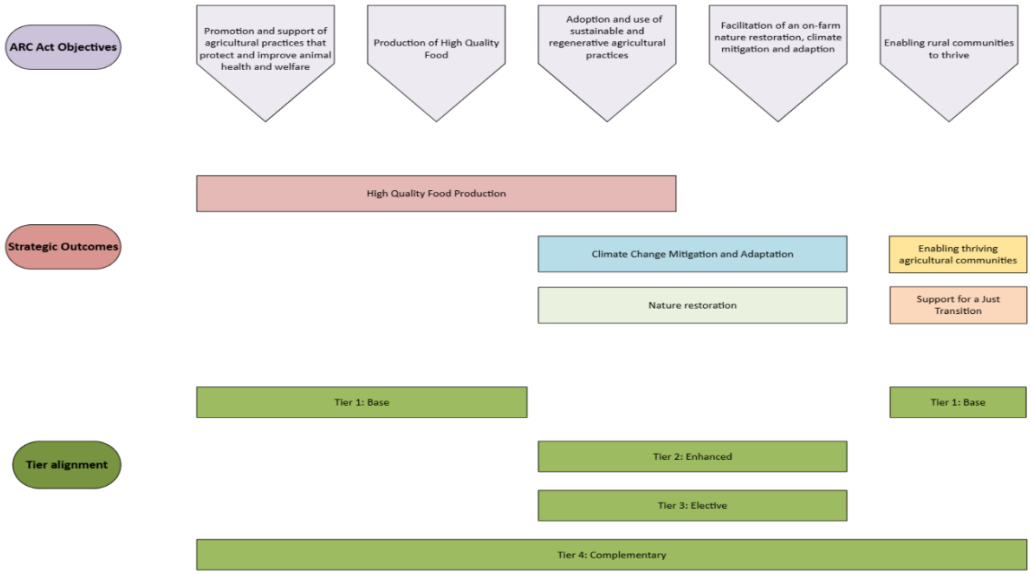
The Strategic Outcomes Framework provides a structure for an inherently dynamic and interconnected system. The sub-outcomes are grouped under strategic outcome areas, but progress in one area can influence others - sometimes positively, sometimes requiring a careful balance between competing priorities. We are working towards a future where farming continues to thrive, while also making progress in protecting nature, restoring biodiversity and tackling climate change through both mitigation and adaptation.

While the Rural Support Plan will help deliver these outcomes, many factors beyond the Plan's control - such as market trends, weather, or geopolitical developments - will also shape results.

As an example, for the purposes of the framework structure, Animal Health and Welfare is grouped within the High Quality Food Production Strategic Outcome. Beyond that structural decision, however, we recognise that improving the health and welfare of livestock, and the role of farms, crofters, vets and others in supporting this, cuts across the framework – soils, biodiversity, nature, climate impacts and supporting thriving rural communities as examples. This is something that systems mapping is supporting us to better understand and that will be reflected on through our evaluation reports.

Figure 2 outlines the alignment between tiers in the four-tier framework (covered in the next section), the Strategic Outcomes Framework and ARC Act Objectives. It is important to note that while this table outlines which tiers are the principal drivers for each strategic outcome, there are indirect or supporting ways that the tiers cut across each outcome area. For example, while Tier 3 does not directly support food production it can support improved biodiversity or infrastructure on the land which may aid food production and may also help marginal farms remain viable, food producing businesses.

Figure 2: Alignment between Tiers and Strategic Outcomes Framework



Overview of Support

Support Structure

This initial Rural Support Plan introduces the use of Scottish Government's four-tier framework to deliver support to farmers and crofters as Scotland's new, unique domestic support framework.

The four-tier framework provides conditional payments under four-tiers - Base, Enhanced, Elective and Complementary. Diagrams were first published as part of the Agriculture Bill Consultation Delivering our vision for Scottish agriculture - proposals for a new Agriculture Bill in August 2022.

Each Tier has a different purpose and contributes differently towards Scottish Government's strategic outcomes:

Tier 1: Base and Tier 2: Enhanced are direct payments

- **Tier 1: Base** will provide direct payments to support active farming. We will start off using the current Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) and develop this over time. Receiving this support will require meeting what will be called essential standards (e.g. Cross Compliance, Whole Farm Plan).

- **Tier 2: Enhanced** will support farmers and crofters whose agricultural practices do even more for climate and nature. Measure will be designed to be integrated alongside existing farming systems supporting continuity of sustainable food production. It will build on the standards established in Tier 1 and provide additional measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and restore and improve nature for those who opt to go further.

Tier 3: Elective and Tier 4: Complementary are indirect payments

- **Tier 3: Elective** will support action that creates and/or protects habitats or species or improves business sustainability. It will focus on funding targeted actions for climate change and nature restoration. This could be specific to a particular species or habitat, the creation of new agroforestry systems or woodlands, supporting conversion to alternative forms of agriculture such as organic production, encourage innovation and provide supply chain support. Aspects of Tier 3 will initially be delivered through familiar mechanisms such as AECS, with improvements to the scheme made.

- **Tier 4: Complementary** will help to grow skills and capabilities. This will include training and advice, including for sustainable and regenerative skills development. It will focus on ensuring applicants are prepared for the suite of management options, new practices, and innovation under Tiers 1-3. Additionally, Tier 4 goes beyond support for agriculture as it also provides for support for community-led approaches in rural and island areas as well as supporting the capacity building and networking of rural communities.

This Plan reflects what is currently available through legacy CAP support, including the Scottish Rural Development Programme (SRDP) and other existing support, mapped into the new four-tier framework.

Support described in the Plan may therefore be provided other than under the Agriculture and Rural Communities (Scotland) Act 2024, but is still relevant to understanding the context of the intended transition to future forms of support under that Act.

Each scheme requires farmers and crofters to undertake actions that deliver towards scheme outcomes, which in turn will deliver towards the outcomes for the Tier thus delivering the programme outcomes, the ARC Act objectives and the Vision for Agriculture

Support Schemes

The accompanying document “Support within the Four-Tier Framework” outlines support currently available through legacy CAP support, the Scottish Rural Development Programme (SRDP) and other existing support, mapped into the new four-tier framework including a description, eligibility, time periods and the outcomes each scheme is looking to achieve.

Amount of Support

The Scottish Budget

The Scottish Budget 2026-2027 (the Budget) allocates funding to the Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands (RALRI) portfolio. That funding is then split between several areas namely: Agricultural Support, Rural Services, Marine, Islands, Land Reform, Scottish Forestry, Natural Resources and Research. The Budget contains a table for each of those areas showing how the funding allocated to each of them is further broken down. Those tables can be found here Scottish Budget 2026 to 2027.

The RALRI section of the Budget states:

"We will provide over £660 million in support to Scottish farmers, crofters, land managers and rural communities, maintaining direct payments and investing in transforming farming and food production"

This figure is made up of the Agricultural Support and Rural Services tables mentioned above, less the administrative costs of running Scottish Government's Agriculture and Rural Economy Directorate, an expense contained within the Agricultural Support table.

The Rural Support Plan provides over £711 million in support, both within and outwith the tiers. This is because the Rural Support Plan includes the Woodlands Grants budget from Scottish Forestry (which was included in the SRDP budget) at £58.7 million. The spending between tiers and individual schemes within the tiers is set out in the illustrative split between schemes table below. £677 million is included within the tiers, whilst the additional £34 million sits outwith the tiers and is narrated below.

Rural Support Plan requirements

The ARC Act requires the Rural Support Plan to show how the budget will be divided between support schemes

The table below illustrates:

1. what is currently available through legacy CAP support, the Scottish Rural Development Programme (SRDP) and other existing support, mapped into the new four-tier framework,
2. how we intend to split the budget between the support schemes

This is based on the figures for 2026-2027 and 2025-2026.

Illustrative Budget Split Between Support Schemes

Tier 1 Base	**Tier 2 Enhanced**	**Tier 3 Elective**	**Tier 4 Complementary**
Basic Payment Scheme (£282M)	Enhanced Greening (£142M)	Agri-Environment Climate Scheme (£25.6M)	Farm Advisory Service (£6.5M)
Fruit and Vegetables Aid Scheme (£5.6M)	-	Crofting Agricultural Grant Scheme (£3.5M)	Knowledge Transfer and Innovation Fund (£1M)
Less Favoured Area Support Scheme (£65.5M)	-	Crofting Cattle Improvement Scheme (£0.64M)****	Land Based Pre Apprenticeship Programme (new entrants £0.5M)
Scottish Suckler Beef Support Scheme (£40.5M)	-	Croft House Grants (£1.05M)	Next Generation Practical Training Fund (see above new entrants)
Scottish Upland Sheep Support Scheme (£7.1M)	-	Forestry Grant Scheme (£58.7M)	Scottish Land Matching Service (see above new entrants)
-	-	Future Farming Investment Scheme (£14.25M)	Small Producers Pilot Fund (£1M)
-	-	Small Producers Pilot Fund (£1.5M)	Women in Agriculture (£0.6M)
-	-	Other Schemes (£1.8M)*	Community Led Local Development (£9.3M)
-	-	-	Scottish Rural Network (£0.87M)
-	-	-	Food and Drink Processing Support (£9M)
-	-	-	Agritourism Investment Scheme (£1M)
-	-	-	Other Schemes (£0.5M)**
TOTAL: £398.75M* **	**£142M**	**£106.40M**	**£30.27M**

It should be noted that:

- *Other Schemes includes: Sea Eagles Management Scheme, Sea Eagles research and Veterinary Grants
- **Other Schemes includes: LIDAR, MyHerdStats, Agritourism Monitor Farm, FONE, Skillseeder, Rural Cohesion and Lantra
- ***Spend in Tier 1 is demand led, figures shown for schemes are the maximum spend available to that scheme whilst the total for the tier represents the total tier budget available
- ****Expenditure for the Crofting Cattle Improvement Scheme (CCIS) is funded through ARE operational costs. ARE operational costs are excluded from the Plan as per the above. Accordingly, CCIS expenditure is noted but is not included in the Tier total.
- Figures represent approximations due to the demand led nature of much of agricultural support, final outturns are reported as normal
- Budget decisions are subject to the UK and Scottish Government budget process each year. Scottish Government only receive an annual budget from UK Government.
- Confirmation of budget allocation between Tiers and Schemes is subject to Ministerial decisions each year, and will be guided by how plans to deliver certain outcomes are progressing.

Additional spend outwith 4 Tiers

Per information above, £677 million is included within the tiers, whilst the additional £34 million sits outwith the tiers and is allocated to the following:

- Animal diseases (£23.5M)

- Smaller scale, one-off and generalist rural support including; SAYFC Big Build, RSABI, Farmstrong, Tenant Farmers/Agricultural Holdings, SASA Agricultural Wages and Rural Industry Engagement and Food and Drink Industry Strategy (combined circa £10M)

The ARC Act requires the Rural Support Plan to set out an indication of the total amount of support that is expected to be provided over the Plan Period.

To give farmers and crofters an indication of how funding will be targeted over the 5 year plan period, we have made three commitments:

- over time, at least half of all funding will be targeted towards nature restoration and climate mitigation and adaption
- 70% of funding will be allocated to Tiers 1 and 2
- we will apply a funding split of 70 / 30 between Tiers 1 and 2

Multi-year funding for the industry is required for long term certainty to underpin investment. Scottish Government only receive an annual budget from UK Government.
However, our budget and spending review, as well as this Plan, set out a clear line of sight. We have committed to a period of certainty until 2030 and beyond.

The table below illustrates:

- what is currently available through legacy CAP support, the Scottish Rural Development Programme (SRDP) and other existing support, mapped into the new four-tier framework,
- for each tier, the budget allocated for each scheme added together to give the total budget for each tier
- how we intend to split the budget between tiers over the 5 year plan period to move towards these commitments.

This is based on the current figures for 2026/2027 and 2025/2026.

Illustrative Budget Split Between Tiers over the Plan Period

Year	**Tier One** (£/million)	**Tier Two** (£/million)	**Tier Three** £/million)	**Tier Four** £/million)	**Yearly Total** £/million)
2026-27	399	142	106	30	677
2027-28	399	142	106	30	677
2028-29	399	142	106	30	677
2029-30	399	142	106	30	677
2030-31	332	142	151	52	677
2030-31 % split between Tier 1 and Tier 2	70%	30%	-	-	-
2030-31 %split between Tiers 1 & 2 and Tiers 3 & 4	70%	-	30%	-	-
Plan Period Total (£/million)	1928	710	575	172	3385

It should be noted that:

- Figures represent approximations due to the demand led nature of much of agricultural support, final outturns are reported as normal.
- Budget decisions are subject to the UK and Scottish Government budget process each year. Scottish Government only receive an annual budget from UK Government.
- Confirmation of budget allocation between Tiers and Schemes is subject to Ministerial decisions each year, and will be guided by how plans to deliver certain outcomes are progressing.
- The shift in allocations from Tiers 1 to Tiers 2, 3 and 4 in years 2030/31 is indicative at this stage. Tier allocations are designed to be flexible to ensure desired outcomes can be delivered in changing circumstances

Through to 2030 we will deliver a period of certainty, investment and preparation.

An ongoing programme of improvements and reforms will continue to the existing support packages that the industry use now and understand. Any changes will be developed in partnership with stakeholders, delivering incremental positive changes which work for climate, nature and sustainable food production. Changes to the existing support in this period will support our active farmers and crofters to continue food production in ways that are more beneficial for nature and climate outcomes.

Our position is clear; this Government will continue to back our active farmers and crofters.

In this period we will work with the industry to ensure that support works for and delivers financial stability and investment to our active producers. We will ensure that the sustainable and regenerative measures within the future Tier Two Enhanced support are practicable and flexible reflecting the diversity of Scotland's farming systems. Further, we will deliver an approach where support is directed at those active farmers and crofters.

The powers of the ARC Act, the nature of the Four Tier approach and its Monitoring and Evaluation Framework enables flexibility once the new support packages go live. Our approach is to co-design, to listen, to monitor and to respond. If it becomes clear that future support is not working for the industry and our shared outcomes then we will be able to react and to change course. We are clear that outcomes can only be realised with a vibrant farming and crofting community and that support must work for them.

The proposed changes to future funding allocations between the tiers at the end of this Plan Period will be developed and delivered in a way which supports those active farmers and crofters, ensuring continued financial stability and investment. A range of mechanisms will be carefully considered to achieve changes in funding

allocations between the tiers. As an example of this proposed approach, we are considering how future LFASS and voluntary coupled support may be delivered in a way which rewards activity and better supports sustainable and productive farming and crofting. We know that those working on our most challenging land and in our communities farthest from market also deliver so much more than agricultural output – they are crucial in underpinning thriving rural communities.

Right now we are co-designing a more effective approach to recognise, reward and further incentivise the critical environmental and social benefits brought about by such active producers. Those farmers and crofters who are actively working the land will be the beneficiaries of that public support in any allocation changes. Our future support package will enable active producers to co-operate and collaborate in ways right for their businesses. As we work together up to 2030, we will continue to consider what more can be done to enhance biodiversity, nature restoration, sustainable food production and to reduce emissions through active production.

Crucially we will also ensure that access requirements to our support schemes is proportionate - that means for smaller producers and crofters we will put in place streamlined requirements which better reflect their needs – an approach we have already implemented through the small herd derogation.

Agricultural Reform Route Map

The Rural Support Plan describes support during the period of the phased transition from legacy EU Common Agricultural Support (CAP) into the new Scottish four-tier framework and sets out the proposed timescale for change over the first Plan Period of 2026-2031.

It builds on the initial Agricultural Reform Route Map published on Scottish Government's Rural Payments and Services website that outlined the first steps in Scotland's agricultural reform journey.

Changes to support will be made incrementally (during the 5 year period of this initial Rural Support Plan and during the 5 year periods of subsequent Rural Support Plans) allowing for a transition from legacy CAP and SRDP support to the four-tier framework, while avoiding cliff edges or sudden changes to support for farmers and crofters.

Agricultural Reform to Date

2025

In the first year of Scotland's agricultural reform journey, Scottish Government introduced the first changes to agricultural support:

- The Whole Farm Plan

  The Whole Farm Plan requires farmers and crofters to review their current land and livestock management practices. There are five audits and plans that make up the Whole Farm Plan. Farmers and crofters will need to complete at least two to be eligible to claim Basic Payment Scheme support. This will enable farmers and crofters to create a baseline of their current agricultural practices, to look for and make improvements (such as opportunities to reduce costs, cut emissions or protect biodiversity) and to measure progress over time. The Whole Farm Plan is designed to help meet Scottish Government's outcomes but can also help farm businesses improve their efficiency and cut costs.

- A new calving interval for the Scottish Suckler Beef Support Scheme

  The longer it takes to get a cow back in calf, the more time she will 1) incur maintenance costs (e.g. feed, veterinary care), and 2) emit greenhouse gases without contributing to beef production. That's why Scottish Government will only support calves who are either 1) the first offspring registered to the dam, or 2) born to a dam with an established calving interval of 410 days or less. This will help to reduce emissions and encourage efficient beef production.

- New protections for peatlands and wetlands

  Access to the Basic Payment Scheme is conditional upon meeting Essential Standards. Cross Compliance regulations are split into Statutory Management Requirements (SMRs) and Good Agricultural and Environmental Conditions (GAECs), safeguarding animal health and welfare as well as soils, habitats, and landscape features on agricultural land. Peatlands and wetlands play an important role in storing carbon and slowing down the effects of climate change. New requirements have been added to GAEC 6: Maintenance of soil organic matter prohibiting a range of activities on peatlands and wetlands. This ensures these important natural assets are protected.

These changes were complemented by additional funding for farmers and crofters:

- Future Farming Investment Scheme (now closed) provided £21.4M in capital grants for capital investments that will deliver at least one of the following outcomes:
  - improve business efficiency and sustainability;
  - protect, restore, or enhance the environment;
  - reduce greenhouse gas emissions and/or
  - mitigate the effect of climate change.

  This scheme will be running for a second round in 2026/2027 with a budget of £14.25M.

- Preparing for Sustainable Farming Scheme (now closed) provided financial support with meeting the Whole Farm Plan requirements.

Indicative Agricultural Reform Route Map 2026 onwards

As the Scottish Government enters the second year of the agricultural reform journey, further anticipated changes can be added to the Agricultural Reform Route Map as follows:

2026 – 2029

- A period of certainty for farmers and crofters by maintaining payments through familiar support mechanisms within the newly launched four-tier framework.
- We will continue to provide investment, knowledge and advice to support the adoption of sustainable and regenerative practices to prepare businesses for changes to future support.

- This includes the publication of the Code of Practice on Sustainable and Regenerative Practice.

2026

- Introduction of Enhanced Greening requirements – farmers and crofters with more than 15 hectares of arable land will be required to dedicate 5% of their land to Ecological Focus Areas, helping to increase the amount of land managed for the benefit of climate and nature
- Introduction of Food and Drink Processing Support (£9M)
- Introduction of the Agritourism Investment Scheme (£1M)
- Introduction of small herd derogation to Scottish Suckler Beef Support Scheme for small farmers and crofters
- Completion of Scottish Rural Communities Policy Review. This will include publication of the evaluations of the Community Led Local Development programme, Scottish Rural Network and Scottish Rural Action, in March 2026, and a report on the future vision and recommendations for rural communities policy and support, in June 2026. Further information about the Review is available on the Rural Exchange website.

2027

- Strengthening of Enhanced Greening requirements – farmers and crofters with more than 15 hectares of arable land will be required to dedicate 7% of their land to Ecological Focus Areas, further increasing the amount of land managed for the benefit of climate and nature

2028

- All farm businesses will have completed their Whole Farm Plans.
- Introduction of AKIS (Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation System) which will build on and improve the current AKIS in Scotland, to bring together and encourage better links and integration between people and organisations that produce and use knowledge for agriculture and interrelated fields. This will give recognition to the importance of collaboration between different stakeholders and encourage this through more effective and efficient flows of knowledge and innovation between stakeholders. This will involve farmers, advisors, as well as higher educational institutions, researchers and industry organisations. A well-functioning AKIS, will be expected to help Scotland become a leader in regenerative and sustainable agriculture.

2030 onwards

- Support mechanisms within the four-tiers will be reformed to more explicitly require the adoption of sustainable and regenerative practices, relevant to each business.
- This will involve the implementation of revised eligibility and activity requirements (all tiers), essential standards for the base tier, packages of measures for the enhanced tier, targeted measures and conditions for the elective tier, and appropriate learning and knowledge transfer activities in the complimentary tier.
- These will continue to be developed through working in partnership with farmers and crofters to get this right for them and communicated in advance.
- Preparation, laying and publication of the Rural Support Plan for 2031-2036.

Throughout this period, Scottish Government will also make the required changes to our ways of working to improve our support for farmers and crofters and make delivery more effective and efficient.

We will also better prepare and make ready our industry for Scotland's transition to a more sustainable and regenerative way of farming in order to meet the ambitions of Scottish Government's Vision of Agriculture.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Background: What is Monitoring and Evaluation and Why is it Needed?

Monitoring is the ongoing process of data collection that happens throughout a government programme. It aims to help track the progress of a programme and whether we are on track to meet our ambitions.

Evaluation provides an understanding of the economic, financial, social, and environmental impacts of a programme, and/or provides an assessment of how it is or was implemented, whether it delivered as expected, and whether it represents value for public money.

Implementing effective monitoring and evaluation mechanisms ensures there is evidence-based insights to inform current decision-making and future policy design. It is essential for:

- Tracking delivery
- Evidencing if policy priorities have been achieved
- Determining most effective use of public money
- Ensuring accountability to stakeholders
- Enabling continuous improvement

For the Rural Support Plan, monitoring and evaluation allows us to track processes, outcomes, impacts and value for money, and learn lessons for our agricultural and rural communities, and for Scottish Government.

It will also demonstrate how well the Rural Support Plan has delivered against the strategic outcomes and ARC Act objectives. The findings can be fed in to give direction to the tiers, support schemes, requirements, and delivery mechanisms, to ensure that they are delivering against objectives and ensures continuous improvement.

Monitoring and Evaluation under the Common Agricultural Policy

Monitoring and evaluation under the Common Agricultural Policy focussed on the Scottish Rural Development Programme (SRDP). It consisted of:

- Annual implementation reports to meet European Commission regulations – which reported information like the number of beneficiaries supported, number of actions/operations supported, and area supported for each Focus Area and Measure.
- Individual scheme evaluations – which assessed the implementation and effectiveness of individual schemes. These evaluations were then collated and summarised in an ex-post scheme summary evaluation.
- An ex-post evaluation - which was structured to the European Commission evaluation questions and examined what was delivered and achieved through the SRDP as a whole.

With the end of the SRDP 2014-2020 the requirement to produce and submit an Annual Implementation Report to the European Commission has also ended. The final report covering the period from 2014 until the end of 2023 was submitted to the European Commission in June 2024. The requirement for an Annual Implementation Report has been extended for an additional year. The extension for a year ensures there is no gap in reporting until the future Rural Support Plan monitoring and evaluation activity coming into effect. The report will focus on the outputs from the continuing schemes that were part of the SRDP 2014-2020.

Legislative requirement to report under the Rural Support Plan

The ARC Act sets out requirements for reporting, monitoring and evaluation.

Section 21 of the ARC Act outlines how support schemes must be monitored and evaluated, and how any support provided otherwise than under a support scheme or the provision of other relevant assistance may be monitored and evaluated. A link to section 21 is provided here: Agriculture and Rural Communities (Scotland) Act 2024.

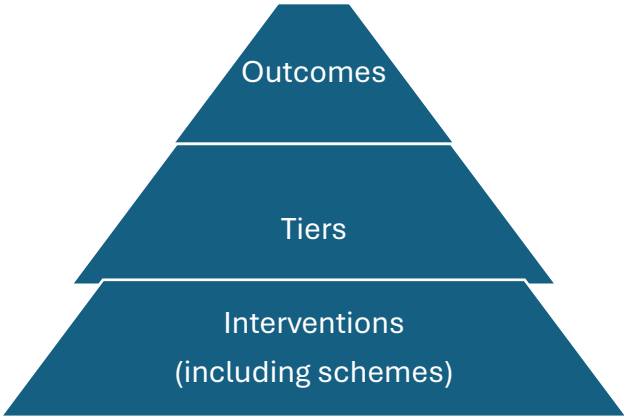
The ARC Act section 5 outlines the reporting requirements on the Rural Support Plan. It provides for the Scottish Ministers to report on each successive Rural Support Plan. A link to section 5 is provided here: Agriculture and Rural Communities (Scotland) Act 2024.

There are also specific reporting requirements on the delivery of Continued Professional Development schemes ARC Act. A link to section 31 is provided here: Agriculture and Rural Communities (Scotland) Act 2024.

Monitoring and evaluation structure

The Strategic Outcomes Framework (detailed in section 3 (Strategic outcomes) above) sets out five strategic outcomes and associated sub-outcomes. These outcomes set out what it will mean for Scotland to fulfil the objectives set out in the ARC Act and Vision for Agriculture.

As outlined in this Rural Support Plan, multiple interventions fall under four tiers of support. Together these interventions intend to influence change across the five strategic outcomes and sub-outcomes.



As a point of definition, ‘intervention’ is used as a catch-all term to refer to ongoing projects, support schemes (such as LFASS), policies, and requirements (such as Whole Farm Plan) that sit under the four Tiers.

The structure of the Rural Support Plan’s monitoring and evaluation will reflect this structure of support. It will show how the interventions under each Tier will achieve change against the strategic outcomes.

Summary of Intended Monitoring and Evaluation Reports

2026-2031: End of Plan Period reporting

- **Rural Support Plan impact monitoring:** baseline set for 2025 with progress reports every 5 years in line with RSP periods

  This is the mechanism for monitoring the impact of the Rural Support Plan required under the ARC Act. Indicator updates may be made between cycles based on data availability and strategic relevance.

- **Rural Support Plan 2026-2031 Ex-Post Evaluations**

  This will include an overarching evaluation of the delivery of the plan as a whole and tier level monitoring and evaluation reports which will include relevant schemes/CPD. They will assess implementation and effectiveness, and identify impact, cost effectiveness, strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement. This reflects the evaluation requirements within the Act in regard to –

  (i) the effectiveness of the strategic priorities
  (ii) whether any specific outcomes have been achieved
  (iii) progress made in respect of the objectives

  These evaluations will be published as soon as practicable after this Rural Support Plan period ends.

Reporting during the plan period:

- **Tier and intervention implementation monitoring, including payment and delivery data**

  Monitoring of payment information and other management information will follow focus on scheme/tier-specific measures. New measures will be integrated into established reporting mechanisms.

  This is the mechanism for monitoring legislative requirements such as the:

  (a) the total amount of support provided during the plan period (including monetary value for non-financial support)
  (b) the amount of support provided to each support scheme etc
  (c) a description of how non-financial support has been provided
  (d) the distribution of support (including geographically and by sector)

Ad-hoc targeted / responsive reporting:

- Additional reporting will be provided over the plan period depending on prioritisation / need – this could include, for example, early evaluations of new schemes, significant changes, or evaluation requirements for government

decision making. This will meet the requirement for proportional evaluation of schemes under the ARC Act.
- A prioritisation tool has been developed to assist with decision making for this type of targeted or responsive reporting

Approach to Monitoring

Monitoring of the Rural Support Plan will follow the reporting structure summarised above. It will track implementation of the plan and assess its contribution to the strategic outcomes over the plan period.

Monitoring of payment and delivery data will offer insights into how effectively interventions and schemes have been implemented. Delivery data will also inform evaluation processes and help assess the overall effectiveness of support provided. Impact indicators for individual schemes and tiers will be developed to provide a detailed picture of whether they are achieving what they set out to do, and their contribution to the strategic outcomes and sub-outcomes. These indicators will form part of the Tier and Scheme ex-post monitoring and evaluation reports.

At a plan level, impact indicators are being selected to assess progress of the RSP and reflect the broader trends anticipated from agricultural reform in Scotland. These will be set out in the Impact Monitoring Framework which will be published in 2026. This will be the basis for baselining and future monitoring activities. These impact indicators will provide specific, objective measures to track progress against our strategic outcomes and sub-outcomes. They help answer the core question: are we achieving the results we expect?

Where appropriate, milestones or targets are defined for outcomes and sub-outcomes to indicate the level of achievement expected at a given point in time. These are aligned to where statutory targets have been set under existing legislation, such as the Climate Change Act. However, most indicators are assessed against an agreed trend—increasing, stable, or declining—rather than fixed targets. This is reflective of the complex relationships that exist between outcomes in our framework. Not all outcomes are always mutually beneficial. There are those where progress in one area may have detrimental impacts or present additional challenges in other areas.

By using trends rather than targets, we are able to monitor this balance and aim to keep all outcomes moving in the right direction. In developing the framework, however, we will also be considerate of how to ensure that this approach does not compromise transparency, accountability and learning opportunities. We are also working with academics to better understand these dynamics and potential challenges and opportunities within the outcomes framework.

The indicators selected will form a suite of measures that collectively represent aspects of Scotland’s agricultural sector. They should be interpreted together and in context, as no single indicator provides a complete picture. Additional context and links to other monitoring frameworks will be highlighted throughout the monitoring framework.

Indicator development

The indicators for our sub-outcomes were developed collaboratively with input from external stakeholders with agricultural, environmental and climate interests. This collaborative approach has been key to informing the identification and agreement of indicators to be included in the framework.

It is important to note that many desired changes, such as biodiversity improvements and reductions in greenhouse gas emissions from new technologies, will occur over longer timescales than the five-year RSP period. As such, the outcomes monitoring framework will be supplemented by the usual output monitoring undertaken by schemes, which will be used as a means of tracking the delivery of the programme, and will be utilised as part of the ex-post evaluation process.

Establishing a baseline

Understanding progress made through the RSP is contingent on establishing a baseline for future comparison. An initial baseline report for 2025 data will form the basis against which to measure progress over the plan period. A progress report will be published using 2030 data.

Establishing a robust baseline is dependent on the availability of good quality data.

Approach to Evaluation

Evaluation will follow a similar structure to monitoring, with the intention to evaluate the impact of the Rural Support Plan as a whole, as well as reporting on the relevant schemes which will be grouped by Tier.

As outlined, targeted earlier evaluation of individual schemes will take place as required. This will ensure that the legislative requirements for monitoring and evaluation of schemes are met, whilst also ensuring value for money by prioritising those that require the greatest evidence and learning for ongoing development and decision making.

There are three main types of evaluation: process evaluations (how an intervention/programme was delivered); impact evaluations (how and why did an impact occur or what difference was made); and value for money evaluations (is it the best use of resources). An evaluation strategy is in development outlining, in more detail, how these different types of evaluation will be incorporated into the Rural Support Plan monitoring and evaluation work.

Evaluations will consider:

- Whether the intervention was delivered as intended, to the people it intended to reach
- The experiences of those involved
- Whether, and how, the intervention contributed to any change in outcome indicators
- What lessons can be learned, or improvements made, for the future

- Whether the intervention delivered value for money

Alignment with wider Scottish Government strategies and policy

We are aiming for an integrated approach to monitoring the Rural Support Plan. To support this, the outcomes framework is designed to align with the aims and outcomes of other key Scottish Government strategies. Aligning outcomes ensures consistency across policies, avoids duplication, and helps deliver more coherent and effective outcomes for rural communities and the environment. For example, linking rural support measures with climate and biodiversity strategies helps ensure that actions to improve farm resilience also contribute to reducing emissions and enhancing nature.

Figure 1 below illustrates how objectives and aims in other key Scottish Government documents connect with our five strategic outcomes, and where we will seek alignment in our monitoring approach.

Please note: this mapping exercise focuses on policy outcomes rather than specific targets, as not all plans currently include monitoring arrangements. Where monitoring and evaluation plans do exist, and where specific indicators have been identified for those plans, these will be included in the upcoming Monitoring Framework Report, to be published in early 2026. Furthermore, this does not include the contribution/alignment of CLLD and SRN.

Strategic Outcome for the Rural Support Plan	Just Transition Plan for Agriculture and Land use	Climate Change Plan	Good Food Nation Plan	Scottish National Adaptation Plan	Forestry Strategy	Environment Strategy	Scottish Biodiversity Delivery Plan	Land Reform Act	Cleaner Air for Scotland	Land Use Strategy	Local Food for Everyone	National Islands Plan
High Quality Food Production	☑	☑	☑	☑							☑	
Enabling Thriving Rural Communities	☑					☑		☑		☑		☑
Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation	☑	☑		☑	☑	☑		☑				☑
Nature Restoration	☑			☑		☑	☑	☑	☑			
Support for a Just Transition	☑			☑				☑		☑		☑

Figure 1: alignment with Scottish Government strategies

The RSP Strategic Outcomes also align with the following UN Sustainable Development Goals:

- 2 End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture

- 8 Promote sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all
- 13 Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts
- 15 Protect, restore, and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss

Matters Considered

Section 3 of the ARC Act specifies matters that the Scottish Ministers must have regard to when preparing this Plan.

This section therefore considers how Ministers have had regard to those matters, but it is not intended to be a comprehensive description of all the matters to which Ministers have had regard when preparing the Plan.

1. The objectives set out in section 1

The objectives of Scottish agricultural policy are specified in section 1 of the ARC Act as being:

(a) the adoption and use of sustainable and regenerative agricultural practices,
(b) the production of high-quality food,
(c) the promotion and support of agricultural practices that protect and improve animal health and welfare,
(d) the facilitation of on-farm nature restoration, climate mitigation and adaptation, and
(e) enabling rural communities to thrive.

The sections of this Plan on "Strategic Outcomes and Strategic Priorities", "Overview of Support" and "Monitoring and Evaluation" explain how the ARC Act objectives are incorporated within the ARP Strategic Outcomes, and how those outcomes form the basis for the monitoring and evaluation framework for the overall agricultural reform programme, the four Tiers, and the individual support schemes.

The objectives will be at the heart of any new support schemes that are introduced during the Plan period.

2. The proposals and policies contained in the climate change plan which relate to agriculture, forestry and rural land use

Ministers have had regard to the Scottish Climate Change Plan update (CCPu) for 2018 to 2032 when preparing this Plan.

The CCPu sets out Scottish Government's approach to delivering a just and green recovery and pathway to delivering net zero. It sets out policies and proposals to reduce emissions from key sectors of the economy from 2018 to 2032 as part of the transition to net zero by 2045, including policies and proposals relating to agriculture and land use, land use change and forestry.

The CCPu sets out how the Scottish Government will reduce emissions from agriculture under six outcomes:

- Outcome 1: A more productive, sustainable agriculture sector that significantly contributes towards delivering Scotland's climate change, and wider environmental, outcomes through an increased uptake of climate mitigation measures by farmers, crofters, land managers and other primary food producers.
- Outcome 2: More farmers, crofters, land managers and other primary food producers are aware of the benefits and practicalities of cost effective climate mitigation measures.
- Outcome 3: Nitrogen emissions, including from nitrogen fertiliser, will have fallen through a combination of improved understanding, efficiencies and improved soil condition.
- Outcome 4: Reduced emissions from red meat and dairy through improved emissions intensity.
- Outcome 5: Reduced emissions from the use and storage of manure and slurry.
- Outcome 6: Carbon sequestration and existing carbon stores on agricultural land have helped to increase and maintain our carbon sink.

The Scottish Government published a draft Climate Change Plan (CCP) for 2026 to 2040 on the 6 November 2025, which is intended to replace the CCPu. The final CCP 2026-2040 is expected to be laid before the Scottish Parliament elections. The draft CCP sets out policies and proposals for agriculture under five key outcomes:

- Outcome 1: A more sustainable and regenerative Scottish agriculture sector that contributes to delivering Scotland's climate change targets and wider environmental outcomes while continuing to produce high quality, nutritious food.
- Outcome 2: More farmers and crofters have the skills, knowledge and opportunity to implement climate change measures, continuing to produce high quality, nutritious food.
- Outcome 3: Soil health is improved and nitrogen emissions, including from nitrogen fertiliser, have fallen.
- Outcome 4: Reduced emissions from red meat and dairy through the implementation of measures, including improved efficiencies, new technologies and improved animal health.
- Outcome 5: Carbon sequestration on agricultural land is increased, and carbon stores are maintained or increased.

The outcomes of the CCPu and the CCP align directly with the ARP Strategic Outcomes, in particular “Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation”, and the policies and proposals set out in the draft CCP recognise that the Agricultural Reform Programme is a key delivery mechanism to reduce emissions from agriculture. The outcomes also overlap with the ARP’s “Nature Restoration” and “Support for a Just Transition” Strategic Outcomes which, as described above, underpin and are considered within the support schemes, tiers and Agricultural Reform Programme.

In particular, the reforms introduced in 2025 seek to contribute directly towards these outcomes (the Whole Farm Plan requirements include carbon audit/soil sampling, changes to cross compliance protect carbon sequestering peatland and wetland, the new SSBSS calving interval targets efficient cattle) and they are captured within the draft CCP.

Furthermore, the Agricultural Modernisation Programme, reflected in the introduction of the Future Farming Investment Scheme in 2025-26 provides upfront funding for capital investments that protect, restore or enhance the environment, reduce greenhouse gas emissions or mitigate the effect of climate change.

Scottish Ministers will consider these outcomes when adjusting existing or developing future support schemes.

It is worth noting that Section 29 of the ARC Act stipulates that the Scottish Ministers must prepare and publish a “Code of Practice on Sustainable and Regenerative Agriculture” (“the Code”) providing guidance on sustainable and regenerative agriculture to include:

(a) an explanation of what the Scottish Ministers consider to be sustainable and regenerative agriculture,
(b) the agricultural activities and methods which they consider to constitute best practice for sustainable and regenerative agriculture, and
(c) such other information and guidance relating to sustainable and regenerative agriculture as the Scottish Ministers consider appropriate.

The publication of a preliminary version of the Code was announced on 19th June 2025 at the Royal Highland Show with a final version to follow this Plan.

The Scottish National Adaptation Plan published on 25 September 2024 sets out a range of actions that can further build our agriculture industry’s resilience to climate change and this will also be considered as part of agricultural reform.

3. Statutory duties of the Scottish Ministers relating to agriculture, forestry, rural land use, biodiversity or the environment

There are a number of statutory duties relating to agriculture, forestry, rural land use, biodiversity or the environment to which the Scottish Ministers have had regard to in the preparation of this Plan.

This section of the Plan is not intended to describe all such statutory duties, nor to detail how Scottish Ministers have had regard to them. It provides examples of where the Scottish Ministers have taken account of particular duties, noting that they will continue to have regard to all their statutory duties as agricultural reform progresses.

Agriculture

The Scottish Ministers must take such steps as they consider appropriate to promote awareness of the Code of Practice on Sustainable and Regenerative Agriculture, and it is intended that the Code will play a key part in the planned transition as considered above.

Forestry

Scotland's Forestry Strategy (2019 – 2029) sets out the Scottish Ministers vision, objectives and priorities for forestry in Scotland, and the Forestry and Land Management (Scotland) Act 2018 places a duty on the Scottish Ministers to have regard to sustainable forest management when exercising any of their functions.

Scottish Ministers have had regard to their statutory duties in respect of forestry when preparing this plan, including for example in respect of the Forestry Grant Scheme within Tier 3, which supports the creation of new woodlands and the sustainable management of existing woodlands.

Rural Land Use

Section 57 of the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 requires the Scottish Ministers to lay a land use strategy (LUS) no later than 31 March 2011, and thereafter to lay a revised strategy at the end of every subsequent 5 year period.

The LUS sets out the Scottish Ministers' long term vision for integrated sustainable land use, its objectives to support the delivery of this and their proposals and policies for meeting those objectives.

The Scottish Ministers have in preparing this Plan had regard to the objectives in the third LUS (2021 to 2026), and the proposed objectives in the fourth LUS (2026 to 2030).

Sustainable land use is a key outcome of the measures described in the Plan, and the Scottish Ministers have considered the land use objectives land use in the preparation of this Plan.

For example, the intended changes to Greening support will reward environmentally sensitive land use by protecting permanent grassland with high nature value.

Biodiversity

The Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004 places a duty on the Scottish Ministers to further the conservation of biodiversity when exercising their functions so far as doing so is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions. In 2024 the Scottish Government published Scotland's Strategic Framework for biodiversity which includes the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy, which sets out the goal to be nature positive by 2030 and restore and regenerate biodiversity by 2045. The six-yearly rolling Delivery Plans (2024-2030) includes a comprehensive set of over 100 cross sectoral actions and the introduction of statutory targets for nature restoration, established by the natural environment bill to address the twin crisis of climate change and biodiversity loss.

The Natural Environment was passed by Scottish Parliament which delivery both for nature and people, this Bill supports the commitment set out within the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy to be nature positive by 2030 and restore our natural environment by 2045. The Bill creates the strongest statutory framework Scotland has ever had for nature recovery. But putting nature targets into law, Scottish Ministers are ensuring that the government can be held to account for delivering real and measurable change to tackling the nature crisis. The Bill also places a duty on Ministers to; modernise the aims of the national parks; reform the way deer are managed, helping to ensure protection to ecosystems while supporting a suitable venison supply chain that benefits real communities; and gives new powers to develop legislation relating to wildlife management, sustainable forestry management and protected sites.

Consideration has been given to biodiversity by, for example, the inclusion of "Nature Restoration" as an ARP Strategic Outcome. A Biodiversity Audit is an option within the 2025 Whole Farm Plan requirements.

Environment

- Natural environment

The Scottish Ministers must, in making policies, have regard to the guiding principles on the environment under section 14 of the UK Withdrawal from the European Union (Continuity) (Scotland) Act 2021. The guiding principles are:

(a) the principle that protecting the environment should be integrated into the making of policies,
(b) the precautionary principle as it relates to the environment,
(c) the principle that preventative action should be taken to avert environmental damage,
(d) the principle that environmental damage should as a priority be rectified at source, and
(e) the principle that the polluter should pay.

The measures in the Plan have been prepared having regard to those principles, including for example in the inclusion of “Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation” and “Nature Restoration”, within the ARP Strategic Outcomes.

In particular, support under Tier 2 and Tier 3 is directed towards the delivery of these outcomes, with enhanced Greening being introduced from 2026.

- Historic environment

Historic Environment is a sub-outcome in the ARP Strategic Outcomes Framework. As agricultural reform progresses, the Scottish Ministers will continue to consider the importance of protecting and enhancing the historic environment, in particular the Historic Environment Policy for Scotland (HEPS) and the European Landscape Convention.

4. Developments in the law and policy of the European Union

The EU CAP 2023-27 is structured around ten key objectives linked to EU goals as set out in the CAP strategic plans of the Member States for social, environmental and economic sustainability in agriculture and rural areas. The objectives are:

- to ensure a fair income for farmers
- to increase competitiveness
- to improve the position of farmers in the food chain
- climate change action
- environmental care
- to preserve landscapes and biodiversity
- to support generational renewal
- vibrant rural areas
- to protect food and health quality

- fostering knowledge and innovation

The development of the ARC Act aligned with this approach, and its five overarching objectives of agricultural policy shape many of the measures described in this Plan. It is the policy of the Scottish Ministers to ensure broad alignment to EU CAP objectives and they will continue to consider developments in the law and policy of the European Union as agricultural reform progresses.

5. The desirability of the agricultural sector operating with fair work principles

Fair Work First (FWF) is Scottish Government's policy for promoting fair work and workforce diversity across Scotland's labour market.

The Scottish Ministers have had regard to the principles/dimensions when developing measures described in the Plan, so that for example from 1 April 2024 all recipients of agricultural grants are required to pay at least the real living wage and provide appropriate channels for effective workers' voice. This requirement applies to grant support schemes such as Agri–Environment Climate Scheme (AECS) and Crofting Agricultural Grants Scheme (CAGS).

6. The objectives of a plan produced under section 1 of the Good Food Nation (Scotland) Act 2022

In 2014, the Scottish Government published a new food and drink policy - Becoming a Good Food Nation It expresses our vision of Scotland *"a Good Food Nation, where people from every walk of life take pride and pleasure in, and benefit from, the food they produce, buy, cook, serve, and eat each day".*

To help realise this vision, the Scottish Ministers introduced the Good Food Nation (Scotland) Act 2022 ("the Act"). Under the Act, the Scottish Ministers are required to produce a national Good Food Nation (GFN) Plan setting out the Government's goals for food and drink policy and how it intends to achieve them.

The GFN Plan was published on 17 December 2025. At the heart of the Plan are six overarching outcomes, namely:

- **Outcome 1:** The food environment in Scotland enables people to eat well. Everyone benefits from reliable and dignified access to safe, nutritious, affordable, enjoyable, sustainable and age-appropriate food.
- **Outcome 2:** Scotland's food system is sustainable and contributes to a flourishing natural environment on our land and in our waters. It supports our net zero and climate adaptation ambitions and plays an important role in

protecting and improving animal health and welfare and in restoring and regenerating biodiversity.

- **Outcome 3:** Scotland's food environment and wider food system enables and promotes a physically and mentally healthy population. This leads to the prevention of, and a reduction in, diet-related conditions.
- **Outcome 4:** Our food and drink sector is prosperous, diverse, innovative, and vital to national and local economic and social wellbeing. It is key to making Scotland food secure and food resilient, and creates and sustains jobs and businesses underpinned by fair work standards throughout food supply chains.
- **Outcome 5:** People and communities are empowered to participate in, and shape, their food system. Scotland has a thriving food culture with a population who are educated about good and sustainable food.
- **Outcome 6:** Decisions we make in Scotland contribute positively to local and global food systems transformation. Scotland actively engages in learning and exchanging knowledge and best practice internationally.

These outcomes align directly with the ARC Act objectives of Scottish agricultural policy, which, as described above, underpin and are considered within the support schemes, tiers and Agricultural Reform Programme.

For example, the Soil Analysis Report and Integrated Pest Management Plan introduced as part of the Whole Farm Plan requirements in 2025, seek both to reduce the costs of production and to mitigate the impact of pesticide use on the environment and on human health.

7. The need for sustainable food systems and supply chains in delivering food security

The Food and Drink Industry Growth Strategy, Sustaining Scotland, Supplying the World' has been produced by Scotland Food & Drink in partnership with the Scottish Government and the wider Scotland Food & Drink Partnership, which includes sectoral representative bodies, research organisations, and Scotland's enterprise agencies.

The need for sustainable food systems and supply chains is taken into account through "the adoption and use of sustainable and regenerative agricultural practices" and "the production of high-quality food" and "enabling rural communities to thrive" as ARC Act objectives that underpin sustainable food systems and supply chains.

The Whole Farm Plan measures described in this Plan will ensure that farmers and crofters undertake a baseline review of their current land and livestock practices, and will over time support more efficient and sustainable farming and cultivation. For

example, the integrated pest management plan will help farms to be more sustainable by reducing risks to the environment and human health.

The Scottish Suckler Beef Support Scheme will ensure more efficient beef production by promoting sustainable livestock management through changes to calving interval requirements.

Existing Schemes included in the Plan, such as the Fruit and Vegetables Aid Scheme, also support connections with the ongoing supply chain (for example basic processing and marketing).

The need for sustainable supply chains has also been considered as part of the development of the Small Producer Pilot Scheme. More generally, the continuation of base support mitigates the impacts of market and weather volatility on the resilience and viability of food-producing businesses, while environmental interventions will support the long-term environmental viability of farming in Scotland, at the beginning of the food supply chain.

8. The benefits of a diverse and resilient agricultural sector including small producers, tenant farmers, crofters, and agricultural co-operative societies

The Scottish Ministers have had regard to the benefits of a diverse and resilient agricultural sector when developing the measures described in this Plan.

For example, support is provided to:

- new entrants to farming through the Land Based Pre-Apprenticeship Programme, Next Generation Practical Training Fund and the Scottish Land Matching Service. The Farming Opportunities for New Entrants (FONE) Group, brings together internal and external stakeholders to maximise opportunities for new entrants, with a particular focus on increasing and coordinating opportunities on public land,
- small producers through the Small Producer Pilot Fund, and
- crofters through the Crofting Agricultural Grant Scheme, Croft House Grant and the Crofting Cattle Improvement Scheme.

Recognition of the benefits of a co-operative approach to agricultural production is reflected in the Fruit and Vegetables Aid Scheme.

Our support scheme requirements, such as the Whole Farm Plan, will be proportionate for smaller businesses such as crofts and small producers to ensure support schemes are accessible and to promote a diverse industry. For example, in 2026, we will be introducing small herd derogation to the Scottish Suckler Beef

Support Scheme. This will mean that those claiming support for 10 calves or fewer in 2026 will not need to meet the calving interval requirement.

Further considerations

Section 2(3) of the ARC Act states that the Rural Support Plan may describe how the Scottish Ministers consider the support provided under the plan will:

(i) reduce greenhouse gas emissions (within the meaning of section 10 of the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009) from agriculture,
(ii) reduce harm from pesticides,
(iii) reduce nitrogen loss and waste,
(iv) optimise the proportion of land which is farmed organically,
(v) optimise the proportion of land which is used for agroforestry,
(vi) improve the biodiversity of agricultural land, including the contribution of agriculture to landscape-scale nature recovery,
(vii) protect and improve the welfare conditions of farmed animals,
(viii) improve the quality of ground and surface water

Whilst the support described in this Plan will contribute towards the achievement of these outcomes, their consideration is not specifically covered in this Plan.

Approach to Reform and the Rural Support Plan

Agricultural Reform Programme

The Scottish Government progresses agricultural reform through its Agricultural Reform Programme (ARP).

ARP takes a co-development approach, engaging key stakeholders to help develop future policy and the new support framework by inviting them to share their views and ideas, their sectoral expertise and lived experiences playing a vital role in ensuring value for money through evidence based design that is both efficient and effective in meeting needs and achieving desired outcomes.

Stakeholders include industry bodies, membership organisations, representative stakeholder groups, Scottish Government sponsored stakeholder groups, government organisations, non-government organisations, statutory bodies, customers (farmers, crofters, and land managers) and rural communities.

Co-development to date has included:

- interviews, surveys, workshops, testing and trials that informed the changes for 2025 with further topics to follow (there are currently 1,250 active research volunteers signed-up);
- a customer panel consisting of farmers, crofters, and land managers to take part in research around service design;
- since the end of 2021, approximately 3,500 customer survey responses and 250 interviews and in person testing with farmers, crofters, land managers, and advisers;
- regular and ad-hoc meetings of stakeholder groups with both officials and Ministers throughout the year.

The Agriculture Reform Implementation Oversight Board (ARIOB), made up of key industry stakeholders, was established to inform agriculture policy reform. The ARIOB acts in an advisory capacity to the Scottish Government, based on a holistic, collaborative approach that helps to inform the decision-making processes of Scottish Ministers at the right stages. It meets regularly, both online and in-person, and remains a vital forum for engaging on key issues.

The ARIOB is supported by an Academic Advisory Panel who provide advice based on the available science, knowledge, and evidence. Further support is offered by the Agriculture Policy Development Group which assists with the development of policy detail. Throughout the lifespan of the ARIOB, several sub-groups have been

established to drive forward policy development from members with expertise in specific areas of industry.

Co-development is not about seeking agreement from everyone, as any change is likely to have its supporters and opponents. It is the role of Scottish Ministers to make balanced decisions taking into account all perspectives.

Alongside the co-development work, the Scottish Government is also engaging with the sector to make sure farmers, crofters and land managers are prepared for change. The Scottish Government is undertaking an intensive engagement programme. This includes:

- writing to all farmers and crofters that completed a Single Application Form in 2024 and 2025 at regular intervals, letting them know what is changing and where they can access support;
- attending shows and events across the country to talk directly to farmers and crofters and answer their questions;
- publishing guides to the changes in trade media;
- publishing information on the Rural Payments and Services website, including in the ARP route map.

The Scottish Government also funds the Farm Advisory Service, which has also promoted the changes to farmers and crofters, including through in person and online events, podcasts, and videos.

Future Policy Work

The ARIOB was asked to consider how we might co-develop future policy principles that help deliver the overarching objectives of the ARC Act and future agricultural support through the four-tier framework. The Agriculture Policy Development Group was expanded to continue that work at pace.

Evidence Underpinning Future Support Scheme Design

There has been a range of evidence used to inform agricultural reform including:

The Supporting evidence and analysis report outlined the current position of the Scottish agricultural sector, with evidence aligned to the objectives in the Vision for Agriculture, and provided information on the approach to assessing new policy proposals as they were taken through secondary legislation.

The New Rural Support Scheme development - evidence synthesis report covers twelve written reports providing evidence reviews, analysis, summaries, and expert

briefings on agriculture in Scotland, with a focus on sustainable food production that tackles climate change and nature restoration.

The Scottish Rural Development Programme 2014-2020: ex-post evaluation presented findings from an independent evaluation of the Scottish Rural Development Programme (SRDP) 2014-2020. The evaluation covers the period from 26 May 2015 (the date the Programme was first formally approved) to 31 December 2023. The evaluation is mainly a backwards look at what was delivered and achieved by the 15 SRDP schemes and to meet the European Commission requirement for ex-post evaluations. The report is structured in line with the European Commission's 30 Common Evaluation Questions.

The Environment, natural resources and agriculture strategic research 2022-2027 funds science, research, and evidence across a range of research and academic institutes. It has provided an evidence base to support policy needs in the environment, natural resources and agriculture portfolio and its research has underpinned policy development for Agricultural reform.

Consultation on the Rural Support Plan

Section 4 of the ARC Act stipulates that when preparing a Rural Support Plan the Scottish Ministers must consult such persons as they consider representative of the interests of:

- farmers (including tenant farmers), crofters and land managers, and
- people who live and work in rural communities

The Scottish Ministers must also consult :

- Food Standards Scotland
- Historic Environment Scotland
- Scottish Environment Protection Agency
- Scottish Natural Heritage ("NatureScot"),
- the Scottish Food Commission, and
- such other persons as they consider appropriate

When amending a Rural Support Plan the Scottish Ministers must consult such persons as they consider likely to have an interest in, or be affected by, the amendments to the rural support plan.

When laying the Rural Support Plan, or an amended plan, before the Scottish Parliament, the Scottish Ministers must lay a statement describing the consultation

undertaken. Details of the consultation undertaken in respect of this version of the Rural Support Plan can be found within the accompanying Consultation Statement.

Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba

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