

## The Future of Scottish Agriculture - establishing a new social contract between land managers and Scottish citizens

### Summary

Farming in Scotland is in a sharp cyclical downturn and short-term targeted support may be needed to keep some farms going. This must also be an opportunity for a proper debate about the future of farming. High standards of environmental management and animal welfare are part of the solution not part of the problem.

Scottish Environment LINK calls for a new social contract between farmers and citizens of Scotland, one of mutual benefit, respect and value. Key to this new social contract is agroecological production, leadership in public procurement and a focus on short supply chains.

### Scotland's Agricultural Challenges

LINK welcomes publication of the Scottish Government's document on 'The Future of Scottish Agriculture' and calls for an inclusive public conversation on the issues it raises. We particularly welcome the commitment for Scotland to become a world leader in green farming.

Scottish Environment LINK recognise that Scotland's agricultural sector is struggling at the current time, with low commodity prices, a weak Euro, CAP changes and adverse weather to contend with. Short-term support is needed.

In the longer term, we face a choice between 'more of the same' and a step change. 'More of the same' is the productionist approach, which relies on high inputs (including fossil fuels, pesticides, imported feed) to generate high outputs of commodities. Given Scotland's challenges of high land values, climate, proximity to markets and the current commodities futures market, this strategy will work only for a minority of farms.

Just as importantly, this approach sees 'the environment' as something external to the farm and is likely to lead to species and habitat loss, depleting our natural and cultural assets and ultimately undermining our ability to produce food<sup>1</sup>. The financial costs of the 'externalities' of agriculture in the UK have been estimated to be £208 per hectare of arable and permanent pasture<sup>2</sup>. This excludes the environmental impacts of feed imports and the impact on animal welfare of continued intensification.

[The 2013 State of Nature](#) report provides the most recent warning of how the countryside has been transformed in less than a generation, with wildlife declining at alarming rates. The report cites increased use of chemical-inputs, intensification of agriculture, habitat loss and climate change as key factors for the decline.

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<sup>1</sup> RSPB (2012) [State of Nature](#)

<sup>2</sup> Pretty, J. N., Brett, C., Gee, D., Hine, R. E., Mason, C.F., Morison, J. I. L., Raven, H., Rayment, M. D., vander Bijl, G. (2000). An assessment of the total external costs of UK agriculture. *Agricultural Systems*. Vol 65: 2. Pg113-136.

- [The last \(2011\) UK National Ecosystem Assessment \(NEA\)](#) states that 44% of ecosystem services delivered by Scottish habitats are in decline, with only 16.5% improving. [\[ii\]](#)
- The most recent assessment by SNH, states that more priority farmland species were declining in population size (43%) than increasing (29%) and more priority farmland habitats were deteriorating in conservation status (63%) than improving (13%).

## The New Social Contract

Currently, Scottish consumers pay for food four times - when we buy food, in the damage to the environment from some forms of intensive food production, in the CAP subsidies and in the public health costs of poor diet and malnutrition.

**The challenges are great and the need for action urgent. Scotland requires transformative change for the good of farmers and citizens alike, not just a short term fix which kicks the can down the road.**

LINK is seeking a 'just transition' to a new food and farming system which secures viable and valued livelihoods for more farmers along with environmental stewardship, well being and social justice for citizens. LINK calls instead for a step change towards **agroecology**; working more closely with nature in a 'circular economy'. This way of farming not only produces food with fewer externalities but also a much wider range of 'products' - from pure air and clean water to uplifting surroundings, public access and education. These 'goods' are required not just now but in long term.

The new social contract would see the people of Scotland supporting its farmers as part of a transformed food and farming system, which:

- Is part of the solution to climate change, not part of the problem
- Restores a thriving wildlife and highest standards of animal welfare
- Cares for existing natural and cultural assets in our countryside
- Ensures good food for all
- Provides more good jobs
- Redistributes wealth and power, with more small farms and more food SMEs

## Establishing a New Social Contract

We see three key areas:

### 1. Agroecology

We should move strategically - like France - towards an [agroecological](#) approach which delivers enough good quality food to eat while mitigating climate change, enhancing biodiversity and reducing resource use.<sup>3</sup> This means changing how we advise and train farmers; how we use subsidies for public good, and how we conduct research.

### 2. Leadership in Public Procurement

National and local government must lead this change in the way it procures 'public food' (schools, hospitals, care homes). "Public procurement of healthy and sustainable food (food that is climate-friendly, nutritious, and produced as locally as possible to high ethical, environmental and animal welfare standards) provides one of the most powerful and effective mechanisms for driving a transformation in food culture and public health whilst addressing

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.gouvernement.fr/en/law-on-the-future-of-agriculture-major-advances-for-farmers-and-citizens>

pressing environmental, social and economic issues. Ensuring public procurement of healthy and sustainable food procurement by our public bodies will be at the heart of achieving the Scottish Government's aspirations for a *Good Food Nation*."

### **3. Short food chains**

Scotland should produce more of what it eats and eat more of what it produces, bringing citizens and food providers closer together. Short food chains create more local jobs and helps primary producers receive more of the final price. National and local government should support short food chains by building infrastructure, processing and marketing capacity. Allotments, grow your own and community gardens also make a significant contribution to short food chains.

**For more information, please contact:**

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This Briefing has been compiled by members of the LINK Agriculture Task Force. They include- Association for the Protection of Rural Scotland, Amphibian and Reptile Conversation Trust, Nourish Scotland, National Trust for Scotland, RSPB Scotland, Scottish Allotments and Gardens Society, Scottish Campaign For National Parks, Scottish Wildlife Trust, Soil Association Scotland.

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