

Roseanna Cunningham MSP, *Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform*
Fergus Ewing MSP, *Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy and Connectivity*

The Scottish Government
St. Andrew's House
Regent Road
Edinburgh
EH1 3DG

26 March 2018

Dear Ms Cunningham and Mr Ewing,

**NGOs, farmers, and rural groups call on the Scottish Government to drive a Just Transition
towards carbon-neutral farming**

Ahead of Scotland's 10-year anniversary of its landmark 2009 Climate Act, the Scottish Government will bring forward an even more ambitious proposal aligning our domestic targets with the Paris Agreement goal of limiting global temperature increases to 1.5 degrees Celsius. To achieve this and targets in the new Bill, all economic sectors have a responsibility to transition to low carbon practices.

As farmers, crofters, land managers, rural groups and NGOs, we acknowledge our joint responsibility to fight climate change and call on the Scottish Government to use the new Climate Bill to drive a just transition to a **carbon-neutral¹, resilient farming sector by 2050 at the latest**.

Whilst our farming sector is currently contributing 22.5% of Scotland's total greenhouse gas emissions, farmers, crofters and landowners are also contributing to carbon sequestration and storage, and efficiency measures are already leading to carbon savings. Farming, therefore, has the potential to bring its net greenhouse gas emissions down to zero and become the first carbon-neutral farming sector in the world, while reaping substantial economic benefits. As the Cabinet Secretary for the Rural Economy and Connectivity has stated, "reducing emissions and improving soil and water quality undoubtedly helps our climate change ambitions, but will also benefit farmers' bank balances by reducing waste and improving market returns". Carbon-neutral farming systems deliver a range of public benefits such as flood prevention, enhanced biodiversity, clean air and water, and greenhouse gas emission reduction; whilst making farms more resilient to climate impacts, creating employment, increasing farm profitability and supporting rural economies.

To prepare for this transition and ensure our rural economies optimise opportunities, we need Scottish Government support to ensure a fair and supportive approach to move farming into a low-emissions future. Climate change mitigation and farm profitability need to be promoted as mutually supportive objectives.

In line with the recommendations of the UK Committee on Climate Change, which highlighted the need for additional emphasis on mitigation through agriculture and land use, we support the following measures as critical to driving a just transition to carbon-neutral farming:

- **Introducing a nitrogen balance sheet.** Creating a national nitrogen balance sheet would help Government develop evidence-based policies and targets to improve the efficiency with which we use nitrogen. Better nitrogen use efficiency reduces nitrous oxide and ammonia emissions, saves farmers money, promotes circular economy business opportunities, and reduces water and air pollution which damages people and nature.
- **Investing in soils.** We must continue to restore carbon-rich peatlands, safeguard semi-natural grasslands and protect and improve our valuable agricultural soils. Advice and incentives are needed to ensure all farmers regularly test their soils, increase soil organic matter – thereby locking in carbon and improving soil quality - and prevent soil erosion from fields.

¹ Carbon-neutral refers to 'carbon equivalent', or net-zero greenhouse gases

- **Promoting productive and profitable carbon-neutral farming.** Low-carbon farming practices and systems must become the norm, in order to reduce emissions. To do this we need to promote and support both organic farming and efficient mainstream production. Public bodies must procure more food from these farms and help drive the transformation to carbon-neutral food production. Organic farming has an important role to play but needs promotion to reverse declines of recent years which have occurred despite strong demand for organic food.
- **Promoting agroforestry.** More farmers and crofters need to be helped to see how integrating trees into their farming business could be of value to them and the climate. When planting the right trees in the right place, agroforestry has the potential to sequester carbon and protect soils, as well as deliver other benefits, such as diversification of farm income, shelter for livestock, and fuelwood.

Scotland needs to begin a fair and just transition to carbon-neutral farming now. We have the potential to establish ourselves as a real leader in sustainable farming and the Climate Change Bill is the place to start. We are looking forward to working with the Scottish Government to develop and implement adequate, cost-effective measures to deliver this ambition.

If you would like to get in touch to discuss any aspect of this letter, please contact Jim Densham at RSPB Scotland, jim.densham@rspb.org.uk

Yours sincerely,

Anaerobic Digestion and Bioresources Association (ADBA)
 Biodynamic Association
 Buglife Scotland
 Caledonian Organic
 Church of Scotland
 Compassion in World Farming
 Commonweal
 Community Land Scotland
 Cyrenians
 Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens
 Friends of the Earth Scotland
 Food Ethics Council
 Froglife Trust Scotland
 Glasgow Community Food Network
 Global Justice Now
 National Trust for Scotland
 NFU Scotland
 Nourish Scotland
 Organic Growers Alliance
 Permaculture Scotland
 Propagate
 RSPB Scotland
 Royal Scottish Geographic Society
 Scotland the Bread
 Scottish Allotments and Gardens Society
 Scottish Badgers
 Scottish Crofting Federation
 Scottish Farming and Wildlife Advisors Group
 Scottish Land and Estates
 Scottish Organic Forum

Scottish Organic Producers Association (SOPA)
 Scottish Rural Action
 Scottish Wildlife Trust
 Scottish Wild Land Group
 Soil Association Scotland
 Stop Climate Chaos Scotland
 Tweed Forum
 Unite Scotland
 Woodland Trust
 WWF Scotland

Individuals

Professor James Curran
 John B Cameron, Member, Livestock Health Scotland
 Professor Dave Reay, Professor of Carbon Management, University of Edinburgh
 Professor Pete Smith, Professor of Soils and Global Change, University of Aberdeen
 Lorna Murray, Member of Scottish Churches Rural Group
 Professor Davy McCracken, Head of SRUC's Hill and Mountain Research Centre
 Antonia Ineson, Myreside Organics
 Hazel Mackenzie, Shetland crofter, member of the Nature Friendly Farming Network
 Michael Clarke, Dumfriesshire Farmer, member of the Nature Friendly Farming Network
 Carey Coombs, Farmer

