



Background:

On 20 June 2019, following a commitment made to the Scottish Parliament, the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy and Tourism launched a new independent group who he asked to look at the future for agricultural support in Scotland beyond 2024:

“People are the food and farming industry’s greatest resource so I am delighted that such an array of talented, experienced and knowledgeable people has agreed to join this group and I look forward to convening its first meeting today. It will provide its views and expertise to support Scottish Government officials in making recommendations on future farming and food production policy built around the six principles set out earlier this year to Parliament...Scotland’s landscape and climate provide us with an unrivalled natural larder. We need to develop policies which support both, to ensure that our status as a high quality producer of food is maintained and grows...Crucially, we need an integrated approach that will ensure that Scotland’s land assets play their part in responding to and mitigating the global climate emergency. I look forward to hearing the proposals.”¹

The Group – which consisted of individuals bringing farming, food, consumer and environmental expertise – met face to face five times before the Covid-19 restrictions impacted and another four times virtually afterwards². During that time the group took evidence from a wide range of contributors including farmers, crofters, producers and academics and produced a draft report for publication. However, this report was never signed off despite it providing an overarching vision which would usefully have informed the direction of the later established farmer-led sector groups.

Next steps:

The potential of this cross sectoral group was enormous and could have produced an overarching vision for the direction of travel Scotland needs for farming and food production, plus stronger and effective relationships between key sectors. This vision cannot provide the detail of actions required – that is much better assessed at a sectoral level – but it could have provided a scientifically informed, effective and realistic direction of travel needed to meet the Scottish Government’s climate targets and actions to address the ongoing biodiversity crisis.

The relationships this group established are key to producing ambitious solutions, grounded in reality, which support Scotland’s farming sector to get ahead in an increasingly competitive world. The need for transformational change is clear – business as usual is not an option. Yet, without an agreed high-level vision, there is the danger that sector-led approaches alone could duplicate or enlarge gaps between sectors, resulting in actions that are not able to meet the necessary targets. This is all the more necessary when the Scottish Government will be leading on the Edinburgh Declaration³ at CoP15 in October, which states that:

We recognise the need for transformative change across terrestrial and marine ecosystems, and across urban development and all productive sectors to ensure enhanced food security, human health and sustainable livelihoods whilst avoiding, mitigating or minimising the negative impact on biodiversity.

¹ <https://www.gov.scot/news/farming-and-food-production/>

² <https://www.gov.scot/groups/farming-and-food-production-group/>

³ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/edinburgh-declaration-on-post-2020-biodiversity-framework/>



We **note** the need to develop effective policy, governance and financing solutions at all levels of government and to ensure vertical integration across national, subnational, city and local levels to effect transformative change. These should address both the direct and indirect drivers of biodiversity loss, and integrate all dimensions of sustainable development (environmental, economic, cultural and social).

We **also note** the vital role that indigenous peoples and local communities, women and youth, non-governmental organisations, and wider society, play in decision making and in taking action at subnational, city and local levels, and that there should be a fully collaborative approach to ensure active participation of these groups.

The food and farming sector needs support from the public purse to achieve the transformational change required to address the nature and climate emergency. The way that Scotland's land is used is critical to the country's future well-being in a host of different ways, from the Land Use Strategy to land reform. Who benefits from its use is also a key issue. In the light of this, the future role of farmers and land managers is going to have to be very different from that which they have played up until now. Indeed, if Scotland is to remain aligned with the European Common Agricultural Policy⁴, two of its five aims are relevant:

- *help tackle climate change and the sustainable management of natural resources;*
- *maintain rural areas and landscapes across the EU.*

Furthermore, it states that *While being cost-effective, farmers should work in a sustainable and environmentally friendly manner, and maintain our soils and biodiversity.* This serves to underline the need for the farming sector to pursue a much wider set of goals than those relating purely to food production. It also carries a clear implication that a much wider range of interests and voices should be involved in shaping its future.

The need for all sectors to double-down and work together has never been clearer, despite the considerable efforts of the Farming and Food Production Future Policy Group failing to result in a published report. Decisions going forward about what form future support should take and how to deliver it will be best made by the government engaging with a wide range of stakeholders. These should include those representing farmer, food, consumer and environmental interests and the process should be backed up with evidence. We now need to work together for the good of Scotland's landscapes and Scotland's future generations.

This statement is supported by:

Bumblebee Conservation Trust	Nourish Scotland	Soil Association Scotland
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Landworkers' Alliance	Plantlife Scotland	
Nature Friendly Farming Network	RSPB Scotland	Woodland Trust Scotland
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⁴ https://ec.europa.eu/info/food-farming-fisheries/key-policies/common-agricultural-policy_en