

# Food Production and Environmental Protection are Mutually Beneficial November 2022



Scottish  
Environment  
LINK

## **A more sustainable future for Scottish farming is within our grasp**

The Scottish Government is considering how to replace the decades-old system of funding for farming and crofting. Next year, new legislation will be introduced that will shape farming and land use for the future. This provides a once in a generation opportunity to encourage farming methods that protect and restore nature, and guard against climate change.

## **The government is heading in a positive direction**

The current Agriculture Bill consultation focuses on delivering the government's vision of seeing Scotland become a global leader in sustainable and regenerative agriculture. This is welcome, because the current farming system is not sustainable. While farmers and crofters produce high quality produce, and many do so in ways that help the planet, there are also problems with the current system that need to be urgently addressed. We are witnessing ongoing declines in biodiversity and agriculture is the third largest source of greenhouse gas emissions in Scotland. Things need to change; we need to support our farmers to produce high quality food whilst reducing environmental impact or we will miss our vital climate and nature targets.

## **Climate and nature coming up the agenda does not mean food production is forgotten**

Given the climate and nature emergency and the government's need to meet statutory climate targets, there is more prominence on climate and nature in the current consultation than there might have been in the past. This is a good thing. It is in part because previous iterations of agricultural policy did not deliver for climate and nature that we find ourselves in an emergency situation now.

Despite these positive commitments, concerns have been raised that the government is not focusing as much as it should on food production, and that the focus on environmental issues has pushed food production off the agenda. Scottish Environment LINK does not agree with this argument:

- **The government has made clear that the new funding system will support farmers and crofters to continue to produce food** and plans to do this through retaining direct payments. LINK has serious reservations about this approach because direct payments have a poor track record of delivering positive environmental outcomes. LINK does however support the Programme for Government proposal to explore capping direct payments, which could still deliver a level of income support while also allowing for a proportion of payments to be redirected to meet the goals of the Scottish Government's vision for agriculture.
- **We disagree with the suggestion that a focus on the environment somehow equates to a marginalisation of food production.** There must be no polarisation between food production and environmental issues and policy-makers should not view this as an either/or choice. Clearly, we need our farmers to be producing high quality food, but we need this to be done in a more sustainable way. The prominence given by the government to climate and nature is only notable because the government is rectifying the fact that these issues have not been given enough prominence to date.
- **Food production and food security depends on nature and having a climate conducive to farming.** Environmental security underpins food security, and climate change and nature loss are already having an impact on farming. We are already seeing the impacts of climate change now, with extreme weather and water shortages impacting food production. In 2017 alone extreme weather contributed to losses of up to £161 million for Scotland's farmers. We cannot push consideration of environmental concerns into the future; we need to act now to limit the negative impacts on farming itself.



## **Scottish Environment LINK recognises that farming is facing difficult times**

Scottish farmers and crofters are facing real challenges. Costs of inputs are high and farmers are naturally worried about the future. Scottish Environment LINK members understand this. We want public spending on farming to continue. There is a good rationale to continue to support farmers - but the way that the money is spent needs to change so that it better supports the sector in its efforts to play a full part in tackling the nature and climate crises. The rise in input costs underlines why we need to reform the agriculture budget to mainstream more nature and climate friendly ways of farming that make farmers less reliant on these inputs.

## **War, food security and the nature and climate emergency**

The atrocities in Ukraine shine a light on the vulnerabilities of our food system, but they should not be used to drive policy decisions that backtrack on environmental commitments. The climate and nature crisis is the single biggest threat to food security. Suggestions that nature must take a back seat while we focus on increasing food production are flawed and short-sighted. These issues should focus attention on the importance of fulfilling the government's vision of becoming a world leader in sustainable and regenerative farming. The way forward is farming with nature, as this would reduce exposure to external shocks such as those currently being experienced.

## **The polarisation of debate does not reflect the complexity of the issues**

We are aware that farmers can feel under attack from all sides at the moment. So let us be clear: reforming agriculture does not equate to an attack on farmers, but is a recognition that the current funding system desperately needs to be reformed if it is to be fit for the future.

We need our farmers to continue to produce high-quality food. We also need our farmers to continue managing the land in ways that are good for nature and climate. Farmers are an essential part of the solution to the challenges we face. Farming more sustainably will be better for nature and climate, but also for communities and for farmers themselves. We will only achieve this change through constructive engagement and by working together.

## **Scottish Environment LINK wants to see the Scottish Government:**

- Replace the decades-old farm funding system with one that works for nature, climate and people.
- Ensure at least three quarters of public spending on farming supports methods that restore nature and tackle climate change.
- Support all farmers and crofters in the transition to sustainable farming.

**Scottish Environment LINK is the forum for Scotland's voluntary environment community, with over 40 member bodies representing a broad spectrum of environmental interests with the common goal of contributing to a more environmentally sustainable society.**

## **For more information contact:**

Dan Paris, Advocacy Manager at Scottish Environment LINK: [dan@scotlink.org](mailto:dan@scotlink.org)



**Scottish Environment LINK** the voice for Scotland's environment

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