



Friday 5th November 2021

Dear Mairi Gougeon MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Islands

Speaking on behalf of the next generation of Scottish food and drink producers, and bodies representing youth in rural Scotland, we are writing to highlight the valuable role our industry has to play in mitigating the twin crises of climate change and biodiversity, as Glasgow plays host to the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26).

As world leaders gather in Glasgow, we are concerned that a disproportionate amount of blame for the current climate crisis will be placed at the door of the agricultural industry, and that countries such as the UK may be used as a stalking horse for tougher climate mitigation measures.

Young farmers across the country are ready to take up the challenges of reducing emissions and increasing biodiversity, acknowledging that these are challenges we all must face. However, we are asking for our industry to be spared sacrifice in the name of vanity, when we can offer so much to the cause, whilst feeding our nation with fantastic food and drink products.

There is an enthusiastic younger generation of farmers waiting to take over family farms, or seeking opportunities within the agricultural and related industries, but we are concerned that their opportunities may be limited without an integrated approach to land use being taken. We would be keen to explore how the next generation of farmers and land managers can be involved within the development of Regional Land Use Partnerships as a way of ensuring decisions around long term land use are made with the next generation in mind.

Whilst we are enthusiastic about the opportunities for integrated agroforestry, and using trees as part of sustainable production systems, we are concerned that the current levels of tree planting on productive areas of land is leading to an unsustainable rise in land prices which will lock new entrants out of accessing the industry. Whilst this is not a new challenge, exploring policy that can facilitate generational renewal across our farms and crofts is critical to our climate change success.

Over the last few years, we have seen a rise in 'carbon credits' traded from land use change activities. This area is at present unregulated and is creating a sense of inequality within the food and farming system. Large companies are utilising the Scottish Food and Farming's land base to offset their emissions, rather than look for ways to reduce them themselves.

As you will be aware, changes are already happening within our industry, and the way farms are run is becoming much more climate friendly. This is through various methods; from the machines we use, right down to the way we treat our soils in order to lock in more carbon. Regenerative farming measures, such as minimum tillage, rotational grazing, cover crops, buffer zones to encourage wildlife and the use of GPS are only a few examples of some of the ways that farmers are taking advantage of new methods and technologies.

Livestock farmers and arable farmers alike, are working hand-in-hand to create opportunities for more sustainable approaches. Manure, which is naturally produced by livestock, can be applied to soil in order to add organic matter and improve soil health, making soils more productive and therefore far more efficient. The inclusion of livestock within arable rotations is key to maintaining the complex ecosystems hidden beneath our feet.

Whilst our Scottish farmers and crofters are already engaged in leading change, we require more to ensure we can close the gap to net zero. We are calling for further investment into applied, farmer led research in this country that can lead the way to improve farming and investigate new developments such as genetic selection and the use of feed additives to reduce enteric methane emissions in ruminant livestock.

The way we measure our emissions has to be fair and based on the most up to date science. Recent advances in science indicate that GWP100 overestimates the role which methane plays in global warming. GWP* is the updated metric that accounts for the true impact that methane has. We would ask of you to spearhead discussions with the devolved nations, and internationally, into the adoption of the GWP* metric – ensuring that we as farmers follow the science, as do our leaders.

Currently, we are dismayed and disgruntled by the inaccurate reporting of Scottish food and drink production by some sections of the press and politicians who should know better. Far too often, figures which have no connection to the industry here in Scotland are used in the press to describe our practices. This not only has a detrimental impact on farming's morale, but it also gives the public a tainted view about the food they eat and how it is produced. Farmers and crofters here in Scotland are the lifeblood of rural communities and their practices help shape the landscape and its ecosystems, which have come to be recognised globally for their outstanding beauty and wildlife.

Everyone in society should be putting their full weight behind the buy local revolution, encouraging the public to buy their food from their local area in order to reduce food miles, and support local food production and rural economies.

The challenge which humanity faces is vast, and is greater than any one individual, business, or country and we wholeheartedly agree that action is needed now, but it is equally important that we simply do not offshore our food and drink production, and associated emissions. In an ever-growing global population, the ability to feed ourselves with the nutritious foods we have reared and grown in Scotland for millennia is going to be key to ensure that we can maintain our ancient rural cultures, whilst playing our part in averting climate disaster.

We welcomed the positive comments you made to farmers and crofters at last week's NFUS conference, and particularly the willingness you showed to support, listen and work with the industry to build a greener and more prosperous future for Scottish Agriculture. We hope the voice of rural youth will be heard in these and future discussions.

We urge this global summit to be the turning point, where meaningful and lasting change is agreed, so everyone can move forward. It is our generation, and the generations who follow us who will have to live with the realities of decisions which are made, or not made now. Do not let COP26 be a cop out!

Yours faithfully,

Ally Brunton, National Chair, SAYFC Agri & Rural Affairs Committee
Peter Moss, Chair, NFU Scotland Next Generation Group
Amy Jo Reid, National Vice Chair, SAYFC Agri & Rural Affairs Committee
Matthew Steel, Vice Chair, NFU Scotland Next Generation Group
John McCulloch, Chair, SAYFC West Region Agri & Rural Affairs Committee / Committee Member, NFU Scotland Next Generation Group
Crawford McLaren, Chair, SAYFC East Region Agri & Rural Affairs Committee
Aimee Budge, Chair, SAYFC East Region Agri & Rural Affairs Committee

SAYFC Agri & Rural Affairs Committee:

Catherine Sloan, Alex Stephen, Ben McClymont, Beth Alexander, Caitlin Ross, David Mitchell, Heather Murray, Jillian Kennedy, Lee Robb, Mhairi Strang, Murray Stephen, Rebecca Duncan, Heather Laurie, Catherine Hynd, James Hay, Nicole Work, Bruce Keillor, Sarah Mowat, Ewan Lambie, Grant Stephen, Hamish Logan, Scott Dey, Stephen Allan, Douglas Paterson, Rachael Wood

NFU Scotland Next Generation Group:

Andrew Neilson, Andrew Taylor, Aylett Roan, Duncan Morrison, Lucy Mitchell, Ryan MacLean, Michelle J Bruce, Iain Livesey, Chris Scott-Park, Stuart Galloway, John Howie, Andrew Neilson, Zoey Symington, Hamish Logan, Catherine Sloan, Ben McClymont

Industry Organisations:

Alan Laidlaw, Chief Executive, Royal Highland and Agricultural Society of Scotland
Katrina Barclay, Chief Executive, Royal Highland Education Trust
Alan Clarke, Chief Executive, Quality Meat Scotland
Ken Fletcher, Editor, The Scottish Farmer
Neil Wilson, Chief Executive, Institute of Auctioneers and Appraisers in Scotland
Penny Montgomerie, Chief Executive, Scottish Association of Young Farmers Clubs
Katie Burns, National Chair, Scottish Association of Young Farmers Clubs
Nina Clancy, Chief Executive, RSABI
Jen Craig, Chair, National Sheep Association Scotland
Caroline Millar, Chair, Scottish Agritourism
David McKay, Head of Policy, Soil Association Scotland
Martin Morgan, Executive Manager, Scottish Association of Meat Wholesalers
Gordon King, Executive Manager, Scottish Craft Butchers
June Geyer, Chair, Women in Agriculture Scotland
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Martin Kennedy, President, NFU Scotland
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