

## Future of Scottish Agriculture Consultation Event

Dumfries, 23 November 2015

### Summary

#### Background

In June 2015 the Scottish Government released a discussion document, *The Future of Scottish Agriculture*, setting out a vision and strategy for farming in Scotland in the next decades. It is an open consultation, with the Government keen to spread the debate beyond the usual suspects.

Nourish Scotland supported this initiative by organising a series of 8 events across Scotland in November/December 2015. The events were opportunities to reflect on, discuss and influence the direction agriculture should be going. To support these events, Nourish also produced a briefing paper outlining the scale of farming in Scotland, discussing some of the challenges faced by the sector and summarising the Scottish Government's document. Summaries have been produced of all these meetings and Nourish will also collate an over-arching response to the consultation, drawing on the themes put forward during these events.

#### Attendance and Partners

Our seventh event, run by Nourish in partnership with the Dumfries and Galloway Council, was held at Woodbank House (D&G Council Education Department) in Dumfries. Around 25 people came together to explore these proposals. Attendees included farmers, smallholders, local politicians and NGOs.

#### Format

The event was framed around 3 questions:

- What is farming for?
- What benefits do we get from farming & how should we pay for these?
- How does farming need to change to survive and prosper?

The workshop activities were carried out in small groups with some plenary feedback and discussion. Participants explored the questions above, along with discussing the vision, and key areas of the consultation.

We began by introducing the 3 questions above. Attendees then heard a springboard statement to help frame the issues and provide some context for discussion. This was a 5 minute presentation from Nourish with accompanying slides, highlighting some of the current issues in farming, such as climate change and emissions, an aging demographic, supplier relationships and income levels for farming and the contribution of the sector to jobs, the environment, and the economy.

Attendees then heard another springboard from David Finlay, from [Rainton Farm](#) in Galloway. David discussed the challenges of adapting their long-standing family business to changing trends and customer demands and the highs and lows of diversifying farm businesses.

#### What is farming for?

After our springboard session, we asked attendees to work in small groups to reflect on and discuss the question of "What is farming for"? (Where suggestions or

comments came up more than once or represent recurring themes, they are marked with an asterisk below).

Responses included:

- Feeding our cities/population \*
- Land Stewardship – responsibly looking after and caring for Scotland’s soil, land, wildlife, and natural environment \*
- Providing work and livelihoods for individuals and communities
- Ensuring the vitality of rural areas now and in the future \*
- Promoting animal welfare

### **What benefits do we get from farming and how should we pay for these?**

We then asked attendees to identify what benefits we receive from farming and how they should be paid for. Benefits identified included:

- Food
  - Healthy, nutritional
  - Quality
  - Affordable
  - Traceable, locally made
- Stewardship
  - Good management and protection of the land, soil, farm animals \*
  - Biodiversity and wildlife
  - The countryside is looked after, rural landscapes are maintained
- Contribution to the community
  - Work and employment in rural areas
  - Sense of ownership
  - Education about food
  - Establishing connections

Suggestions for how we pay for these benefits included:

- Fair food prices should reflect the efforts and costs of farmers to produce food sustainably and the mileage travelled by imported foods \*
- Continued public support, both directly and indirectly \*
- Applying the polluter-pays principle
- More localised, decentralised funding
- Rewards (price and subsidies) must be linked to the quality and value of the produce (not the quantity of land)
- CAP subsidies should be linked to the delivery of eco-system services protection and enhancement

### **How does it need to change to survive and prosper?**

Finally we asked attendees to suggest how farming should change. Responses included:

- More focus on sustainability: apply sustainable farming methods, take responsibility for social and environmental costs of bad practices \*
- Education about food and farming in schools \*
- More cooperation between farmers \*
- Emphasis on mutual respect: amongst farmers and between them and the rest of society
- Crop diversification

- At the farm-level, diversify activities to add value, thereby securing revenue streams
- Take better care of the land and the animals
- Promote and enhance partnerships between farmers and neighbouring businesses as well as neighbouring consumers (eg. through vegetable box schemes)
- More openness and transparency about sources of revenue vis-à-vis consumers so they understand farmers' situation better
- Keep in touch with societal demands and fashions (about food) -- eg. free range and organic
- Subsidies must meet farmers and smallholders' needs and stop driving intensification of farming methods
- Reduce meat production and consumption

## Vision

We then moved on to looking at the Scottish Government's vision for the Future of Scottish Agriculture. We first asked attendees to identify what they liked about it, what aspects of the vision were attractive to them and what words they were most drawn to. Positives listed included:

- People liked that the vision was **aspirational\***
- Liked that the vision recognised Scotland's **international** role - not insular, and the explicit and **interconnected** references to being innovative and profitable as well as supporting environment and communities
- Liked that the vision sought to support the **reputation** of Scottish food and drink

Attendees were then asked to put identify how the vision could be improved. Suggestions included:

- People felt that the vision was not clear on how the various priorities would be **balanced** – in what direction reform would head. In particular it was felt that the vision was too generic and would not address real life operational business challenges. Many felt that words like **green** were too vague and didn't unpack whether that means sustainable, organic, or an opportunity for greenwash.
- They noted wariness in the agricultural sector around the word **innovation** – in that without infrastructural support to manage the risks of innovation it is difficult to take action.
- A number of people were concerned at how **profitability** of the sector is measured – especially re environmental and social externalities. People also noted that profitability must be for the whole of society. Some people also questioned whether economic growth should be a priority, suggesting instead that the vision should center on the principles of food sovereignty.
- People wanted the vision and the food system more generally to better **value** farmers. Many feel that profit is out of their hands and that the vision does little to address the power of supermarkets.
- People wanted more in the vision around **stewardship** - particularly to shift the normalization of a particular kind of consumption, and called for more **diversity** throughout the food sector including the people, learning, breeds, crops etc.

## Key Issues

We gave our attendees a sheet with 6 key areas marked up onto it. We also left two spaces blank for attendees to capture any other areas that came up in discussion. We prompted them by asking 6 key questions reflecting the areas marked on the sheet:

- How do we encourage new entrants into farming and make sure that it is an attractive career option?
- How do we improve training, support and advice to farmers?
- How do we better target our research and make sure it is used effectively?
- How can we make our farming practices more environmentally friendly, while ensuring farmers can earn a living in a competitive global market?
- Are there new models of working that we need to develop? New ways of buying and selling?
- How can we support our farmers and communities to work together more closely?

On **new entrants**, attendees said:

- Raising the public status of farming and creating more accessible image.
- Expanding on the support in LEADER
- Access to land, especially long term tenancies - could be addressed through Land Reform Bill. 'Starter smallholdings' would be a more manageable entrance level.
- Prioritizing the promotion of jobs that urgently need new entrants like hill shepherds, and promoting new forms of farming more generally for example share farming.
- Tackle excessive land prices through tax system, remove subsidies from land around settlements and reduce cost.
- Support in management and administration
- Financial support through low interest loans
- Share stories and experiences of successes of young peoples involvement in farming 'people need to see folk like them'.

On the provision of **training, support and advice**, attendees said:

- We need clearer pathways in and out of farming.
- Some diversified farms offer a lot of training and can support others
- High cost of training and the high cost in time and money of travel to training; training should be delivered locally for free – peer to peer train the trainer.
- The high turnover of regulation makes it difficult to keep on top of developments. Would benefit from being in more accessible language.
- Shift of agricultural training from Colleges to Universities makes less accessible, focus should be on a wider range of apprenticeships that encourage collaborative attitudes.
- Link local economic needs and opportunities to advice and guidance.

On **research**, attendees said:

- Want research to be practical and relevant, and need to overcome habit – the 'this is how we've always done things' attitude to new research
- Barriers to accessing research stifles innovation, many found participating in research daunting and struggled to secure funding
- Who funds research, what is the agenda of funders / concentration of influence. The specific challenges experienced in Dumfries are not properly represented in research

- Specifically want more research into Carbon Capture and Storage technology, on changing food buying habits, and on the externalization of costs
- Want international benchmarking of research

On ***new ways of working***, attendees said:

- Want more supportive planning system, seeing land as a landscape to use. In particular wish for kinder local authorities, less red tape, and a more pragmatic approach from SEPA – especially in terms of support to achieve compliance.
- Support to diversify (with simpler SRDP) and to work more cooperatively with each other and machines (acknowledging that self sufficiency can lead to becoming insular)
- Many people wanted to see farming become more profitable so it does not need to rely on subsidies, though acknowledged that this would price out some consumers.
- Want to see the costs of farming reduced for example through the centralization of various farming membership fees.
- Ideas for shared marketing – for example a local certification scheme that is recognizable similar to Fair Trade, learning from the work of the Soil Association.
- New and different markets such as food exchanges, more local value-adding.
- A South of Scotland equivalent to the Convention of the Highlands & Islands.

On ***environment***, attendees said:

- Continued and consistent support is vital, being more proactive at protecting – prevention better than cure.
- Recognize the value of low intensity farming
- Connect Land Use Strategy with agriculture policy
- Environmental costs to be identified and included in price both directly and indirectly – a polluter pays model
- Generally agree with the requests of SEPA but want financial and practical support to comply.

On ***supporting our farmers***, attendees said:

- There is a democratic deficit in many areas of farming, and that in general Dumfries is not well represented by national strategies like Good Food Nation where focus is on arables. Need a stronger voice for farmers, and to fight the concentrated power and influence of supermarkets.
- Help to bridge the remoteness of farming – the logistics of participating are often geographically and financially prohibitive.
- Would like more diverse and innovative ways to get produce to consumers, and better marketing eg ‘Good for Scotland’ or ‘Fair for Farmers’.
- Different and better incentives for farmers to do business in a socially and environmentally sustainable way. Valuing farmers properly and connecting subsidy to value outputs.
- Acknowledge the weaknesses of competitive neo-liberal approach towards farming and instead encourage collaboration.
- FOSA vision looks as if it were drafted in a city
- The cumulative impact of the many small challenges creates an insurmountable challenge, notably; geographic remoteness and the time it takes to access training / events / networking, low wages in a fragile rural

economy, isolation, high costs, limited digital access, skills deficit, transport and energy costs.

**Other** issues identified included:

- On **land reform**; change rules on succession, disincentivise large estates, strike a fairer balance between big landowners and the need for tenancies - with opportunities for social landlords, land in exchange for death duties
- On **sustainability**; economic, social and environmental – an acknowledgement that they are all interconnected, planning reforms to permit more rural development outside of clusters, scrap and replace SRDP with emphasis on supporting diversification, a voice for young people in planning
- On **rural demographics**; tackle creatively the challenges of ageing population

## **Conclusion**

At the end of the time spent on key issues, we had a quick round of table feedback, ensuring that tables could hear what others had come up with. There were a number of hot topics raised including better valuing and supporting farmers, recognizing the unique barriers that different regions of Scotland face, research based in reality, and more emphasis on collaborations.

Attendees were thanked for their time and their contributions, and encouraged to respond directly to the Scottish Government consultation, via email or appropriate social media channels.

For a further description of the event, one of our attendees blogged about her experience of attending her event, and this can be found at <https://sarahbeattiesmith.wordpress.com/2015/11/24/farming-in-crisis-how-to-create-sustainable-agriculture>