

Food & Farming

Draft measures published for Scottish Agri Reform Programme

A route map and list of draft measures for the Scottish government's Vision for Agriculture has been published. The Agriculture Reform Route Map sets out the timescales for information and interaction within agriculture. The Scottish government admits the Route Map does not yet answer all the questions about the new support framework or provide the detail of how measures will be applied and what applicants will be paid. But it does provide a clear programme of dates explaining when current schemes will transition or end, and when more guidance, support and information will become available.

The Draft Agriculture Reform List of Measures is a supporting document for farmers and crofters, intended to show the measures currently being appraised by the Scottish government. These measures have undergone initial evaluation of their impact and ease of application on farms and crofts and potential costs. Measures for sectors with the highest emissions are being prioritised. For more information, please see our Rural Research briefing note.

Funding for productivity boosting equipment returns

The next round of Defra's Farming Equipment and Technology Fund is due to open in England later this month. It offers grants of between £1,000 and £25,000 to help farm and forestry businesses purchase specific items of equipment which will help increase productivity, boost environmental sustainability or improve animal health and welfare on their farms. The fund is split into two themes; one focusing on productivity and slurry (to open this month) and another focusing on animal welfare (to open in March). For this round, 19 items have been added to aid productivity, two to aid slurry management and 66 to support animal welfare. Eligible items include precision inter row hoes, timber forwarders, slurry injection equipment, direct drills, robotic silage pushers, tyre inflation systems, auto steer conversions, cow mattresses and livestock handling equipment. A clear grant value is assigned to each item. In the first round, applicants received approximately 44% of the total cost. The fund proved popular and the first round was significantly oversubscribed. If you would like to discuss the fund please contact [Georgina Sweeting](#).

Field trials for bovine TB vaccine

Field trials for a cattle vaccine as well as a new skin test for bovine tuberculosis (bTB) have moved to the next phase. It is hoped the combination of CattleBCG vaccine, and the Detect Infected among Vaccinated Animals (DIVA) skin test will be deployable in the next few years to help combat bTB. The second phase of the field trials will assess the safety of the CattleBCG vaccine and the safety and performance of the DIVA skin test in vaccinated cattle. The field trials are taking place on commercial livestock farms across the country and will be completed this year. Phase 2 will involve at least five farms with 600 animals participating, 300 of which will be vaccinated with CattleBCG, whilst the remaining half will receive a placebo.

So far, laboratory studies have indicated the vaccine and DIVA skin test are safe and that the test performs well under controlled conditions. In 2021, the Animal and Plant Health Agency began Phase 1 trials in England, which focused on the safety and performance of the DIVA skin test in unvaccinated animals. Performed on ten farms with 524 participating animals, Phase 1 was completed in May 2022 and analysis of the results is in progress.

Food Data Transparency Partnership launched

The National Food Strategy was mired in disappointments and setbacks. Plans for sugar taxes and targets to reduce meat consumption only inspired controversy before they were swept aside. Yet the new Food Data Transparency Partnership (FDTP) is one of the few recommendations to endure and the partnership has now been formed and recently met for the first time. That meeting marks the beginning of a five-year process to mandate how the industry measures its impact on society. Its overall objective is to drive a real transformation in health, animal welfare and environmental outcomes through our food. It will use data transparency to both incentivise industry and equip consumers with the information they need to make informed choices.

Scotland: New payment scheme

Rural Affairs Secretary Mairi Gougeon has announced a new payment scheme for farmers and crofters to improve the health and welfare of sheep and cattle. From summer 2023, livestock keepers will be able to claim a £250 payment for specific interventions. The new scheme joins the carbon audits and soil sampling measures introduced last year to encourage a more sustainable and regenerative agriculture sector in Scotland.

Ms Gougeon later announced the opening of the next round of the Knowledge Transfer and Innovation Fund (KTIF) when addressing the National Farmers Union Scotland annual general meeting. The KTIF encourages collaborative projects and offers up to £200,000 per application to deliver on-the-ground improvements in agricultural competitiveness, resource efficiency, environmental performance and sustainability. Applications should be submitted by 10 March 2023.

Policy

Compulsory purchase law to be reviewed

The Law Commission will undertake a review of existing compulsory purchase and compensation law. It previously reviewed compulsory purchase in the early 2000s, however the recommendations were not implemented in full. The latest review has been instructed by the Department for Levelling up, Housing and Communities in light of the volume of critical infrastructure projects required across England and Wales. The government committed in its 2022 White Paper, "Levelling Up the United Kingdom" to enhance compulsory purchase powers. The Law Commission's objectives are to make the law simpler, consistent and more accessible. Preliminary research for the review will begin in early 2023 and include pre-consultation engagement with stakeholders and analysis of the current law.

Scotland: Register of persons holding a controlled interest in land

The register of persons holding a controlled interest in land, under the Land Reform Act (Scotland) 2016 is a tool to improve landownership transparency in Scotland. In essence, it makes the information about those who have a controlling interest in land publicly available, even if they are not registered as the actual owners. The regulations came into force on 1 April 2022 but a 12 month transition period with no financial penalties was provided to allow time for registration. Failure to comply with the regulations after this period would result in a fine of up to £5,000. Subject to the Scottish Parliament's approval, the Scottish government is now proposing to extend the transition period by a further 12 months to 1 April 2024.

Wales: Amends to the Agriculture (Wales) Bill

A number of amendments will be made to Wales's Agriculture Bill in an attempt to ensure Welsh farms remain viable. When the Bill was first unveiled, it received heavy criticism for focusing too greatly on the environment and culture at the expense of economic viability. In response, the Welsh government will clarify the first objective to make it clear that factors relevant to whether food and other goods are produced in a sustainable manner include, among other things, the economic resilience of agricultural businesses within the communities in which they operate.

To encourage food production in a sustainable manner, three additional purposes for providing support will also be added:

- Helping rural communities to thrive and strengthening links between agricultural businesses and their communities
- Improving the resilience of agricultural businesses
- Sustaining the Welsh language and promoting and facilitating its use.

Government increases focus on energy

In response to the challenges of the past year, the government has increased its focus on energy security by splitting up the Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and forming the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero. Grant Shapps who was formerly the Secretary of State for Business and energy will lead the department. Business and trade will be united in a new Department for Business and Trade led by Kemi Badenoch, whilst a dedicated Department for Science, Innovation and Technology will be led by Michelle Donelan.

Environment & Natural Capital

Peatland restoration funding available

The Nature for Climate Peatland Grant Scheme (NCPGS) will open for applications in early April. It aims to restore 35,000 hectares of upland and lowland peatland in England, and reduce emissions by 5.7 megatonnes of carbon dioxide equivalents cumulatively by 2050. Alongside peat restoration other environmental benefits are also sought

including better water quality, natural flood management, protection of historic environment features, and connecting people with nature.

The third round of Restoration Grants will allow individual landowners, environmental groups, public bodies and charities to apply for funding lasting until March 2025. This can cover 75% of the total project costs or up to 85% in exceptional cases which offer significant and unique environmental benefits which conventional techniques cannot achieve or where funding from other sources cannot be secured. Through the latest round Defra is seeking to support projects that can start work in the 2023/24 restoration season. It expects applications to be for £1 to £2 million across the life of the project. To discuss NCPGS projects please contact [Hannah Turner](#) or [Georgina Sweeting](#).

Countryside Stewardship application window opens

The Countryside Stewardship Higher Tier scheme is now open for applications and is expected to prove competitive, meaning applications that offer the biggest environmental improvements while demonstrating value for money will be favoured. Higher Tier offers grants for the most environmentally significant sites and some flexibility to tailor requirements to suit the local environment. Most options last for five years, but some can last for up to 20 years. Agreements will start on 1 January 2024. If you would like to discuss the scheme please contact [Matt Riddington](#).

Nature projects launched to test carbon capture

Six nature projects will receive funding to trial the most effective ways to capture carbon and mitigate the impacts of climate change. Each of the projects covers more than 500 hectares and will assess how carbon is captured and stored across different habitats such as grasslands, forests, wetlands and hedgerows. £4.3 million worth of funding will support:

- Wild Exmoor Carbon Sequestration Project
- Wansbeck Restoration for Climate Change (WRCC)
- Plymouth's Natural Grid Nature Based Solutions for Climate Change
- Derwent Forest Landscape Recovery Project, Derbyshire
- The Oxfordshire–Buckinghamshire Freshwater Network
- Severn Solutions for Nature's Recovery (SSNR)

The Nature Based Solutions for Climate Change Programme was launched in 2021 and will run until March 2024. It is backed by £12.5 million from the Treasury's Shared Outcomes Fund.

Property & Development

Commercial property EPC deadline approaches

On 1 April 2023 it will become unlawful to let commercial properties with an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) rating of lower than E, unless the property is registered on the exemptions register. Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards (MEES) are expected to tighten further for commercial property in the future, with an EPC rating of C or higher expected to be mandatory by 1 April 2027, and B or better by 2030.

Business & Economy

Rural estates boost Scotland's wellbeing economy

New research has found rural estates play a vital role in Scotland's wellbeing economy, which is defined as an economic system operating within safe environmental limits, which serves the collective wellbeing of current and future generations. The Scottish government has set 11 national outcomes to measure progress towards a wellbeing economy and the research concluded that rural estates contribute to at least seven of the national outcomes. The [report](#) found estates:

- Provide homes for 13,000 families and land for 14,000 rural enterprises
- Provide access to the natural environment for 5.4 million Scottish visitors each year
- Provide 58% of Scotland's renewable energy capacity
- Make a substantial contribution to Scotland's natural capital base through agricultural, forestry and renewable energy operations
- Are important for carbon sequestration potential and nature-based tourism
- Generate an estimated £2.4 billion gross value added per year for the Scottish economy and provide one in 10 of all rural jobs
- Have huge potential to help drive efforts to establish a wellbeing economy in Scotland.

UK and US must forge a sustainable future for agriculture

Environment Secretary Thérèse Coffey recently delivered a speech to the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture (NASDA) Conference in Virginia. In the speech, Ms Coffey called for the UK and USA to work together to create “a more secure, more sustainable future” for the farming sector. Referring to the journey since we left the European Union, she highlighted the Agriculture Act and forthcoming Precision Breeding Bill which will liberalise gene editing as significant pieces of legislation for farming which will cut red tape, improve resilience and the adoption of the latest technology.

She repeated the government’s wish for a trade agreement, stating “all this to me reinforces the need to champion free trade”. Ms Coffey hinted new legislation could be coming on food self-sufficiency, stating “we only have domestic self-sufficiency of about 60% and we want to maintain that at least, if not consider higher”. While that does not appear conducive to a free trade agreement, the government’s food strategy does reference trading with a diverse range of trading partners as a way of achieving food security.

Other Rural News

Engineering nature’s magic

Some methods of afforestation rely on dropping seeds from a great height over vast areas, called aerial seeding. But can these seeds become embedded in the ground, safe away from hungry birds and adverse conditions, when merely dropped from an aeroplane? One solution could be seed carriers, engineered to replicate the self-planting mechanisms of certain varieties of plant like the Erodium. The seeds of the Erodium plant are carried inside a thin, tightly wound stalk. During rain or high humidity, the corkscrew-like stalk unwinds and twists the seed into the soil, where it can take root. Scientists have now replicated this mechanism in a biodegradable seed carrier referred to as E-seed. This seed carrier, fashioned from wood veneer, could enable aerial seeding of difficult-to-access areas, and could be used for a variety of seeds or fertilizers and adapted to many different environments. You can see the seed carrier in action [here](#).

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