Policy for a Just Transition in Scottish agriculture

The Scottish Agroecology Partnership (SAP) is a coalition of eight agricultural organisations working together to promote agroecological, nature-friendly farming across Scotland. Bringing together farmers, crofters, landworkers, and advocates, SAP aims to create a fairer, more resilient food and farming system. The partnership focuses on policy advocacy, knowledge sharing, and building networks to support a just transition in Scottish agriculture – ensuring that those who work the land are central to shaping its future.

Scotland's agricultural sector must transition toward a more sustainable and regenerative future, and we welcome the Scottish Government's stated commitment to delivering this through a 'Just Transition'. Crucially, we believe that this transformation must be farmer-led. Across the country, farmers and crofters are already pioneering innovative practices that support climate, nature, and community resilience.

However, current proposals for agricultural subsidies under the new Rural Support plan risk entrenching existing inequalities in our farming system, failing to support those leading the way, and crucially, doing little to actually encourage or incentivise the wider transition that is needed. In some cases, proposals even exclude the very farmers and crofters who are most aligned with the government's stated goals.

A new agricultural system requires a new payment structure; one that reflects the realities on the ground and genuinely supports change. Our network of over 3,000 farmers and crofters demonstrates that there is strong appetite within the sector for a transition to more sustainable and regenerative farming, but this will only be possible with meaningful government support. The following proposals, co-developed with our members, outline key reforms needed to ensure that agricultural subsidies can underpin a truly just transition for Scottish agriculture.

Policy for a Just Transition in Scottish Agriculture

Redirect subsidies to support a Just Transition for the sector

Introduction

The Scottish Government has pledged that the transformation of the agricultural sector will progress in keeping with the principles of a Just Transition, that is: ensuring that no one is left behind or pushed behind in the transition to low-carbon and environmentally sustainable economies and societies. Yet, family farms keep going out of business, while little progress is made towards ambitious climate or nature restoration targets. Meanwhile, productive farmland is surrendered to green investors, harvesting carbon credits instead of food.

We support the transition towards a sustainable and regenerative agriculture that deserves its name, and is not merely the same old in new clothes. We are convinced that this is achievable if this transformation is farmer-led: Farmers and crofters across the country are already pioneering innovative practices that support climate, nature, and community resilience. The commitment to a Just Transition requires continued support for those who are already farming in a way that meets all objectives of the new Agriculture Act – high quality food production, animal welfare, climate mitigation, nature restoration and thriving rural communities. And it also requires clear, credible and financially affordable pathways for those within the sector who will be required to do more in the future.

A Just Transition for agriculture means building a system built on equity and fairness. However, current proposals for agricultural subsidies under the new Rural Support Plan risk entrenching existing inequalities, failing to support those leading the way, and doing little to encourage or incentivise the wider systemic transition that is needed.[1] A truly just transition implies a fundamental rethink of our payment structures to ensure public funds are used to farm in a way that supports restoring ecosystems, building soil health, and strengthening local food systems.[2]

Policy Context

The financial landscape for the 2026–27 financial year allocates £703.2 million to the Rural Affairs portfolio for agricultural support and related services. The Scottish Government has pledged that at least half of funding will eventually be targeted towards outcomes for biodiversity gain and a drive towards low carbon approaches to improve the resilience, efficiency and profitability of the sector.[3]

Currently, however, policy remains heavily weighted toward direct, area-based support payments: According to the recently published Rural Support Plan, a total of 80% of the future budget remains earmarked for Tier 1 and Tier 2 payments, indicating very little shift in

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[1] Allanson, P et al, Income Mobility and Income Inequality in Scottish Agriculture, Journal of Agricultural Economics (2016) 68 (2) 471-493.
[2] Springman, M and Freund, F, Options for reforming agricultural subsidies from health, climate, and economic perspectives, Nature communications (2022) 13 (82).
[3] Scottish Government (2023), Agricultural reform route map (1st ed) <https://www.gov.scot/publications/agricultural-reform-route-map/>.

how funding will be distributed: The largest landowners will continue to receive the lion's share of the budget in the form of largely unconditional payments tied to land size.

Under the current system, the top 20% of claimants (i.e. those in receipt of most subsidy by area) receive 62% of the direct payments budget with an average of £79,000 per claimant. The bottom 40% of producers received just 5% of this fund, or about £3,000 per business on average. The remaining 38% of the budget in 2024 was then split among the remaining 40% of medium-sized family farms.[44] Keeping over two thirds of the future budget tied strictly to land area guarantees that public funds continue to disproportionately reward the largest landowners while penalising medium-small family owned, diversified, and agroecological producers who are actively delivering public goods beyond commodity food.[5]

Budget Allocation by Tier (2026-27)

Tier	Primary Mechanism	Estimated Funding (2026-27)
Tier 1: Base	Basic Payment Scheme (BPS)	£282 million
Tier 2: Enhanced	Enhanced Greening	£142 million
Tier 3: Elective	AECS & Forestry Grants*	£84.3 million
Tier 4: Complementary	Advisory Services & Training	£10.1 million
Outwith Tiers	SSBSS, SUSSS, & Others	£44.75 million

*Includes £25.6m for AECS and £58.7m for the Forestry Grant Scheme.

Less than 5% of the budget is allocated to support Agri-Environment Climate Scheme measures, despite their potential to deliver positive outcomes for climate and nature alongside food production. Agriculture remains the second largest source of greenhouse gas emissions in Scotland, responsible for nearly one-fifth of the nation's total. Research suggests that a widespread shift to more agroecological farming measures could deliver a reduction of almost 40% in greenhouse gas emissions compared to 2017 levels.[7] However, many of the government approved tools for measuring farm emissions struggle to accurately reflect the realities of systems that utilise ecosystem services, such as soil carbon cycles, over easier life-cycle analysis modelling of kilos of inputs.

This reductionist way of measuring has led to policy failures and perverse outcomes such as the calving interval conditionality on the SSBSS which may have made sense from a perspective focusing on outputs in terms of kilograms of meat and CO2 equivalents, but resulted in smaller producers in Less Favored Areas dropping out of the system, despite the important environmental contribution of cattle in High Nature Value systems. Similarly,

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[4] Wightman, A and Gilmour, R (2024), Big Farmer: Agricultural subsidies are too heavily concentrated in the hands of large landowners, Holyrood Magazine <https://www.holyrood.com/comment/view,big-farmer-agricultural-subsidies-are-too-heavily-concentrated-in-the-hands-of-large-landowners>.

[5] Hejowicz, A and Hartle, S, New Directions: A Public Goods Approach to Agricultural Policy Post Brexit, Brexit environment (2018) 12(2).

carbon auditing tools have proven to lack context sensitivity, highlighting a fundamental mismatch between audit assumptions and how regenerative, pasture-based farms actually function.[6]

The commitment to a Just Transition acknowledges that one size does not fit all, and that whatever we implement moving forward, must account for the diversity of place and practice. It must take seriously the financial struggles of family farms and the time and money required to adapt towards lower input, more resilient farming models.The next two years will be crucial when it comes to shaping the future direction of the sector. Whilst the tiered system itself now seems to be the accepted delivery mechanism, much hinges on the ways in which these tiers are designed and how they interact.

Our Position

The terms “sustainable and regenerative” can mean a number of things, and tend to obliterate competing visions and the tensions between them. For SAP, sustainable and regenerative farming means working in accordance with agroecological principles.[7] Agroecology, as we understand it, challenges approaches geared towards maximizing agricultural yields over other socio-economic, environmental and biocultural objectives.[8]

As such, agroecology positions itself as an opposite to other farming concepts, namely output-driven “sustainable intensification” which heavily relies on technology such as precision farming instead of people, corporate investments instead of individual family businesses, and further land consolidation instead of diverse patterns of landownership and tenure. Sustainable intensification operates on a paradigm of “land sparing” for food production and nature respectively. This account is divisive, pitting farmers against environmentalists, meat eaters against vegans, rural against urban populations, thereby deepening existing divides within our society instead of bridging them.

It is often maintained that only sustainable intensification of the sector can achieve long-term food security. Various studies, however, challenge this assertion, highlighting that transition to agroecology is not only desirable, but achievable for individuals, businesses and communities across the UK, and, with the right enabling policy and market conditions, can be the foundation of a society more responsive to current needs and more resilient to future environmental and economic shocks.[9] While agroecological transformation requires adjustments in people’s diets and a reduction in intensively farmed pork and poultry, red meat production could remain largely stable, and grass-fed beef and lamb would become our staple meat.[10]

We believe that agricultural funding must be used strategically and equitably to secure the future of farming. Continuing to funnel the vast majority of public money into area-based

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[6] Propagate Scotland (2026), Why current farm carbon audits risk getting the wrong answers <https://www.propagate.org.uk/farm-carbon-audits-and-why-they-are-flawed>.
[7] See eg Agroecology Europe, The 13 Principles of Agroecology <https://www.agroecology-europe.org/the-13-principles-of-agroecology/>.
[8] Isaac, M E et al, Agroecology in Canada: towards an integration of agroecological practice, movement, and science, Sustainability, 10 (2018), 3299.
[9] Food, Farming & Countryside Commission (2021), Farming for Change <https://ffcc.co.uk/publications/farming-for-change-charting-a-course-that-works-for-all>.
[10] Sustainable Food Trust (2022), Feeding Britain From the Ground Up <https://sustainablefoodtrust.org/our-work/feeding-britain/>.

payments fails to address the multiple crises our farming system is facing. By redirecting funding away from passive land ownership and toward targeted, practice-based agroecological support, Scotland can meet its environmental obligations while building a financially resilient, low-input farming sector.

Our asks

We refrain from reductionist proposals allocating budget percentage figures to various tiers. While it is clear that the direction of travel requires moving away from largely unconditional payments per hectare, moving forward, much will depend on how the support within each tier looks and how the tiers connect.

Over the remainder of this document, we propose six detailed asks how this could look like in practice. These are

- **Provide a fair income for all farmers and crofters**
- **Invest in organics**
- **Support local fruit and vegetable production**
- **Incentivise agroforestry**
- **Build resilient local food supply systems**
- **Promote peer-to-peer training and farmer-led knowledge exchange**

Beyond these specific proposals, we aim to collaborate with farmers, crofters, government, MSPs and any other stakeholders who share our vision, to enable agroecological transformation across all tiers of the agricultural support system.

Provide a fair income for all farmers and crofters

Introduction

Across Scotland, small and medium-sized family farms and crofts are under growing pressure, and many are disappearing altogether. For decades, farmers have been squeezed between rising production costs and a food system that increasingly fails to reward them fairly for the food they produce. Global commodity markets and supermarket buying power have driven down farmgate prices, while the costs of fuel, feed, fertiliser, machinery and housing continue to rise. At the same time, economies of scale favour larger businesses, making it increasingly difficult for smaller farms and crofts to remain financially viable.

The agricultural support system, which is intended to help sustain farm incomes and secure domestic food production, has often reinforced these inequalities by directing the largest payments to those with the most land. As a result, many farmers and crofters are working long hours for incomes well below a living wage, often while carrying substantial debt burdens. This is neither fair nor sustainable. The people who produce our food are essential to Scotland's food security, rural economy and resilience, yet the current system too often fails to provide them with a viable livelihood.

Globally, it is well recognised that small- and medium-scale agriculture plays a key role in society. For example, the European Parliament recently stated that small units: "allocate larger shares of their production to food and have a more diversified produce portfolio than larger farms".[11] Several UN Special Rapporteurs on the Right to Food have emphasised both the great environmental and community value of production at smaller scales, including the potential of job opportunities and the fact that many small- and medium-scale units are more productive than large farms when productivity is calculated per hectare rather than per worker.[12] Furthermore, smaller scale production is able to deliver a mosaic of habitats which landscape heterogeneity provides benefits for biodiversity.[13] Yet, in Scotland, there has been little recognition of the crucial value of small and medium family farms and crofts, and this is showing in our agricultural support system.

SAP welcomes the Scottish Government's recognition that income support remains essential for farmers and crofters. Farming is a uniquely challenging sector, exposed to volatile markets, rising costs and factors beyond producers' control, and public support has a vital role to play in maintaining a resilient domestic food system. However, the purpose of income support should be to sustain farming livelihoods, not simply to reward land ownership. A system that directs the largest share of public funding to those who already own the most land entrenches existing inequalities and fails to support the producers and communities that need it most. If Scotland is serious about a just transition, agricultural support must be distributed more equitably and targeted towards sustaining active farming, thriving rural communities and a resilient food system.

[11] European Parliament, Small farms' role in the EU food system (2022).
[12] De Schutter, O and Vanloqueren, G, UN special rapporteur on the right to food calls for a new Green Revolution based on agroecology, (GRAIN 2011).
[13] Hass, A L et al, Landscape configurational heterogeneity by small-scale agriculture, not crop diversity, maintains pollinators and plant reproduction in western Europe, Proc Biol Sci (2018) 285.

Policy context

Scotland's current agricultural payments system disproportionately favours large-scale landowners: Because the majority of support is distributed through area-based payments, those with the most and best land receive the largest share of public funds. Under this system, the top 20% of claimants receive 62% of the direct payments budget, while the bottom 40% receive just 5%, leaving many small and medium-sized family farms struggling to stay afloat.[14]

The Scottish Government's own analysis acknowledges that this distribution model is not delivering on Scotland's goals for agriculture, including sustainability, food security, and rural resilience.[15] Yet, under the new four-tier Rural Support Plan, more than 70% of the budget remains to be allocated to area-based basic payments, indicating little shift in how funding is distributed. This entrenched imbalance highlights the urgent need for policy mechanisms that mitigate the regressive effects of area-based payments, ensure fairer distribution, and provide meaningful support to the types of farms that deliver public value – but often face the greatest financial vulnerability.

The current agricultural support system runs counter to the Good Food Nation Plan's commitment to Fair Work. Outcome 4 of the published Plan commits Scotland's food and drink sector to creating and sustaining jobs and businesses 'underpinned by Fair Work standards'. Yet the current payment system makes Fair Work harder to deliver in practice for the farms that need it most. Small and medium farms that wish to pay living wages, offer stable employment, and invest in their workforce face higher costs per hectare than large operations, and receive proportionally less public support.

Scotland's commitment to alignment with EU policy provides a clear opportunity for improvement. In 2021, the EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) introduced a mandatory requirement for Member States to allocate up to 30% of their direct support budget to redistributive payments, a mechanism known as *Complementary Redistributive Income Support for Sustainability*.[16] This policy is specifically designed to uplift payments on the first hectares farmed, benefiting small and medium-sized businesses and helping to achieve CAP objectives across social, environmental, and economic pillars.

The passage of the Agriculture and Rural Communities (Scotland) Act in 2024 provides a significant opportunity to address inequalities in agricultural support. As framework legislation, the Act establishes broad powers and objectives while leaving considerable discretion to Scottish Ministers over the design of future support schemes. This means that the continuation of existing payment structures is a political choice rather than a legislative necessity. The Act explicitly provides Ministers with the power to apply caps or limits to payments, creating a clear mechanism through which excessive concentration of support can be addressed. At a time when public funding is under increasing pressure, it is difficult to

[14] Wightman, A and Gilmour, R (2024), Big Farmer: Agricultural subsidies are too heavily concentrated in the hands of large landowners, Holyrood Magazine <https://www.holyrood.com/comment/view,big-farmer-agricultural-subsidies-are-too-heavily-concentrated-in-the-hands-of-large-landowners>.
[15] Agriculture and Rural Communities (Scotland) Bill – Explanatory Notes <https://www.parliament.scot/-/media/files/legislation/bills/s6-bills/agriculture-and-rural-communities-scotland-bill/introduction/explanatory-notes.pdf>.
[16] Regulation (EU) 2021/211, Articles 29 and 98.

justify a system in which a large proportion of the agricultural budget continues to flow to a relatively small number of landowners. The Scottish Government should use the powers available within the new legislative framework to develop a fairer distribution of support, ensuring that public investment reaches the farmers and crofters who are most important to Scotland's food security, rural communities and agroecological transition.

Our position

We call on the Scottish Government to include a redistributive payment mechanism within Tier 1 of the new agricultural payments system, ensuring that income support is targeted at those who need it most, particularly small-scale and medium-sized family farms and crofts.

Front-loading, or redistribution, is already **a standard feature in the EU** and should be a central part of the agricultural support system in Scotland. Including this mechanism in direct support schemes will reflect a clear, values-based commitment to fairness, rural livelihoods, and the long-term resilience of Scotland's food and farming system. Front-loading of Tier 1 direct support would:

- **Recognise the value of small-scale farming and crofting** in delivering key public goods, such as climate action, biodiversity, and community resilience.
- **Benefit medium-sized family farms**, many of which are currently struggling to stay financially viable, despite playing a vital role in rural communities and local food production.
- **Address structural disadvantages** faced by smaller farms and crofts, which often incur higher costs due to lack of economies of scale
- **Help level the playing field**, by increasing payments on the first hectares farmed, supporting those most in need rather than simply those with the most land.
- **Ensure fairness and alignment with EU standards**, where redistributive payments are **mandatory** under the new CAP (Regulation (EU) 2021/2115, Articles 29 and 98), reflecting Scotland's own commitment to EU alignment.

The targeted support for smaller farms and crofts can be financed by limiting the amount of Tier 1 payments paid to the country's largest landowners. With public budgets under pressure, it is essential to ensure agricultural funding is used equitably and strategically, supporting the future of farming. A cap on Tier 1 payments would:

- **Support struggling small- and medium-sized family farms**, which are vital for rural communities, food security, and landscape stewardship.
- **Free up budget** to frontload support for smaller farms and invest more in sustainable and regenerative practices through other funding tiers.
- **Prevent disproportionate funding to the country's largest landowners** who already benefit from economies of scale and currently absorb a vast share of public funding.

We further think that the Scottish Government should remove the 3ha minimum size threshold for all agricultural support schemes. Instead, farmers and crofters should be eligible if they can demonstrate they are running an active, productive agricultural business, similar to models used in Ireland and Wales. Scotland needs a support system that reflects the diversity of its farms and backs all those contributing to sustainable, local food production - including those with small parcels of land. This would:

- **Include all productive small-scale farms** in agricultural support schemes. This would be particularly beneficial to horticultural enterprises, which are currently excluded despite their critical role in improving public health and food security through increased fruit and vegetable production.
- **Align Scotland with best practice** seen in countries such as Ireland and Wales, where support is based on business activity rather than land area.
- **Build on existing precedent**, as some Scottish schemes, such as AECS support for organic conversion, already operate effectively without a minimum size threshold

In Ireland, the minimum size threshold for accessing farm grants was removed. Instead of relying on land size, farmers must demonstrate that they are operating a viable, active business. This change has helped to strengthen rural communities and expand support to small and diversified farms.In Wales, under the new Sustainable Farming Scheme, eligibility is based on either having a minimum area of land or spending more than 550 hours a year actively farming. This ensures support reaches all active farmers, not just those with access to large holdings.

Our asks

1. **Front-load Tier 1 payments** to support medium- and small-scale agriculture, by allocating **30% of the Tier 1 direct payments** budget to fund a **flat-rate uplift on the first hectares farmed**, delivering redistributive income support to smaller and medium-sized businesses.
2. **Cap Tier 1 payments at £100,000 per farm business,** with additional allowances for employed worker salaries and appropriate exemptions for shared land arrangements such as stock clubs on common grazings, to ensure a fairer and more effective distribution of agricultural support.
3. **Remove the 3ha minimum threshold** for agricultural support, and instead support genuinely active, functioning agricultural businesses regardless of size.

Invest in organics

Introduction

Organic farming is a whole-system approach that delivers multiple agroecological outcomes. Grounded in principles of health, ecology, fairness and care, it integrates food production with nature restoration, climate action, and rural vitality. Scotland's organic sector has seen recent growth in certified land area[17] and consumer demand for produce[18], yet still lags behind European counterparts. There is now an opportunity to scale up this transition by embedding organic farming at the heart of Scotland's agricultural strategy.

Organic farming practices include the use of crop rotations, legume based leys, biological pest control, farmyard manures/compost, and the exclusion of synthetic inputs. These support soil health, biodiversity, water quality and climate mitigation while producing high quality food. The system is independently audited to standards underpinned by legislation and is internationally recognised, giving confidence to consumers and clear standards for support and development.

Policy context

The Scottish Government has made strong commitments to agroecological transition, including through the Agriculture and Rural Communities Act, the Good Food Nation Act and the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy. Since 2021, the total organic area in Scotland has nearly doubled, from a 1.8% share of agricultural land, to 3.3.% in 2025, in line with Scottish Government targets. With the right policy and investment signals, this trend can continue and diversify. Strategic alignment of support for organic conversion, maintenance, and market development is essential.

Our position

The Scottish Agroecology Partnership believes the following principles should underpin future policy for organic farming:

- **Clear strategic direction** – Organic must be embedded as a core route to delivering nature, climate and food policy objectives.
- **Long-term funding** – Conversion and maintenance support must be reliable, multi-year and reflective of the true benefits delivered.
- **Market development** – Public and private investment is needed to grow organic processing, supply chains and consumer access.
- **Integrated advice and skills** – Specialist advice, mentoring, and training should be available to support new and existing organic farmers.

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[17] Scottish Government, Organic Farming in Scotland 2024 <https://www.gov.scot/news/organic-farming-in-scotland-2024/>.
[18] Scottish Organic Market Report 2026 <https://foodanddrink.scot/media/myeaxu5u/scotland-organic-market-report-2026-single-pages.pdf>.

- **Public procurement leadership** – Organic should be prioritised in school, hospital and public kitchens, stimulating demand and demonstrating leadership.

- The **benefits** of organic farming for nature, public health, rural jobs and the economy **must be better communicated** across policy areas and to the wider public.

- **Recognition of organic as a key delivery mechanism** for the Vision for Agriculture and a Good Food Nation is vital.

Our asks

The Scottish Government should adopt the following policy proposals to accelerate a fair and ambitious organic transition:

1. Deliver a **funded Organic Action Plan to 2029**, co-developed with the organic sector, with clear targets, timelines, and delivery responsibilities.

2. Commit to **doubling the area of organic farmland in this parliamentary term**, with tailored support across livestock, arable, horticulture and crofting systems.

3. **Invest in market and processing infrastructure**, including regional supply chains and distribution, to ensure organic supply can meet growing demand.

4. Provide and promote **secure conversion and maintenance payments** for organic farming through the new support framework, with budget allocation that reflects ambition.

5. Set **progressive targets for organic food in public procurement**, supported by practical delivery mechanisms and reporting requirements.

6. **Embed organic** within food, farming, climate and biodiversity strategies as a model for regenerative, resilient and high-integrity food production.

7. Commit **a budget of at least £20 million annually** to provide a foundation for achieving these aims, driving a step change in Scotland's agroecological transition and delivering public value across multiple policy domains.

Support local fruit and vegetable production

Introduction

Supporting and expanding local fruit and vegetable production is essential to delivering many of the Scottish Government's key policy ambitions – including under the Good Food Nation Act, the Local Food Strategy, and national Public Health Priorities. With rising import costs and extreme weather events increasingly affecting supply chains, the need to develop a resilient local food system has never been more urgent.

Cyber attacks, pandemics and economic shocks have created disruptions to the food system, leaving communities vulnerable – especially in island and remote areas - without access to any fresh food for more than a week. A strong local food economy, built around supported local producers, would offer far greater resilience in the face of such shocks.

Scotland has enormous potential to grow a wide variety of fruit and vegetables, even in challenging climates. Vegetable Producers in Skye are successfully growing aubergines and cucumbers commercially, while producers near Inverness are cultivating sweetcorn. From the Western Isles to Galloway - areas not known for fruit and veg production - there are growers who operate on a commercial scale. These examples demonstrate that with the right support, small-scale growers can make a significant contribution to Scotland's food system.

What is a Market Garden?

A market garden IS

- A commercial enterprise with viable business models
- Located in rural or peri-urban areas, with significant potential to feed both Scotland's cities and countryside
- Operating at a wide range of scales, but typically smaller than 30ha
- Featuring polyculture systems, typically growing many different crops throughout the year
- Supporting sustainable, climate- and nature-friendly food systems

Market gardens ARE NOT

- Community gardens, which are typically non-commercial and focused on social or educational goals
- Kitchen gardens or allotments used for personal or household consumption rather than commercial sale
- Farms growing only a very limited range of crops, exclusively for export or supermarkets

Despite their value, small-scale horticultural producers receive little recognition or support through existing agricultural subsidies, which disproportionately favour large-scale, monocultural farming. Fruit and vegetable producers often grow large volumes of nutritious food on small areas of land, and their work should be rewarded as a valuable contribution to Scottish agriculture.

Market gardens have proven remarkably resilient, offering multiple public goods – from biodiversity and soil health to local employment and fresh, healthy food. Yet they are still struggling to survive. Supporting market gardens is vital to delivering the “thriving rural communities” vision of the Agriculture and Rural Communities Act.

A market garden is a farm business that grows a variety of fruits and/or vegetables for sale into local food markets. These sales can be made directly to consumers through veg box schemes or farmers' markets, or through local shops, food hubs, public services, restaurants, and caterers.

Policy Context

Under the existing agricultural support scheme, almost no financial support is available to the local fruit and veg sector. The funding which is currently available for horticulture is directed exclusively to just 5 producer organisations, each with an annual turnover of over a million pounds, who produce for the supermarket supply chain. The complete lack of direct support for smaller scale fruit and vegetable producers who sell locally means it is hard to make a living in this sector, with chronically low wages and financial precarity due to extreme price competition from supermarkets and no government recognition of the public goods market gardens deliver.

Supermarkets practise aggressively competitive low pricing and often treat fresh produce as a loss leader, which causes significant financial problems for larger, field scale producers too. Although market gardens rarely sell into supermarkets, the prices they can charge are directly influenced by supermarket prices, supermarkets are in direct competition with box schemes, farmers markets and other forms of direct and co-operative marketing. Low wages and reduced EU mobility are creating a reduced labour pool and most businesses currently have skilled labour shortages.

Yet despite these challenges, interest in growing local fruit and vegetables is high, with many new entrants keen to work in the sector, and a recent upsurge in horticultural diversification within existing crofting and farming communities. Scotland can and should grow a much higher proportion of our fruit and vegetables, but to achieve this horticultural production must be valued on a par with other forms of agriculture.

This ambition aligns closely with the vision set out in the Good Food Nation Act, which recognises the need for a fairer, healthier and more sustainable food system. Local fruit and vegetable production is fundamental to achieving this vision, yet remains largely unsupported in policy terms. While market gardens are explicitly referenced in the Agriculture and Rural Communities Act, there is currently no substantial policy framework or targeted support in place to help them thrive.

Our position

Existing schemes within the current support structure demonstrate that the Scottish Government has a well-established precedent for providing sector-specific support where it is needed to sustain viable farm businesses. Local fruit and vegetable production is a highly efficient use of land, meaning horticultural enterprises often operate at smaller scales than arable or livestock counterparts - and will therefore benefit very little from area-based income support such as the proposed Tier 1.

Existing schemes tailored to supporting specific parts of the sector

With an annual budget of around £703.2 million, agriculture as a whole receives significant financial support from the Scottish Government. This money is distributed under a number of funding schemes which support various sectors of Scottish farming.

- **Tier 1: income support for large scale farming,** awarded on a per-hectare basis with limited conditionality. These direct payments, which resemble the previous Basic Payment Scheme, will provide over £450M a year in direct payments to medium and large scale farmers primarily in the arable and livestock sectors, specifically for income support.

- **Suckler beef calf support scheme: direct support to beef producers,** awarded on a per calf basis. There is currently an annual budget of £40M for the scheme, with no maximum number of claims per applicant.

- **Less favoured areas support scheme: income support for farm businesses in remote areas,** awarded on a per hectare basis. This funding is only available for forage land, and stocking density of livestock has to be above a certain minimum threshold. This funding is therefore only available to livestock farmers. Currently LFASS has an annual budget of £60M

A sector-specific scheme for small-scale fruit and vegetable producers would bring market gardening into line with the recognition already extended to other farming sectors, helping to build a more diverse and resilient agricultural sector in Scotland.

Our ask

Introduce a market garden support scheme

We propose the introduction of a dedicated support scheme for market gardens and other fruit and vegetable producers supplying local food systems. This scheme, which could sit within Tier 1 or Tier 2 of the new Rural Support Plan, would provide a form of direct support comparable to that currently available to larger-scale farm businesses and would do so at a fraction of the cost.

It is essential both to ensure fairness across sectors, and to advance key government objectives including increasing local food production, improving diet and nutrition, and supporting thriving rural communities: goals that area-based funding mechanisms are poorly placed to deliver for small-scale producers.

The scheme should be based on direct support to the farmer or grower, rather than area-based proxy measures, and should be explicitly focused on sustaining and growing businesses that produce local fruit and vegetables for their communities.

Support payments

- **Grower income support:** Basic income support of £15,000 per year, available to the self-employed grower or operator of any fruit and vegetable business operating on less than 30ha.
- **Wage support:** Contribution toward staff costs of up to 50% of the total wage bill, or £75,000 per business per year — whichever is lower — for up to five full-time employees. This would enable small enterprises to grow their workforce and expand production to meet local demand.

Claims could be verified through online data collection of wages paid, cross-referenced against monthly or quarterly PAYE returns already submitted to HMRC — minimising administrative burden for both applicants and government.

This scheme would provide a secure and predictable income floor for growers and their core staff, helping to offset the structural challenge of low wholesale prices and high labour costs that currently limits the viability and growth of market gardening in Scotland.

Eligibility

To be eligible for this scheme, applicants would need to meet the following criteria:

- Registered business operating on less than 30ha, with no minimum land area
- Growing and selling fruit and vegetables into local markets, with a minimum turnover of £20,000 in local sales by the end of year two
- Growing a minimum of 20 varieties of fruit and vegetables for commercial purposes each year
- Paying the Real Living Wage to themselves and all staff

Budget

Budget requirements for this scheme would be modest in comparison with existing sector-specific support. Indicative figures based on a phased rollout:

Year	Estimated businesses supported	Indicative budget
Year 1 (2026)	60	£2.7M
Year 5 (2030)	150	£6.75M
Year 10 (2035)	400	£18M

This level of investment would support a steady increase in the number of viable market gardens across Scotland, and a corresponding expansion of local fruit and vegetable supply.

To contextualise the ask: the current average intervention rate across all Scottish farms is £0.24 for every £1 of standard output. By 2035, this scheme would bring the intervention rate for local fruit and vegetable production to £0.23 per £1 of standard output - on par with other agricultural sectors, and achieved through a relatively small and targeted budget allocation.

Outcomes
This scheme would support a large number of key government objectives, and would therefore be an effective use of public money. These include:

- Supporting sustainable jobs as part of a just transition
- Strengthening local food systems through increasing availability of local produce and reducing the need for imports
- Improving agricultural practices to support climate and biodiversity goals
- Supporting healthy diet goals through improving access to healthy local food

Case study: East Neuk Market Garden, Fife

East Neuk Market Garden is a cooperative farm run by Connie Hunter, her husband Tom, and two partners on five acres of rented land on the Balcaskie Estate in the East Neuk of Fife. They grow around 60 varieties of vegetables, supply approximately 180 CSA members and 15 local restaurant customers, and employ the equivalent of four full-time people during the main season. The farm operates using agroecological methods including minimum tillage, composting, green manures, and agroforestry, while maintaining a strong focus on food access: around 15% of CSA members pay a reduced rate through a sliding scale pricing model that subsidises veg boxes for those on lower incomes.

Despite this - producing nutritious food for their local community, employing staff, building biodiversity, and running a financially active business - East Neuk Market Garden currently receives no agricultural support payments. As a farm of under three hectares, they are automatically excluded from existing subsidy schemes, even though their farm generates more income and employs more people per hectare than larger operations.

Connie has described what targeted market garden support would mean in practice: the ability to pay fair wages to owners and staff; investment in infrastructure to reach more customers; and expansion of their solidarity food access scheme. These are not marginal benefits, they are the difference between a market garden sector that grows and one that struggles to survive.

East Neuk is one example of a model that exists across Scotland: small, productive, community-focused farms that are currently invisible to the support system. A targeted market garden scheme would change that.ply approximately 180 CSA members and 15 local restaurant customers, and employ the equivalent of four full-time people during the main season. The farm operates using agroecological methods including minimum tillage, composting, green manures, and agroforestry, while maintaining a strong focus on food access: around 15% of CSA members pay a reduced rate through a sliding scale pricing model that subsidises veg boxes for those on lower incomes.

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Incentivise agroforestry

Introduction

Trees can provide multiple benefits to farming and crofting systems, helping to regulate growing conditions, provide shade and shelter to livestock, stabilise soil temperature and reduce soil erosion and produce valuable materials for farm use or sale, including timber, fruit, firewood, and fodder. Trees also provide a range of ecosystem services such as reducing pollutants in watercourses, improving water management, absorbing atmospheric carbon and providing vital habitats for wildlife

In a Scottish context there are four distinct models for agroforestry:

- Silvopastoral: integrating trees and livestock.
- Silvoarable: integrating trees and crops.
- Hedgerows, copses and buffer strips, including the use of trees to protect riverbanks and provide shade to rivers.
- Farm-scale woodland to add a timber production element to the farming system.

Policy context

The Scottish Government offers support for agroforestry through the Forestry Grant Scheme, with options generally geared towards higher density planting, 150-200 or 300-400 trees per hectare. There are also options through the Agri Environment Climate Scheme (AECS) for hedgerow creation and small scale tree and shrub planting, but gaps in support remain for other forms of low-density tree planting.

In the Forestry Strategy for Scotland,[19] the Scottish Government set a target to reach 21% forest and woodland cover by 2032 and has the ambition to achieve greater land use integration.The SNP manifesto for the 2026 election set out an ambition to reach 18,000ha of woodland creation per year by 2029.

The Farming for 1.5°C final report ‘From here to 2045[20]’ concluded that “agroforestry remains one of the most effective ways to achieve Scotland’s climate goals in both mitigation and adaptation across a range of soil types”. The UK Climate Change Committee’s modelling for the Seventh Carbon Budget[21], published in 2025, assumes an increase in land under agroforestry systems across the UK of 8,000ha per year up to 2050, at which point, 10% of cropland and grassland would be under agroforestry.

[19] Scottish Forestry, Forestry Strategy 2019-2029
<https://www.forestry.gov.scot/scotlands-forestry-strategy-2019-2029>.
[20] One point 5 <https://www.onepoint5.org/>.
[21] Climate Change Committee, The Seventh Carbon Budget (2025)
<https://www.theccc.org.uk/publication/the-seventh-carbon-budget/>.

Our position

SAP believes the following principles should be applied to future policy in this area:

- **Accessible** - support for integrating trees must be universal, with all farmers and crofters able to access grants for establishment and maintenance.
- **Flexible** - grant support should allow for farmers and crofters to develop agroforestry systems that best suit their individual farm/croft objectives, land/soil type and location.
- **Practical** - payment options should be based as far as possible on what is practical on farms and crofts, with meaningful consultation during the policy development phase,
- **Affordable** - payment rates should be made upfront to offset risk and set at a level that incentivises uptake, with calculations based on income foregone plus costs.
- **Consistent** - farmers and crofters need clarity and consistency in policy, and once established, any changes to schemes should be based on improvements following feedback from farmers and crofters.

The benefits of integrating trees must be clearly communicated, with distinctions made between agroforestry (or 'trees on farms') versus afforestation or land use change. Clarity is also required on eligibility and potential loss of BPS payments (although our understanding is that this is not the case for planting funded by agroforestry grants through the FGS).

Investment in peer-to-peer learning programmes – and expansion of existing programmes such as the Integrated Trees Network – will be essential to winning 'hearts and minds'.

We support the below examples of payment options that were developed by Soil Association Scotland and Woodland Trust Scotland[22], based on workshops with farmers and crofters. These are fully costed and could fit within the Scottish Government's proposed agricultural support framework in future iterations of agri-environment support, which we are assuming would sit within Tier 3 'Enhanced'.

We are also supportive of incentives for higher density tree planting, again with flexibility for integration of different livestock e.g. pigs in woodland. Increases in the area of farm woodland will also open up the potential for regenerative farm scale forestry systems[23]. A report by the Soil Association found that this requires investment in a timber supply chain and market innovation that is geared around a more mixed range of species and timber sizes.

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[22] Soil Association & Woodland Trust Scotland (2024), Farm payments to support integration of trees and woods into farming systems in Scotland <farm-tree-payments-scotland-report.pdf>.
[23] Soil Association (2023), The case for regenerative farm-scale forestry <soilassociation.org/media/u1wnxhd1/reforestry-report-digital-aug23.pdf>

Examples of costed options for tree planting schemes

Silvopastoral low density trees

Purpose: to increase shade for livestock in hotter weather, improve shelter during inclement weather, create new habitats for wildlife, carbon sequestration and landscape enhancement.

Specifications: low density (10-30 trees per hectare), protected with a 160cm cattle proof (e.g. cactus) guard and plastic tree guard, trees mostly native species.	Location: improved permanent grassland fields, and where appropriate, unimproved grassland	Grant level: single up-front payment of £31.15 per tree

Silvopastoral tree enclosures

Purpose: to provide multi-directional shelter for livestock, increase shade in hotter summers, provide tree and shrub fodder for cattle, create ‘stepping stones’ of semi natural habitat, expand tree cover along watercourses, create seed source for future potential natural regeneration, carbon sequestration.

Specifications: fenced enclosures based on standard fence rail lengths: 3.6m x 3.6m (small), 5.4m by 5.4m (medium), 7.2m x 7.2m (large). Dense planting of native trees and shrubs (towards the edges) with appropriate guards.	Location: suitable for a wide range of locations across lowland and uplands sites including improved/unimproved grassland fields, rough grazings and riparian margins.	Grant level: single up-front payment: £195.45 per enclosure (small), £363.05 (medium) and £531.90 (large)

Small farm woodlands

Purpose: shade/shelter, tree and shrub fodder, firewood, timber, control of runoff, protection of water margins, creation of semi-natural habitat, improved habitat connectivity, carbon sequestration, creation of seed source for future natural regeneration.

Specification: native trees and shrubs planted at a (minimum) average of 1200/ha (3m spacing) protected with 1.2m	Location: all in-bye land and on unimproved/upland sites subject to suitable growing conditions and	Grant level: upfront payment of £7,232/ha

biodegradable guards and stakes and (if livestock) a stock fence	other potential conservation interests	

Silvoarable alley cropping Purpose: diversifying farm income from tree products, protection of arable soils from erosion, protection of crops from wind, improvement of pollinator habitat, improvement of soil structure, integrated pest management, habitat creation, carbon sequestration		
Specifications: trees planted in rows within arable field, planted in strips sown with wildflower/grass mix, protected with appropriate biodegradable guards. Rows spaced to enable farm machinery to operate in the ‘alleys’.	Location: land that is regularly cultivated and managed as part of an arable or horticultural crop rotation.	Grant level: upfront payment £1,147.35/ha

Hedgerow and field boundary trees Purpose: shelter, shade and browsing for livestock, shelter for crops and soils, creation of new wildlife habitats, improved habitat connectivity, carbon sequestration/watercourse protection and restoration.		
Specifications: where livestock present, protected with a 1.6m cattle-proof (e.g. cactus) guard and biodegradable tree guard. Where livestock are not present, protected with 1.2m biodegradable tree guard and stake.	Location: field boundaries and water margins on in-bye land.	Grant level: upfront payment £65.25 per tree with cactus guards (or £50.67 per tree without cactus guards).

Enhanced biodiverse hedgerows: Purpose: to create wide and diverse field boundary hedgerow habitats/quality shelter for livestock and crops, high quality wildlife habitat connectivity, browse for livestock, carbon sequestration, reduced soil erosion, control of runoff, optimise productivity gains.

Specifications: enhanced hedgerows should consist of 4 rows of trees, 1.5m apart. A mix of native shrubs planted on the two rows closes to the prevailing wind, 1m apart. A mix of taller growing native trees planted in the two rows furthest from the prevailing wind, 1.5m apart. Trees should be planted in 1.2m biodegradable guards and shrubs in 0.6m biodegradable guards.	Location: All in-by land, minimum length of 50m	Grant level: upfront payment £2,462.78/100m

Our ask

The Scottish Government should adapt existing schemes or introduce new grants to support farmers and crofters to establish agroforestry and farm woodland systems. This support should be made available to all farmers and crofters, rather than through competitive schemes.

A budget of at least £10M per annum would support a doubling of the current area of land under agroforestry and farm woodland systems in Scotland, contributing towards the government's biodiversity, regenerative farming and woodland creation ambitions.

Case study: Croft agroforestry, Isle of Mull

High Lee is a seventy-acre working croft in the South West of Mull. Whilst the surrounding area features few trees, the occupiers' predecessors planted a number of shelterbelts and a small native woodland (two hectares) about twenty-five years ago, providing the croft with a uniquely sheltered position in a place otherwise very exposed to high winds, heavy rains and, increasingly, prolonged periods of drought. Wildlife is abundant on the croft with a large number species present, including mountain hares, adders and slow worms, raptors and other rare birds.

The present occupiers are building on their predecessors work, integrating trees throughout their croft on which they run an adaptive multi-paddock grazing system with a flock of 30 Herdwick ewes. Whenever facing weather extremes, the animals can be observed seeking shelter under existing trees and patches of willow. The latter also provides additional forage when other food sources are limited. Since taking over the croft in 2021, the occupiers have been planting trees to support agricultural productivity and biodiversity, according to the principle of "the right tree in the right place for the right reason".

A three hectare woodland has been established under the “Native Broadleaf Northern and Western Isles” Forestry Grant Scheme (FGS) option, on a steep and inaccessible piece of hill ground overgrown with bracken and unsuitable for grazing. Hedgerows have been created along boundaries of the in-bye croft land, as well as between fields, some of it with support of the Woodland Trust’s “More Hedges” programme.

Moisture-tolerant species such as alder, birch and willow have been planted strategically in wet areas of existing fields. Furthermore, by reinstating the deer fence erected by previous occupiers, deer browsing has been eliminated, leading to natural regeneration of existing trees and scrub. More copses, hedges, and individual trees for shelter are to be added in the future, whilst some of the older tree stock – including some older coniferous trees – is gradually thinned to provide for regeneration and for a sustainable source of firewood for the croft.

Mull is located within the area historically covered by temperate rainforest, a unique and globally rare habitat, covering less than 1% of the planet. Pockets of native trees including birch, pine, oak, and hazel are dotted across the island, yet more of those would help to enhance a mosaic habitat for wildlife to thrive. However, browsing pressures due to extremely high deer numbers in the area make it impossible to grow trees without additional protection, even where farm livestock is excluded.

Apart from the FGS and support via the Woodland Trust’s More Hedges programme, recent tree planting on High Lee has been largely self-funded, as tailored support options for agroforestry were largely absent or inaccessible. Capital support for deer fencing through the Crofting Agricultural Grant Scheme (CAGS) is usually unavailable as deemed not agriculturally justifiable under the current support policy. Yet, deer fencing entire individual crofts is not only economically unviable, but also runs counter to the maximes of habitat connectivity and the ethos of crofting as a communal and collaborative practice.

Further, trees and scrub for shelter – unless established under a government-funded agroforestry option – must be excluded as ineligible features in the Single Application Form, despite the benefits for livestock health and productivity associated with increased shelter and pasture improvements reducing waterlogging and associated parasite risks.

Combined, the above factors provide little incentive for neighbouring crofters to establish more trees on crofts to create a mosaic habitat landscape beneficial to livestock and wildlife alike. The agroforestry options outlined, in particular those on silvopastoral low-density trees and silvopastoral enclosures – combined with adjustments in terms of direct support eligibility – would open up meaningful opportunities.

Build resilient local food supply systems

Introduction

Scotland has a strong level of food self-sufficiency in many basic foodstuffs such as cereals, potatoes, lamb, beef, dairy, and eggs, and potential to increase self-sufficiency in other products such as vegetables, pork and chicken.[24] Meanwhile, however, the UK has the highest consumption rate of ultra-processed food in all of Europe,[25] with recent figures ranging at 50% or more of all food intake falling into that category, compared to countries such as France, Italy and Portugal where the same figure sits below 15%. We believe that it is no coincidence that these countries have a thriving food culture with farmers markets even in the smallest towns.

Fresh vegetables, eggs and unprocessed meat are at the heart of any healthy diet and, as such, can help to address the most pressing problems of our society in terms of obesity and diet-related disease. Yet, market pressures and long supply chains continue to squeeze farmers' profit margins,[26] leading ever more small farms to give up.[27] And instead of being produced for local consumption, food is being transported across the country, contributing to the national carbon footprint instead of reducing it.

While overall self-sufficiency in Scotland is high, local self-sufficiency is largely absent: Instead of selling and eating the food we produce locally to people who live in the area, we have become over-reliant on vertically integrated food supply chains dominated by multinational corporate actors whose driving objective is profit maximisation.

To confront these issues, we need to re-localise supply chains, enabling more farmers, crofters, and growers to sell their products locally, and with as few intermediaries as possible, leaving more of the value created in their own pockets and local communities while, at the same time, reducing food miles. This means: more farm shops and farmers markets, more local food hubs, more local processing and packaging facilities, and more small local and mobile abattoirs.

In times of a changing climate and increasing political instability, re-localising supply chains is the most important step in building a resilient food system from and for all people of Scotland, rather than profits for corporate shareholders. By producing our food locally, we can truly live up to our aspirations to a just transition, to sustainable and regenerative agriculture, to becoming a Good Food Nation and a wellbeing economy.

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[24] Rathnayaka, SD et al, Assessing Scotland's self-sufficiency of major food commodities, Agriculture & Food Security 13, 34 (2024).
[25] Soil Association, What are ultra-processed foods? <https://www.soilassociation.org/what-we-do/food/ultra-processed-foods/>.
[26] Sustain, Unpicking food prices: Where does your food pound go, and why do farmers get so little? (2022) <https://www.sustainweb.org/reports/dec22-unpicking-food-prices/>.
[27] Farming Online, Farmers take on supermarket 'farmwashing' (2024) <https://farming.co.uk/news/farmers-take-on-supermarket-farmwashing-->.

Policy context

The 2024 **Agriculture and Rural Communities (Scotland)** Act features five high-level objectives: The adoption of sustainable and regenerative farming practices (1); the production of high quality food (2); protecting and improving animal health and welfare (3): facilitating on-farm nature restoration, climate mitigation and adaptation (4); and enabling rural communities to thrive (5).

Localising supply chains is warranted with a view towards all of these objectives: Sustainable and regenerative agriculture is best achieved by keeping things local, by farmers and crofters who know their land, with breeds and seeds best adapted to local circumstances, with short transport distances for live animals, contributing to animal welfare and a lower carbon footprint, and vibrant local food economies serving thriving rural communities.

The Scottish parliament has, in 2022, passed the **Good Food Nation Act** which requires Scottish Ministers, local authorities and health boards to deliver outcomes which support, amongst other things, the nation’s social and economic wellbeing, the environment and animal health and welfare. The Scottish Government’s vision for the country, moreover, is to become a ‘wellbeing economy’ that prioritises meeting fundamental human needs – such as affordable healthy food – over GDP growth.

The National Good Food Nation Plan’s stated outcomes explicitly require a food system that is more locally resilient and economically diverse, yet the investment in the local supply chain infrastructure that would make this possible is still missing. It is not credible to commit to improving diet-related health outcomes, rural economic wellbeing, and food resilience while simultaneously failing to invest in short supply chains which are the practical precondition for all three.

Instead of investing in infrastructure and capacity building, too much public money continues to flow towards parts of the sector not focused on producing food for Scottish people or keeping value chains local, but instead operate profitably by contributing to the export of luxury products and shareholder profits of transnational corporations.

Our position

At the SAP, we are convinced that there is room for significantly more ambition then what is currently deemed realistic. The support for local processing infrastructure via Producer Pilot Fund (SPPF) is one important step in the right direction. However, more is required to genuinely transform our food system and build a resilient food supply structure in local areas across Scotland. Bold investment in processing infrastructure and capacity-building is required, as is giving priority to local producers in public procurement.

In its election manifesto, the SNP has pointed that the party, when returning to government, will not be afraid of taking it up with supermarkets, by pleading to cap prices for staple foods – the same bold approach must apply when it comes to the supply side of things: By creating alternative routes to market, empowering producers to reduce their dependency on retail outlets. Investment in local food processing and distribution infrastructure will be money well spent in the long run. Investment in re-localising supply also means that less money needs to flow into direct support for farms to operate profitably, since more of the value produced by farmers and crofters stays with them instead of disappearing in the pockets of third parties.

We also believe that localising supply chains benefits more than just the producers: Incentivising local food production and selling directly to consumers can have a positive impact on our overall food culture, contribute to healthier diets and reverse the trend towards ultra processed foods. This in turn, will have a positive impact on the public purse if it means that less medical interventions are required to cure diet-related health conditions.

Furthermore, local processing facilities have the potential to reduce food miles and improve animal welfare for producers facing long travel distances with their animals: In Orkney, the Orkney Boreray Tiny Trailer abattoir is currently piloting moveable slaughter of sheep and goats for small producers. Other European countries are advancing models of so-called farm and pasture slaughter,[28] saving animals from stressful journeys to their final destination, which does not only mean improvements from an animal welfare perspective, but also can enhance meat quality if done correctly. While home slaughter for own consumption should continue to be permissible as under current regulations,[29] the Scottish government should explore alignment with EU regulations allowing for on-farm slaughter models which open up a pathway for high-welfare meat production.[30]

We believe that strength lies in diversity, and that local collaboration makes for a more resilient and interesting food and farming landscape. Research conducted by Quality Meat Scotland (QMS) finds that 90% of Scottish red meat consumers would prefer meat sourced in Scotland even if imports were 30% cheaper.[31] A recent survey conducted among members of the Scottish Crofting Federation, for example, has revealed that over 80% of all respondents would consider selling meat locally. Hence what is lacking is not consumer demand, or willingness on part of the producers.

To grow more resilient in an era of shocks and crises, we must invest in local food supply infrastructures. Across much of the Western world we have acknowledged that food production designates a market failure, which we, in Scotland, are prepared to mitigate with over £700M worth of taxpayer money. Moving forward, we should direct more support towards enabling Scottish producers to become independent from global, commoditised supply chains, and to feed people in their surrounding areas instead. We should be using public money to achieve Food Sovereignty for Scotland and less to support supermarket profits.

[28] FiBL, Farm and pasture slaughtering for improved animal welfare (2020) <https://www.fibl.org/en/info-centre/news/farm-and-pasture-slaughtering-for-improved-animal-welfare>.
[29] Food Standards Scotland, Home slaughter of livestock: Scotland revised guidance 2024 <https://www.foodstandards.gov.scot/business-guidance/running-a-food-business/publications/home-slaughter>.
[30] See Regulation (EU) No 853/2004 Annex III Section VI a.
[31] Quality Meat Scotland (2025), Quality Meat Scotland survey reveals strong preference for Scottish red meat over imports <https://qmscotland.co.uk/news/quality-meat-scotland-survey-reveals-strong-preference-for-scottish-red-meat-over-imports>.

Our asks

We ask the Scottish Government to

1. Require local authorities to treat investment in local food supply chain infrastructure as a core delivery mechanism within their Local Good Food Nation Plans.

2. Commit to spend at least 5% of the annual agricultural budget to support the following:

    - Contribute to costs for building and operating **food hubs and local producer cooperatives**, aiming to build a network of local food hubs, with a hub available within maximum an hour travel distance for 90% (or more) of all Scottish producers and consumers
    - Produce national guidance for clear and **consistent application of regulations around food safety & hygiene** and other relevant areas by local authorities
    - Continue to **support the operation of existing small and Island abattoirs** offering private kill**,** namely by investing in solutions to lower running cost such as on-site renewables, incinerators and staff accommodation
    - Make abattoir support **conditional upon fair price and quality guarantees** for producers
    - Further explore **moveable abattoir solutions** for all species and models piloting **on-farm slaughter** for meat production in accordance with EU legislation
    - Conside**r investing in fixed micro abattoirs** in areas not currently serviced by an within reasonable travel distance
    - Support investment in on-farm and community **facilities to hang, butcher, package, and store farm products**
    - Support for **capacity building and training** for producers and communities in the following areas: butchering, processing and packaging, added value products, marketing, finance and logistics for running local food hubs, setting up and successfully operating farm shops and meat and veg box schemes and associated regulations

Promote peer-to-peer training and farmer-led knowledge exchange

Introduction

Peer-to-peer learning is one of the most effective routes to practice change on farms. When farmers see a neighbour managing cover crops on similar soils, hear honestly about the mistakes made, and can ask questions in a trusted setting, they are far more likely to act than after any number of formal workshops or advisory visits. This kind of knowledge, rooted in place, accumulated over seasons, and exchanged between equals, is foundational to Scotland's agricultural transition.

The shift toward agroecological, regenerative, and sustainable farming in Scotland will not happen without investing in the people making that shift. A significant barrier to uptake of sustainable and regenerative practices is not a lack of willingness, but a lack of access to learning environments that are relevant, trusted, and led by farmers and crofters themselves. Scotland's agricultural transition must therefore be supported by educational models that are participatory, inclusive and built around those working on the land.

Policy Context

Current provision for agricultural training in Scotland tends to focus on formal, top-down models of delivery, which are often geared toward large-scale, conventional production systems. This leaves a significant gap in support for small-scale producers, new entrants, crofters, and those already practising or transitioning to sustainable and regenerative approaches.

Younger and underrepresented groups, particularly women, migrants, and new entrants, continue to face barriers to entry and progression within farming due to a lack of inclusive education pathways and networks. A previous KTIF project, *Agroecology: Strengthening Livelihoods,* identified that funding for training is often restricted and does not cover the cost of participation, such as travel, accommodation, and childcare. This disproportionately affects women as they are more likely to be juggling multiple jobs and roles and to have less disposable income.

There is also a significant geographical dimension to access. Training delivered in central Scotland is of limited use to a crofter in the Western Isles or a market gardener in Shetland. For peer-to-peer learning to work, it must be provided where farmers and crofters live and work, delivered by people with knowledge of local conditions, not delivered from central locations.

This is a critical moment for the Scottish Government to act. The Agricultural Reform Programme and Good Food Nation Act, provide an opportunity to build a system of agricultural education that is democratic, decentralised, and genuinely responsive to the changing needs of land-based communities.

Our Position

The Scottish Government has committed to a just transition in food and farming, and to building a Good Food Nation. Neither of these commitments are credible without a serious investment in the people who will deliver them. The current training landscape is fragmented, excludes whole sectors, and is often inaccessible to those who need it most - new entrants, crofters, part-time farmers, and those in island and remote communities.

The gap between ambition and actual provision is most visible to horticulture, Fruit and vegetable production has a significant role to play in any future vision of Scotland as a Good Food Nation, yet it remains excluded from the practical training funds that support other parts of the sector. This reflects a broader tendency to design agricultural support around the farms that have always received it, rather than around the

We believe that the solution is not more centralised delivery but a transformation of knowledge infrastructure, funding farm clusters and regional delivery networks and removing the access barriers that keep training out of reach for many. Scotland has an opportunity to lead on this change, building on the DEFRA collaboration model while going further in its ambition.

Our Asks

We are calling on the Scottish Government to fund accessible training and peer-to-peer knowledge exchange at all career stages, through three interconnected mechanisms.

1. **A Scottish Farmer Collaboration Fund**

   Scotland should establish a dedicated fund for farmer-led collaboration groups and knowledge exchange networks, modelled on the approach now being adopted in England. DEFRA is launching a new £30 million Farmer Collaboration Fund, building on the lessons of the Countryside Stewardship Facilitation Fund (2015-2024). The new fund will channel resources through regional delivery partners who understand local needs, who will distribute support directly to farmer groups.

   A Scottish Farmer Collaboration Fund, co-designed with farmers, crofters and land workers from the outset, should be established as a core part of the Agricultural Reform Programme. It should:

   - Channel funding through regional delivery partners with local knowledge, empowering them to resource farm clusters and knowledge exchange groups in their areas.
   - Include ring-fenced provision for island and remote rural areas, where access to centralised training is impractical
   - Recognise and resource informal knowledge exchange networks that already exist, rather than creating parallel structures from scratch
   - Cover all agricultural sectors, with explicit inclusion of horticulture and market gardening

2. **New entrant and specialist training**

   Current provision systematically fails new entrants, particularly those entering horticulture and market gardening. The New Entrants Practical Training Fund does not cover fruit and vegetable production, and the Small Producers Practical Training Fund is not structured in a way that works for new entrants who lack an established business or land tenure. The result is that this key part of Scotland's emerging food sector, and those most aligned with public health goals and supply chain development, are left without meaningful support.

   To address this, Scottish Government should:

   - Fund apprenticeships specifically for market gardeners, providing a structured, paid route into a currently unsupported part of the sector.
   - Extend the New Entrants Practical Training Fund to cover fruit and vegetable production, reflecting horticulture's critical role in improving public health and food security.
   - Redesign the Small Producers Practical Training Fund so that it is genuinely accessible to new entrants, including those without established businesses or land tenure.

3. **Remove access barriers**

   All training should be designed with access as a primary consideration. This means:

   - Covering participants' time, travel, and childcare costs to ensure equitable access for new entrants, part-time workers, and carers.
   - Delivering training locally where farmers are, including provision for island and remote rural communities where geography is itself a barrier to participation.
   - Co-designing content and format with farmers and crofters, ensuring provision reflects the real needs of diverse land-based communities.