



TRANSFORMING SCOTTISH AGRICULTURE

Bee pollinating strawberry flower
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WWF'S VISION FOR SUSTAINABLE SCOTTISH AGRICULTURE

Our food system is not working in the best interests of people or planet. It is vulnerable to shocks, stresses, supply chain disruptions, and price rises, many of which are directly caused and made worse by climate change and nature loss.

Cover image: Angus Walton and cow
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WE HAVE A CHANCE TO CHANGE OUR FOOD SYSTEM FOR THE BETTER.

Scotland is facing a climate and nature emergency, with Scottish biodiversity intactness ranking in the bottom 12% globally¹ and climate emissions off track for reaching net zero. How we use our land is key to tackling this: agriculture is our dominant land use, and one of the biggest sources of Scotland's climate emissions. All the while farmers receive on average only around 9 pence for every food pound², 6.9 billion meals' worth of food is wasted on UK farms each year³, almost one fifth of adults in Scotland experience food insecurity⁴ and the NHS spends £6 billion a year on health issues driven by poor diets⁵.

This year we have a chance to change our food system for the better. The Agriculture and Rural Communities (Scotland) Bill will determine the framework for how public money will be used to support Scottish farmers and crofters. Combined with future policy developments, alongside the upcoming National Food Plan and Climate Change Plan, decision-makers have an opportunity to deliver a new vision for thriving, resilient, and productive landscapes in a net zero Scotland.

We know that there can be no food security without a stable climate and healthy ecosystems.

This is recognised by food producers, retailers and financial institutions who are all putting in place strategies to minimise their farm-related footprint. That's why we need to see the Scottish Government develop a new food and farming policy framework that supports an ambitious direction of travel. New and ambitious agricultural policy will provide stability to farmers seeking to take positive steps to decarbonise, reduce dependence on external inputs, and weave nature back into their farmland. It will also ensure farmers and land managers can adapt to changing markets, and a changing climate.

Although the Scottish Government has set out its ambition to become a global leader in sustainable and regenerative agriculture, clarity about exactly what this entails and how this helps Scottish agriculture deliver for climate, nature and people is currently lacking.



THERE IS NO FOOD SECURITY WITHOUT NATURE AND A STABLE CLIMATE.

Grass Leys
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A NEW VISION FOR SCOTTISH AGRICULTURE

WWF Scotland's vision for a sustainable Scottish food system is one where nature thrives, while emissions are reduced, and food is produced sustainably, providing healthy, accessible, and affordable food to all.

We believe that the transition to a more sustainable food system needs to be fair, managed and inclusive. By creating a fairer food production system, we can continue to **support thriving rural communities** and make sure that farmers and land managers are guaranteed stable incomes and fair market returns for the goods and services they provide.

WWF Scotland believes that **the current agriculture budget should be increased but spent differently**. We believe the **Scottish Government should create a fairer funding system** that diverges from the current farm support system.

The current distribution of farm support is unfair: it diverts the largest amounts of public money to the largest businesses and does not base most of these payments on need or outcome. Meanwhile, those that need support to transition their businesses to nature- and climate-friendly farming are not prioritised, while those who are most depending on public support for business viability get the lowest share of funding.

Changes to how we manage land can also increase our resilience to extreme weather events caused by climate change that have in the past contributed to losses of up to £161 million for Scotland's farmers⁶. By adopting nature-friendly farming practices, most farmers can remain profitable and become more resilient in the face of a changing climate⁷.

This should be based around three key objectives detailed on the following pages.

1. FUNDING NATURE AND CLIMATE ACTIONS

Agricultural emissions are increasing as other sectors decarbonise⁸, current peatland restoration rates are only 40% of that needed to meet net zero⁹ and new woodland creation fell to its lowest level in 5 years in 2023¹⁰. Meanwhile, the 2023 State of Nature report showed that species abundance continues to decline, with 11% of species now under threat¹¹.

The scale of the challenge in reaching net zero greenhouse gas emissions and reversing the loss of nature means that we need to see increased ambition and urgency across all farming and crofting policy.

The Scottish Government currently spends over £600 million each year on farm support payments, but this system does not support the farming systems that are most valuable for emissions reduction and nature protection. This needs to change: public money should prioritise support for measures that reduce emissions and protect and restore nature.

WWF Scotland believes that **75% of available funding to support agriculture should support measures that allows farmers to reach new markets while restoring nature and tackling climate change**. By supporting activities such as woodland creation, peatland restoration and better soil management, we can help nature thrive, lock in carbon and support climate adaptation, whilst building resilience.

BY SUPPORTING NATURE-FRIENDLY FARMING WE CAN HELP NATURE THRIVE, LOCK IN CARBON AND SUPPORT CLIMATE ADAPTATION

Supporting nature-friendly farming also improves the resilience of the farming sector. Research from WWF Scotland has shown that **by adopting nature-friendly farming practices, most farmers can become more resilient and profitable as our climate continues to change**¹².

Businesses, such as financial institutions and food retailers, can also play an important role in supporting a sustainable agricultural transition. However, through WWF's work with businesses we know that unlocking the potential of the private sector will not be possible without the strong and secure policy signal from government that an ambitious policy framework can provide.

We should be clear that private money can add to but should not replace public funding where markets are not set up to properly invest in agriculture and nature, or where public funding is better geared towards paying for ecosystem services. Currently, these markets focus too much on carbon at the expense of other ecosystem services and community interests and lack robust standards to avoid greenwashing and negative impacts on communities. The Scottish Government needs to work with the private sector and communities to further develop the institutional and regulatory frameworks that will be needed to underpin these markets, using the Interim Principles for Responsible Investment in natural capital as a starting point.



Heather Close and livestock
© David Bebbler/WWF-UK

SUPPORTING NATURE-FRIENDLY FARMING IMPROVES THE RESILIENCE OF THE FARMING SECTOR

2. INVESTING IN ADVICE AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

Investing in advice and skills can speed up the rate of Scotland's emissions reductions, deliver transformational change and create green jobs in rural areas.

Advisory services for land managers should increase their provision of advice, knowledge sharing, and skills development so that all farmers and crofters can identify opportunities and understand how climate change and the transition to net zero will affect their business.

At present, the budget allocated to farm advice is too small to underpin the transformation in approach in the coming years. Between 2014 and 2020, the Farm Advisory Service was allocated just 1.5% of the available agriculture budget¹³. WWF Scotland has called for investment in advice and skills for farmers and crofters and believes that the Scottish Government should scale up the budget for training, knowledge sharing, and advice year-on-year to reach £20 million per year by 2027.

By delaying investment in innovation and knowledge transfer, the Scottish Government risks missing a key opportunity to prepare the sector for future policy developments and give confidence to the sector to take up new measures. This lack of investment risks creating a skills and knowledge gap across Scottish agriculture and hinders a just transition for all those working in land management.

Soil
© David Bebbler/WWF-UK



**WE NEED TO INCREASE PROVISION OF
ADVICE...SO ALL FARMERS AND CROFTERS
CAN IDENTIFY OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHANGE**

3. GUARANTEEING NUTRITIONAL SECURITY

WWF wants to see food produced to high standards that support the health of the environment and people. Through WWF's Basket Initiative¹⁴, UK retailers have committed to sourcing at least 50% of all whole produce and grains and 100% of all meat, dairy and eggs from standards certified or covered by a robust environmental scheme by 2030. Future agricultural policy must reflect changing market demands and ensure that Scotland's definition of high-quality food also meets market expectations, environmental standards and consumer expectations.

Moving to a sustainable production model is the only way to safeguard food production in Scotland for future generations. Sustainable production is essential to build up the fertility of our soils, improving the inherent productivity of our agriculture. Simply increasing the amount of land, we use to produce food won't solve any of the problems we are seeking to address. The Scottish Government needs to act to ensure that our food production methods are as sustainable as possible. We can and should use land we already farm much more efficiently to grow more food for people and make space for nature at the same time.



Carrots
© Aled Llywelyn, WWF Cymru

Rainbow Chard
© David Bebbler/WWF-UK

Future agriculture policy should recognise the need to rebalance Scottish production towards more crops, vegetables and fruit for direct human consumption and prioritise supporting farmers and crofters that contribute to aligning Scottish food production with Scottish Dietary Goals.

Although Scotland produces a large amount of pasture fed meat and dairy, we know that the majority of crops grown here are not consumed by humans: almost 80% of our cereal crop is diverted to use for livestock feed or alcohol production. The amount of cereal that we feed to livestock in the UK could produce 10.7 billion loaves of bread, while the amount of oats used to feed animals is equivalent to 5.8 billion bowls of porridge¹⁵. This all has huge consequences for nature, climate and our food prices - using feed sources that aren't suitable or desired for human consumption will be an important part of future farm systems, alongside restoring our natural environment and tackling climate pollution.



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WWF Scotland
The Tun
4 Jackson's Entry
Holyrood Road
Edinburgh
EH8 8PJ
0131 659 9100

wwfscotland.org.uk
@WWFScotland

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