

Rural Affairs and Islands Committee

Future agriculture policy— Farming for 1.5 meeting, 14 March 2023

Background

1. The Committee held an informal evening meeting with [Farming for 1.5](#) as part of its pre-legislative scrutiny of the Scottish Government’s proposals for future agriculture policy. The meeting took place at the Scottish Parliament at 6:00-7:30pm on Tuesday 14 March.
2. Farming for 1.5 was established in 2019 as an independent inquiry by NFUS and Nourish Scotland. The inquiry was intended to develop a consensus on how Scottish agriculture can meet the challenge of limiting global warming to 1.5° Celsius. The Farming for 1.5 panel published its final report, entitled “[Farming for 1.5: From here to 2045](#)”.
3. The Committee met with the following panel members—

Nigel Miller (co-chair)	Former NFUS President. Board member of the Moredun Research Institute and Chair of Livestock Health Scotland.
Mike Robinson (co-chair)	Chief Executive of the Royal Scottish Geographical Society.
Keesje Avis	Clerk to the Farming for 1.5 panel and Senior Policy Officer at Nourish Scotland.
Andrew Barbour	Farmer and acting chair of the Deer Working Group.
Kate Hopper	Policy Manager for Climate Change at NFUS
Pete Ritchie	Executive Director and co-founder of Nourish Scotland and Trustee of the Food Ethics Council.
John Smith	Former chair of the Scottish Association of Young Farmers Clubs, the NFUS Legal and Technical Committee and NFUS Milk Committee chair.
Steven Thomson	Senior Agricultural Economist at SRUC and supports the ARIOB through the Academic Advisory Panel.

Discussion key points

4. Farming for 1.5 panel members presented a summary of their inquiry, report, and recommendations. The recommendations included the implementation and management of transition within Scottish agriculture, greater investment in skills training and continuous professional development for farmers, and a public interest test for afforestation and soil carbon offsetting.
5. The panel noted there was a positive response to its 2021 report but highlighted the need for urgent implementation of the recommendations. The panel also argued that cooperation between the Scottish Government and farmers is necessary in order to tackle the climate and nature emergencies effectively.
6. The panel set out their view of the potential role of artificial intelligence and genetic technology for livestock breeding and indexing. The panel stated that climate targets will not be met without investment in and the use of new technologies that lead to greater efficiency and lower emissions.
7. A need for a more comprehensive and consistent approach to data collection by farmers and government was highlighted by the panel, particularly in relation to the measurement of the CO₂ equivalent of methane. The creation of a national inventory and the use of an on-farm calculator was suggested as a means to establishing a baseline understanding of soil health and emissions by farm and by sector.
8. The panel advocated a sectoral approach to meeting emission and biodiversity targets in Scottish agriculture, arguing that some sectors must be production focused with baseline biodiversity and emissions targets while others must focus on nature restoration and the sequestration of carbon. It was suggested that a future farm payment system should incentivise farmers to meet baseline targets while also rewarding those who have already made progress towards sequestration and biodiversity restoration.
9. For farms in less-favoured areas, the panel noted that these would deliver public goods through restoring wetlands and biodiversity, as well as contributing to food production. They supported the use of incentives to reward farmers who manage land in such areas to diversify their income and deliver a managed mosaic of mixed land uses.
10. On agroforestry, the panel considered that a public interest test should be required for the use of agricultural land for the planting of non-productive tree species solely for sequestration. A key recommendation by Farming for 1.5 was that any support provided for agroforestry and sequestration should not be traded away from the agriculture sector as carbon credits.
11. The panel stated that a culture shift towards emissions reductions and biodiversity restoration has occurred within Scottish agriculture. Farmers and land managers have become more aware of the potential for innovation and positive change. In the panel's view, the Scottish Government must articulate the

destination for agriculture in Scotland and provide farmers the tools and support to reach that goal.

12. In relation to the priorities of a future Agriculture Bill, the panel considered it should be structured in a similar way to the EU's framework legislation for the Common Agricultural Policy with details on the farm payment system delivered through secondary legislation. The panel stated that the priorities of the Bill be maintaining food production through a mixed and flexible system of land use by region and sector to reduce emissions and restore biodiversity.

Rural Affairs and Islands Committee clerks
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