

ABOUT LOCHABER MONITOR FARM

Farm name	Strone Farm, Banavie, Fort William, PH33 7PB
Meeting Number	07 – A Vision for the Hills & Mountains - A Strategic View of Land Use in the Future
Meeting Date	23 rd February 2018
Next Meeting	15 th March 2018

Strone Farm is run by Chris and Malcolm Cameron as a family partnership and in total the business farms 1,788 hectares.

Cattle: 40 Limousin cows producing store calves. Cows are in-wintered.

Sheep: 500 Cheviot ewes, producing store lambs. Mainly Lleyn tups and hogs kept as replacements. Ewes lambed away.

Management Group: John MacAulay (Chair), Paolo Berardelli, Peter Kennedy, Ewen Campbell and James Colston



Aims and Objectives of this joint meeting with NFU Scotland:

- To explore different views on the future for hill and mountain land use – real views and opinions.
- To identify and communicate the key public benefits that active hill and mountain farming can deliver
- Help farmers explore and influence the future of hill and mountain farming
- To identify what, and how, future policies and support mechanisms can support a viable hill and mountain farming sector, to influence the debate on post-Brexit agricultural policy

Speakers:

The Politician’s View	Donald Cameron MSP
The Environmentalist’s View	Claudia Rouse SNH
The Market View	Laurent Vernet – QMS
The Farmer’s View	Jonnie Hall – NFUS

The key speakers were followed by four breakout sessions.

KEY MESSAGES

The key messages of this meeting were:

- It is essential that all farmers are active in promoting the public good they provide to taxpayers
- We want a future support structure based on some kind of activity – reward activity not inactivity
- Is there an opportunity to better link with arable farms who now realise they need grass in their rotation?
- Protected species in conflict with agricultural management (eg geese, sea eagle), to be properly managed and given realistic compensation as they have significant consequences for land managers.

Interviews with each of the key speakers were recorded on the day

AREAS OF DISCUSSION

The Key Points noted from the breakout sessions were as follows:

Breakout One: Public Good

What public goods are currently provided by hill and mountain farming?

- Food production is the most important thing
- Employment
- Open to public – 365 days
- Adds value to tourism
- Health – we are what we eat, high quality food
- We influence soil and water health
- Rural community not just economic – schools, employment etc
- But... we need a clear policy of what public good actually is

What will the public want from farming in the future?

- Crucial importance is maintenance of environment and water for future generation
- Cheap food
- Maintain environment
- Natural capital model

How can these best be achieved?

- Raise awareness of what public good farmers produce
- Educate school children about farming – they don't know what we do
- Educate through public engagement (open farm days) in schools
- Promote agriculture /farming positively on TV more (e.g. programmes like 'This Farming Life')
- Farmers need to sell themselves

Other points –

- Rural economy is supported by the whole country – we have to prove why we need the money
- Labour is a huge issue at present and the industry also needs to look at succession
- Need to support new entrants with access to land and full time employment
- Need research to back up and publicise that carbon is captured by moorland management
- Support local food consumption – aspiration. Local processing to help deliver local food consumption

Breakout Two: Future Markets for Hill Produce

- Scotch Beef easily sold, Scotch Lamb more of a challenge. Store lamb trade very volatile
- Could hill breeds move to produce female replacements?
- Partnerships with other farms – cooperation between east and west coast farms? Encouragement for arable farms to fence and stock their farm – through greening options and rotations? Agri Scheme to encourage cooperation between hill store producers and arable farms?
- Processing capacity in Scotland – more abattoir lamb seasonality than beef. Co-op – go to HIE for funding?
- Educate consumer to encourage them to eat lamb. What is it's unique selling point? Highland? Argyll? Branded product – romantic overview to promote sale. Building relationships to supply right product to right market
- Challenge the low lamb consumption in Scotland
- Rural innovation service – employ professionals to seek market opportunities.

Breakout Three: The Shape of Farm Support

- Need to demonstrate public good and need recognition and reward for delivery of public good
- Production & activity not separate from one another or from the environment. Manage this “cause and effect”
- Stock leads to activity on 365 basis – supporting the local economy (multiplier effect)
- Sustainable/extensive grazing manages carbon capture
- There is a very big difference between productivity and activity

- Not exclusively production or environment – they go hand in hand
- Suite of options accessible to every farm – regionalisation of these “options” Relevant options menu for farms to choose individually (regionalised)
- VITAL communication and visibility to public (the taxpayer)
- Recognise strengths and play to them
- High hill areas – support to stock essential
- More practitioners needed to develop/influence future policy

Breakout Four: Future Environmental Challenges

- Positive management rewards required for environmental benefits provided
- More contact with environmentalists and more information transfer between environmentalists and land managers
- Species introductions to be properly managed and given realistic compensation
- Rewards should be to those who actively manage and live on the land
- Flexibility and outcome approach required by all
- The number of people working on the land is a key measure of resources required
- Recognise that historic practices have created this environment. Maintenance and improvement needs support

SO WHAT IS THE VISION FOR HILL AND MOUNTAIN FARMING?

The future for hill farming and crofting is undoubtedly going to be tough with threats to markets and support payments. The vision coming out of the meeting was however generally positive:

Hill and mountain farming and crofting is a hugely important part of the physical and social landscape of the West of Scotland. We supply a wide range of public goods, but that needs to be better communicated to the public and tax payer. Our contributions to positive management of the environment need to be better rewarded and will we need to work more closely with environmental bodies in the future. Future support payments need to be aimed at those actively involved in managing the land and livestock. And last but certainly not least there will be a market for hill lamb. However, there is also scope to improve the product we offer to better fit the market specification.

The vision is to have an active and robust hill and mountain farming sector that supplies a quality product into the food chain and is fairly rewarded for actively managing the wider environmental and landscape and supplying key public goods.

A document laying out the benefits and key strengths of the hill and mountain farming sector is an essential next step in communicating the above points to the public, politicians and those in a position of influence and to the agricultural industry as a whole.

ACTIONS FROM MEETING

The actions from this meeting are:

- Future Lochaber MF meetings will focus on some of the topics and issues raised on the day.
- NFU Scotland plan to form a lead a group of farmers to take forward some of the key actions identified.

FACILITATOR CONTACT DETAILS

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