



BRINGING OUR WORLD BACK TO LIFE

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FARMING FOR SCOTLAND'S FUTURE

WWF Scotland Briefing to the Rural Affairs and Islands Committee – March 2025

SUMMARY

Agriculture is the second **largest source of greenhouse gas emissions in Scotland**. Emissions from agriculture have remained almost static for over a decade, decreasing by only 1% between 2021 and 2022. Livestock emissions, animal waste and fertilisers are the main sources of greenhouse gas emissions.

Modern agricultural practices can drive nature loss and put pressure on ecosystems. The Biodiversity Intactness Indicator ranks Scotland's biodiversity intactness as 212th out of 240 countries. The Dasgupta Review highlighted that our unsustainable engagement with nature is endangering the prosperity of current and future generations. Although many farmers and crofters have taken steps to manage their land in climate- and nature-friendly ways, the agriculture sector needs to do more to shift the dial on climate change and nature loss.

Scotland's **farmers and crofters are key to restoring nature, fighting climate change, and supporting rural communities, while working to produce food and other goods**. Transforming policy to change the way farming is supported will help nature thrive, lock in carbon, and bring benefits for farmers and local food production. **There is no food security without nature: sustainable production is essential to build up the fertility of our soils, improving the productivity of our agriculture.**

AGRICULTURE, CLIMATE CHANGE AND NATURE LOSS

- Scottish agriculture is responsible for almost **one fifth of greenhouse emissions** and is the nation's second biggest emitter. To remain on track to reach net zero as a nation, the sector will need to see dramatic reductions in emissions. However, emissions have remained almost static for over a decade, decreasing by only 1% between 2021 and 2022¹.
- Modern agricultural practices can **drive nature loss** and put pressure on ecosystems. The latest State of Nature report showed that species abundance in Scotland continues to decline, with 11% of species now under threat².
- Climate change is impacting Scottish farmers and crofters by making extreme weather events more common. Extreme weather in 2017 contributed to **losses of up to £161 million** for the sector³. Record-breaking temperatures and droughts in recent years have severely impacted Scottish growers.

¹ Scottish Government, *Greenhouse Gas Statistics 2022*, [Scottish Greenhouse Gas Statistics 2022 - gov.scot](https://www.gov.scot/publications/greenhouse-gas-statistics-2022/pages/introduction.aspx).

² State of Nature Report 2023, <https://stateofnature.org.uk/>

³ WWF Scotland, *The Economic Impact of Extreme Weather on Scottish Agriculture*, <https://www.wwf.org.uk/sites/default/files/2021-04/Impact%20of%20extreme%20weather%20on%20Scottish%20Farmers%202018%20FINAL.pdf>

CREATING TRANSFORMATIVE POLICY

- WWF Scotland's **vision is for agriculture** is one where nature thrives, emissions are reduced, and food is produced sustainably, providing healthy, accessible, and affordable food to all⁴. We believe we can do this by:
 - **Funding** climate and nature actions;
 - Investing in **advice** and **skills** development;
 - Guaranteeing **nutritional security**.
- Supporting activities such as woodland creation, peatland restoration and better soil management will help nature thrive, lock in carbon and support climate adaptation, whilst building resilience and bringing benefits for farmers and local food production.
- WWF Scotland recognises the importance of high-quality food production. 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.
- Research from WWF Scotland has shown that **increasing uptake of nature-friendly farming measures** could deliver a **reduction of almost 40%** of greenhouse gas emissions on 2017 levels⁵.
- Research commissioned by WWF Scotland has shown that **by adopting nature-friendly farming practices most farms can remain profitable** and become more resilient to extreme weather events caused by climate change⁶.
- The **public supports shifting policy towards climate and nature** goals. Polling carried out last year by Survation for WWF Scotland found that 74% believe farmers should be paid to produce food, protect nature and reduce emissions⁷.
- WWF Scotland worked alongside farmer and environmental organisations to **campaign** for more ambitious agricultural policy. We were disappointed that the Agriculture and Rural Communities (Scotland) **Act did not signal a shift in the distribution of funding** to better support delivery of environmental outcomes or set targets to drive change in practice at a farm level.
- However, there is an **opportunity** in the next year for decision-makers to ensure that **policy** delivered through this legislation is **ambitious** and supports a thriving, resilient, and productive agriculture sector in a net zero Scotland. This will include changing how agriculture is funded.

CURRENT AGRICULTURE POLICY IS NOT FIT FOR PURPOSE

- The Scottish Government spends over £600 million every year on farm support payments, but this **system does not work for climate, nature, or people**.
- The Scottish Government's own research⁸ has highlighted inefficiencies in the payments system that is largely being replicated by current Scottish Government policy decisions. Documents published when the Agricultural and Rural Communities (Scotland) Bill was introduced sets out how benefits from direct payments did not necessarily go directly to the farmer, the payments reduced innovation, structural development and productivity growth and had little environmental benefit (and in some cases had a negative impact). In

⁴ WWF Scotland, *Vision for Agriculture*, <https://www.wwf.org.uk/sites/default/files/2024-02/WWF-Scotland-Vision-for-Agriculture.pdf>

⁵ WWF Scotland, *Delivering on Net Zero: Scottish Agriculture*, <https://www.wwf.org.uk/sites/default/files/2019-12/WWF%20Net%20Zero%20and%20Farming.pdf>

⁶ WWF Scotland, *The Impact of Extreme Weather Events on Scottish Agriculture*, <https://www.wwf.org.uk/our-reports/impact-extreme-weather-events-scottish-agriculture>

⁷ WWF Scotland, *Poll: Strong Public Support to Help Farmers Adapt to Changing Climate*, June 2024, <https://www.wwf.org.uk/press-release/poll-strong-public-support-to-help-farmers-adapt-to-changing-climate#:~:text=89%25%20also%20say%20that%20farming,grown%20and%20produced%20in%20Scotland>

⁸ Scottish Government, *Agriculture and Rural Communities Bill: Supporting evidence and analysis*, September 2023, <https://www.gov.scot/publications/agriculture-rural-communities-scotland-bill-supporting-evidence-analysis/>

addition, Greening and the Less Favoured Area Support Schemes were found not to deliver as effectively as possible on their stated objectives. The Scottish Government's decision to proceed with a policy of largely replicating these legacy schemes contradicts their own evidence and contradicts their ambition to make Scotland a world-leader in regenerative agriculture.

- Research from WWF Scotland has highlighted **that policy measures proposed** to reduce agricultural emissions get us **less than halfway** to where we need to be for Scotland to remain on track to reach net zero by 2045⁹.
- WWF Scotland recognises the importance of high-quality food production, but we know that there will be no food security without nature. Moving to a sustainable production model is the only way to build up the fertility of our soils and safeguard food production in Scotland for future generations.
- We can and should use land we already farm more efficiently to grow more food for people and make space for nature. 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.

FUTURE RURAL SUPPORT NEEDS TO BE MORE AMBITIOUS

- The Scottish Government should create a fairer funding system that allows farmers to protect nature and reduce emissions while continuing to produce food.
- New and ambitious agricultural policy must provide stability to farmers seeking to take positive steps to decarbonise, reduce dependence on external inputs, and weave nature back into their farmland. It must also ensure farmers and land managers can adapt to changing markets, and a changing climate.
- WWF Scotland believes that **75% of available funding for agriculture should support measures which enable farmers to produce food while restoring nature and tackling climate change**, that figure currently stands at approximately 30%. By supporting activities such as integrating trees and hedges, peatland restoration and improved soil management, we can help nature thrive, lock in carbon and support climate adaptation, whilst building resilience into the agricultural system.
- There is strong public support for changing how we support Scottish agriculture. Polling carried out by Suvation for WWF Scotland¹⁰ found 54% believe that farmers should be paid for how they manage their land, and 89% believe that farming and crofting has an important role to play in tackling climate change and restoring nature. The polling also showed that 74% believe farmers should be paid to produce food, protect nature and reduce emissions.
- Adopting climate- and nature-friendly measures can deliver win-wins for farmers and crofters as the local climate changes, with healthier and more diverse ecosystems more resilient to shocks. By **introducing regenerative farm practices**¹¹, including minimising or eliminating tillage where appropriate, rotational livestock grazing and planting cover crops, the majority of Scotland's farmers and farm businesses are better able to remain profitable as the frequency of extreme weather events increases.
- **Investing in advice, knowledge transfer and innovation** while developing a new farm payments system will allow farmers and crofters to be better equipped to make changes when legislation comes into force. Investment in skills **should be scaled up so that by 2027** Scottish farmers and crofters are prepared for engagement with new funding schemes. By Delaying investment in innovation and knowledge transfer, the Scottish Government risks missing a key opportunity to prepare the sector for future policy developments

⁹ WWF Scotland, *Reaching Net Zero in Scotland: Emissions reduction in agriculture*, <https://www.wwf.org.uk/sites/default/files/2021-10/Ricardo%20GHG%20mitigation%20WWF%20Scotland%2017Oct21.pdf>

¹⁰ Suvation polling results: <https://www.suvation.com/wwf-scotland-pr-tables/>

¹¹ WWF Scotland, *The Impact of Extreme Weather Events on Scottish Agriculture*, <https://www.wwf.org.uk/our-reports/impact-extreme-weather-events-scottish-agriculture>

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.

LEVERS OF CHANGE

- There is a clear need to take all available established opportunities in the short-term for Scotland to remain on track for net zero as a nation. A report from WWF Scotland and the Soil Association has highlighted certain measures of the Scottish Government's proposed policy framework can be considered 'low hanging fruit', which should be implemented without delay¹². This is critical given that the report also identifies potential difficulties with implementing some of the measures proposed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions on-farm, including a lack of data and evidence on measures and several barriers to uptake. The report makes the following recommendations:
 - More **monitoring of current on-farm activities** in relation to agricultural reform measures and management practices contributing to greenhouse gas mitigation;
 - Further **research into emissions** associated with agricultural reform measures;
 - **Addressing barriers** to uptake and supporting the adoption of new measures on-farm.
- A recent WWF Scotland report aims to guide and accelerate the agriculture sector's transition through policy and finance recommendations. The report sets out a timeline of actions for policy makers and government, with deadlines for the end of 2025, 2026 and 2027¹³. Milestones include:
 - By end of 2025: publish an ambitious **Rural Support Plan**; publish a **Code of Practice for Sustainable and Regenerative Agriculture** that puts Scotland on the path to being a world leader; set ambitious targets, policies and proposals for agriculture in the next **Climate Change Plan**; give **Regional Land Use Partnerships** mandate and support to coordinate investment to deliver landscape and catchment scale collaboration.
 - By end of 2026: improve **Whole Farm Plans** to include a wider range of actions; increase the **budget for agricultural knowledge and innovation** systems to £20 million per year.
 - By end of 2027: introduce **new support schemes for farming and crofting**, clearly articulating their contribution to climate mitigation, nature restoration and a just transition; set out how options in new farming schemes can be bundled, stacked, or blended with private finance.

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1961-2025: Over 50 years of conservation. WWF works in over a hundred countries to safeguard the natural world so that people and nature thrive.

¹² WWF Scotland and Soil Association Scotland, *Farming for Net Zero: Transitioning Scottish Agriculture*, <https://www.wwf.org.uk/sites/default/files/2024-09/WWF-Soil-Association-Net-Zero-Farming-Full-Report.pdf>.

¹³ WWF Scotland, *A Roadmap for Financing a Regenerative Agricultural Transition in Scotland*, <https://www.wwf.org.uk/our-reports/roadmap-financing-regenerative-agricultural-transition-scotland>.