

NFUS GOES FROM STRENGTH TO STRENGTH

Aim: NFU Scotland knows that strength in numbers is what counts when it comes to acting in the best interests of Scottish farming, whether it be in lobbying politicians, engaging with the retailers, the media, the general public and even the farming industry at large. NFU Scotland would not exist without its members and we have spent the last 24 months working on recruitment and retention.

Result: NFUS membership has been growing steadily for the last two years, a sure sign that farmers, crofters and other parties working in agriculture are convinced of NFU Scotland's effectiveness as a strong voice for Scottish agriculture and day-to-day provider of support and information. In 2007, we had 423 new members and in 2008 a further 413 new members joined NFUS, enabling the Union to remain the true driving force for Scottish agriculture.

RALLYING MEPS ON PESTICIDES

Aim: NFU Scotland was appalled at the emotionally driven and poorly informed way in which radical rules governing which plant protection products are available to European farmers and how they can be used were being negotiated. Early versions of the legislation in the European Parliament were not too drastic but soon turned into unnecessarily heavy-handed and scientifically unjustifiable proposals, which took little heed of food producers' and scientists' concerns. NFU Scotland was determined to inject some common sense into the debate.

Result: NFU Scotland's policy team studied in detail how the proposals might affect Scottish farmers, with supporting evidence from the UK's own authorising body, the Pesticides Safety Directorate (PSD). We arranged to meet Scotland's MEPs on farm to highlight the proposals' potential effects and to engage them to put our message across to their colleagues in the European Parliament. Within days, we had the full public support of all of Scotland's MEPs and managed to secure more than fifty pieces of media coverage, from articles and letters to the press, to radio and television interviews.

Shortly before the final vote in the European Parliament, two separate delegations of staff and officeholders travelled to Brussels and Strasbourg to speak to politicians. They met with MEPs from a range of parties and EU Member States, some sympathetic to our cause, some less so, and some who were still not aware of the issues at stake. We also managed to table amendments to the final text, which meant gathering official support in the form of signatures from forty MEPs, a feat in itself, although we were never daunted.

The final result was a mixed victory; we do not welcome the new rules and shall work closely with the UK Government to mitigate their effect when they are finally adopted.

However, we can honestly say that the rules, absurd as they are, are not nearly as bad as they would have been without the amendments we fought for.

Last year was successful for NFUS but very turbulent for Scottish agriculture. The volatility in our input costs and output values was unprecedented, and the turmoil in the global economy will mark out 2008 as a unique period in our country's history.



Jim McLaren - NFUS President

Our ability to influence Scottish, UK and EU decision makers remains central to NFU Scotland's success. Food security is now recognised as a key policy issue and there is a new emphasis on Scottish agriculture's primary role as a producer of food and drink.

NFUS is growing stronger, with net membership increasing for the second year running. I would like to thank and congratulate all those members and staff who have worked so hard to achieve this result, and I look forward to even greater things in future.

THE HEALTH OF THE CAP

Aim: The much-vaunted health check of the Common Agricultural Policy contained some proposals that could have had significant ramifications for many Scottish farmers. There were threats on modulation, capping and funding for the Scottish Beef Calf Scheme.

Result: As the deal on the CAP Health Check was being thrashed out in Brussels, our officeholders worked alongside the Scottish and Westminster Governments to secure a fair outcome for our members.

The existing funding mechanism for the SBCS was secured, allowing the scheme to run until at least 2012 and possibly beyond. On modulation, Scottish farmers are no worse off from rates that had previously been set out by the Scottish Government, while the rates applicable to all EU Member States are now much closer to those that will apply in Scotland, providing a more level playing field than before. Similarly, the spectre of progressive modulation, and the prospect that our largest agricultural businesses would end up suffering massive cuts in support was also watered down. Set aside will officially end and the timetable for the removal of the milk quota regime remains set at 2015.

For the Union, the debate now turns to the shape of the CAP post-2013 and we expect to meet with Commissioner Mariann Fischer Boel this spring - our fourth meeting with the Commissioner in recent times to discuss CAP.



STEMMING THE TIDE OF LIVESTOCK DECLINE

Aim: The parlous state of livestock farming in Scotland's hills and uplands was well documented in the Scottish Agricultural College and Royal Society of Edinburgh's reports published in the summer and autumn of 2008. NFU Scotland, acutely aware of the degree to which this is affecting the livestock sector throughout Scotland, as well as other businesses and communities, which depend on hill farmers, decided to act.

Result: NFU Scotland launched a 'Manifesto for the Hills'; a proposal drawing on existing and potential policies which, if used in combination, NFUS believes could go some way to protecting hill beef and sheep farmers. Underlying this proposal is a belief that ultimately the marketplace must provide farmers with enough money to keep their businesses profitable, and NFU Scotland will continue to hold candid talks with the retailers until we are sure that all Scotland's farmers receive a decent return. Until this happens, we must use the policy tools at our disposal to keep the hill sector alive.

The Manifesto's three aims are to 1. Retain the Scottish Beef Calf Scheme (SBCS) 2. To develop a new model for Less Favoured Area (LFA) support and 3. To improve options under the Scotland Rural Development Programme (SRDP).

As of 20 November 2008, the SBCS was assured following CAP Health Check negotiations, and NFU Scotland has met with the Scottish Government, European Commission officials and members of the House of Lords to outline our vision for the future of LFA. A review of the SRDP will soon be underway and NFUS is consulting its members on a revamped and extended list of Land Managers Options (LMOs), which would see funds moved from competitive to non-competitive schemes, enabling more land managers to take advantage of them.

MAKING MILK PAY

Aim: After a short burst of improved prices, NFU Scotland is concerned that processors have cut the prices they are paying to their dairy farmers and that production continues to decline. The Union is adamant that dairy farming has good future prospects but that farmers must receive a decent price if Scotland is to have a dairy sector in future.

Result: Ultimately, retailers and processors must pay producers a fitting price for their milk and since the start of 2009 NFU Scotland has met with senior representatives from Tesco and Sainsbury's to impress this upon them. We are still pursuing the appointment of a supermarket ombudsman to oversee a transparent and fair supply chain where suppliers can air their concerns without fear of losing their contracts. At the Tesco meeting we managed to agree that we would facilitate better communication between farmers and retailers to help farmers produce what retailers want and help retailers gain a better understanding of farming practices and seasonality. NFU Scotland continues to be involved in the evolution of food policy within Scotland.



PERKING UP PORK

Aim: Pig producers have had a rough time recently and the viability of the Scottish pig herd is under real threat. NFU Scotland and its What's On Your Plate? campaign aims to promote all Scottish food and drink, including pork and bacon and ensure that consumers buy Scottish – or at very least British.

Result: Waitrose recently launched an initiative aimed at explaining to consumers just how high animal welfare standards for pigs are in the UK in comparison to elsewhere in Europe and they are urging consumers to buy British pork and bacon. All pork and bacon products in Waitrose, other than artisan products such as salami, are sourced in Britain. The Co-operative has also confirmed that it is converting its entire own-brand pork and bacon ranges to British.

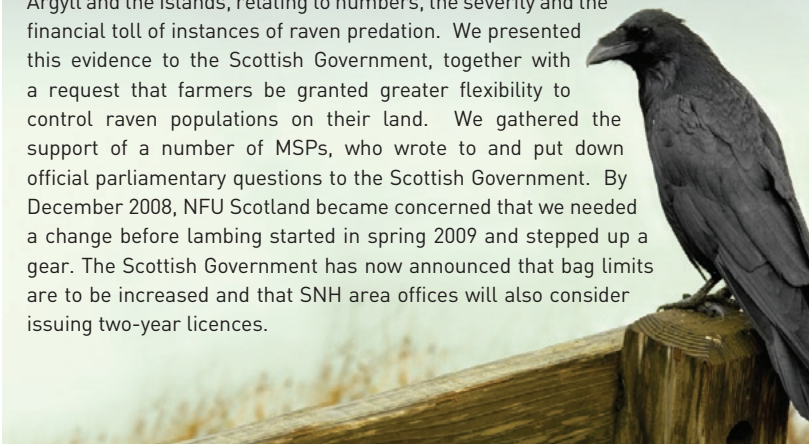
NFUS was pleased to see celebrity chef, Jamie Oliver's show 'Jamie Saves our Bacon', which created a very positive view of British pig production and is likely to boost sales.

Following NFUS pressure, the Rural Affairs Committee in the Scottish Parliament has agreed to get Cabinet Secretary Richard Lochhead, and pig industry representatives round the table once again to discuss a wide range of issues. This debate is likely to include animal welfare legislation; the prospect of expensive investments to meet Nitrate Vulnerable Zone (NVZ) legislation and the difficulty of applying for schemes under the Scotland Rural Development Plan (SRDP).

REASONING WITH RAVENS

Aim: NFU Scotland was particularly concerned at the numbers and severity of members' reports of livestock, particularly lambs and calves, being attacked by ravens. In many cases, raven populations had grown out of control and farmers were not permitted to restrict them to a sufficient degree to protect their animals' welfare.

Result: NFU Scotland gathered evidence from scores of members, particularly in Argyll and the Islands, relating to numbers, the severity and the financial toll of instances of raven predation. We presented this evidence to the Scottish Government, together with a request that farmers be granted greater flexibility to control raven populations on their land. We gathered the support of a number of MSPs, who wrote to and put down official parliamentary questions to the Scottish Government. By December 2008, NFU Scotland became concerned that we needed a change before lambing started in spring 2009 and stepped up a gear. The Scottish Government has now announced that bag limits are to be increased and that SNH area offices will also consider issuing two-year licences.



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