

Submission

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Completed by: David Michie

Email: David.michie@nfus.org.uk

Environment, Natural Resources, and Agriculture (ENRA) research strategy 2027-2032

- NFU Scotland (NFUS) is the leading agricultural organisation in Scotland. Representing more than 9,000 farmers, growers, and crofters, our members provide and support thousands of jobs and deliver significant economic, social and environmental benefits across Scotland.
- Agriculture is the lynchpin of rural Scotland and is an important part of Scotland's booming food and drink industry. Scottish agriculture generates a gross output of £3.3 billion annually. The farming and crofting sector is committed to sustainable food production, enhancing biodiversity and helping to tackle climate change.

Overall Strategy

1. **The research strategy outlines a new outcome focused approach with five core Missions and a set of corresponding Challenges. Do you think this is the right approach to take?**

Yes.

- As this research programme is funded by government, to primarily inform policymaking decisions, it makes sense that the missions correspond with the government's policy priorities. Mission-driven research is a good strategic approach that should deliver on these priorities.

- In terms of future agricultural policy we at NFU Scotland want to see a phased and stable transition to changes in policy support for active farming and crofting to support a sustainable and profitable Scottish agricultural sector. Our policy focus is on future agricultural support, farming and production systems, fairness in the supply chain, land use and species management, and climate change. There is a reasonable cross-over with these focus areas and the core missions, and we welcome ENRA's proposed gathering of evidence in these areas to inform policy making.

2. Do you think the research strategy will enable us to get the best research and scientific evidence from the best providers?

- The proposed theory of change impact pathway is a good approach to work back to deciding on the proposed activities. The ENRA's focus on maximising impact should deliver useful evidence for policymakers and the wider Scottish agricultural sector.
- However co-development can be a protracted process that can result in a wide range of different goals to satisfy those involved, with a resulting loss of focus. For this to be effective it is important a very clear process is developed, understood, and followed, to effectively develop research projects with clear aims.

3. Do you support the proposals on delivering our investment, including the five key funding mechanisms and governance approach?

Yes

- We want to see research that supports sustainable and profitable Scottish agriculture. We think the mechanisms and governance will deliver on government's current priorities. We want to highlight the importance of a dynamic and flexible approach that can respond to changes in Scottish agriculture's operating context (with changes in markets, the supply chain, the geo-political context that can influence these, as well as weather) and Scottish political priorities.
- We would like to see a dynamic strategic research programme (SRP) that provides flexibility, co-ordination, co-operation, and co-creation across disciplines.
- We welcome the Responsive Research Fund (RRF), and want it to continue to fund research that includes industry stakeholders like ourselves. As Scotland's leading agricultural organisation we highlight policy needs of our c.9,000 farmer and crofter members to policymakers on an ongoing basis. We think it's important that we remain closely involved in rapid research that supports effective policymaking for sustainable and profitable agriculture.

- We also welcome the Impact Investment's (II) living labs and innovation pathways as a means of engaging with 'real world' practice. As above, we would like to know and understand these II activities, and participate where appropriate.
- We want the ENRA to have governance and an approach that enables responsive research to address the inevitable and unknown shifts in policy needs that will happen in the 2027-2032 period. We want the proposed governance structure to enable efficient cross-working and avoid unnecessary duplication.
- The proposed governance structure contains several boards and groups. This risks slowing decision-making and a loss of focus. It is important that governance provides focus and makes clear decisions to support integration and co-operation across the missions.

4. Do you have any other comments or suggestions on any part of the Strategy?

No.

Impact Approach

5. Do you think the proposed Impact Framework is an appropriate way of defining, monitoring and evaluating the impact of research funded through this programme?

- We think the focus on impact is very important. A lot of research has been funded and carried out over the years. We want farmers and crofters to feel the impact of this, and future research, through changes that support more profitable and sustainable production.
- We think this can be achieved through collaboration and co-development with relevant stakeholders, and activities that enable innovation. An understanding of impact, how to measure it, and what frameworks are used to evaluate it, is essential to develop impactful research.

Areas of Research Interest

6. The government evidence needs are being captured as Areas of Research Interests within the Strategy. Do you think this is the right approach to take?

Yes.

- It is also important to identify the interests of industry that align with government and work to include these in the research activities.

7. Do you agree that the key ARI questions are captured within the strategy?

- As described in the answer to question 1, there is a reasonable cross-over with NFU Scotland's focus areas and the ENRA's core missions.
- We want to highlight where we feel there is a gap between our organisational policy priorities and ENRA's proposed Areas of Research Interest (ARIs). The main areas are: fair returns to primary producers from value chains, support and development of strategic supply chains to support the processing of agricultural products, and addressing a lack of skilled and unskilled agricultural labour. We would like to see these issues considered within the ENRA's programme.
- We welcome the reference to crop genetic diversity. We think the development of underpinning gene editing capabilities in Scotland is important. Increasing the pace of plant breeding is important to support more resilient crop production in lower input systems, where there are less pesticides available, and when there is more extreme weather.

Impact Routes – Decision Support, Living Labs and innovation

8. Which actions relating to data, data analysis, and modelling should the ENRA research programme prioritise?

No response from NFU Scotland.

9. What barriers exist to delivering effective data analysis and modelling in the current ENRA Research Programme?

No response from NFU Scotland.

10. Which principles relating to the delivery of analysis and modelling are most important (e.g., collaboration, innovation, impact)?

No response from NFU Scotland.

11. Is the Living Labs approach for co-production appropriate, and how could it be enhanced or adapted?

Yes.

- It is important that living lab partners have the skills, knowledge, and capacity to effectively deliver the living labs. We would like to highlight potential risks of partnering with organisations that want to support the research but may not have the capability and capacity to effectively do so. This risks a poor return on investment. Clear guidance and evaluation frameworks could mitigate this risk.
- We think that the living labs approach could be enhanced through integration with agricultural AKIS (advisory, knowledge, and innovation system) activities.

12. Is the Innovation approach well designed? How can it be improved?

- We welcome the aim to support the adoption and commercialisation of innovations. We are pleased to see the aspiration to give research 'real world' applications. Particularly if they improve the profitability and sustainability of Scottish agricultural businesses. Commercial partnerships, enterprise agency links, and learning from previous commercialisation of research are all welcomed. It is difficult to provide much more comment on the aims in the proposal. We welcome the development of the strategy and urge this development exercise to capture lessons learned from initiatives like the Digital Dairy Chain, and new platforms like the International Barley Hub.

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