

NFU Scotland Policy Strategy



Introduction

NFU Scotland is committed to securing a profitable, sustainable, and resilient future for Scottish agriculture.

Our policy strategy outlines five interlinked themes that are central to shaping 'the future of Scottish agriculture' and delivering economic, environmental and social benefits for Scotland and are clearly aligned to the stated objectives of the Agriculture and Rural Communities (Scotland) Act 2024 – namely: high-quality food production; tackling climate change; restoring nature; and underpinning thriving rural communities.

These five themes are

- Future Agricultural Support
- Farming Production Systems
- Fairness in the Supply Chain
- Land Use and Species Management
- Climate Change

Together, they must be addressed via a coherent, consistent and integrated policy framework.

Delivering the right outcomes for each theme is vital for the future prosperity of Scottish agriculture and all that it underpins. Equally, each theme is critical to the others – none of the five themes sit in isolation.

This Policy Strategy lays the groundwork for NFU Scotland's forthcoming 2026 Manifesto, which will set out our detailed policy priorities for the next parliamentary term. The strategy and the manifesto are being developed in parallel to ensure they are fully aligned - providing a coherent and consistent message to government, stakeholders and the public about what Scottish agriculture needs to thrive.



Background

Scottish agriculture is under pressure. In recent years, farmers and crofters have faced spiralling costs of production, continuing labour shortages and more extreme and volatile weather, whilst output prices across most commodities have remained volatile at best. Margins continue to be under significant pressure as supply chains and retailers focus on consumers rather than primary producers.

As farmers and crofters seek to respond to these challenges, they also face an unprecedented level of policy and regulation as governments in both Holyrood and Westminster pursue significant socio-economic, environmental and fiscal agendas which place demands and expectations on Scotland's farmers and crofters, but without providing the political and policy backing they need to breed the confidence our industry relies on.

As the dominant land use in Scotland, active farming and crofting is the key to helping meet climate and biodiversity needs while underpinning rural communities and producing food of the highest quality.

Agriculture is also the backbone of Scotland's wider food and drink industry – a sector that is worth £16 billion to the Scottish economy, employs 130,000 people, and supports Scotland's national reputation on the world stage.

The next few years will be pivotal for Scotland's farmers and crofters. If the Scottish and UK governments, and their agencies, take a positive and pragmatic approach to policy it will enable a profitable future for Scottish agriculture – not least for the next generation and beyond. In turn, a sustainable and resilient agricultural sector will support thriving communities, given their economic and social reliance on the industry.

A profitable, prosperous Scottish agricultural industry is key to a successful, prosperous Scotland.



NFU Scotland's Vision and Purpose

Whilst there have been many changes in farming and crofting over the years, the one thing that has remained consistent is our steadfast commitment to supporting our members and the relentless pursuit of a better future for Scotland's farmers and crofters.

As a result, our Vision is clear:

- A profitable and sustainable future for Scottish agriculture.

Our Purpose naturally follows:

- To support our members and positively influence the operating environment for Scotland's farmers and crofters.

Policy influence lies at the core of why we exist and what we do. Our stated aim is to maximise our impact through effective policy and market influence.

There is no doubt that our task will be even more challenging in the years ahead, given the significant volume and complexity of policy and regulatory proposals emerging from both the Scottish and UK governments that will have significant implications for Scottish agriculture – as well as the pressures on public finances.

Market challenges are also becoming more acute, with farmers and crofters' margins being relentlessly squeezed by imbalances in supply chains. Equally, geo-political uncertainties and more extreme weather events have created unprecedented risks and uncertainties from which Scottish agriculture is far from immune.

In response, this policy strategy maps out the key themes that require coherent policy, backed by leadership and responsibility, so that Scotland's farmers and crofters are enabled to deliver the outcomes required whilst also securing their own futures and those of the generations that will follow.

As part of this, we will place continued emphasis on championing and supporting the next generation, through active collaboration with organisations like the Scottish Association of Young Farmers Clubs (SAYFC), whose work in leadership development, training and peer support plays a vital role in sustaining rural communities.

This future policy strategy for Scottish agriculture sets out the five key themes in terms of our goals and what is needed.

These are the headlines only. Behind each theme lies a specific strategy leading to actions and measures for delivery.





Theme 1

Future Agricultural Support

Our Goal:

Scotland has a progressive agricultural support system that rewards active farming and crofting and responsible stewardship driven by productivity, innovation, efficiency, and resilience.

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What is needed:

Activity driven, accessible and adequately funded direct support measures. An effective transition to a new framework of support based on financial stability and practical and effective management options to deliver high-quality food production, climate, biodiversity and wider rural development goals.

Key policy outcomes include:

- Scotland has a four-tiered, fully funded support structure providing financial underpinning and incentives for active farmers and crofters to produce high-quality food whilst taking actions for climate, nature and water quality.
- Active farming and crofting are recognised, rewarded and valued as the mainstay of thriving rural communities.
- Innovation and technology drive productivity and sustainable production practices.
- Farming and crofting attract and retain new entrants and young people.



Our Future Agricultural Support Strategy will include sections on:

- The smooth transition from legacy Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) schemes to a new four-tiered framework for support.
- The development and delivery of direct support based on conditions and actions/ measures, rather than land areas or outcomes.
- The need for multi-annual, ring-fenced funding commitments to ensure certainty and instil confidence.

Connections to other Themes include:

- Ensuring optimal use of agricultural land and balancing climate and biodiversity interests with agricultural production.
- Incentivising low-carbon production systems and adaptive land management.
- Supporting supply chain fairness to help protect domestic production (and food security) whilst underpinning rural economic activity and the communities that underpins.



Theme 2

Farming Production Systems

Our Goal:

Scottish agriculture is diverse, sustainable and resilient and is built on farming and crofting systems delivering for high-quality food production, food security, animal welfare, and environmental stewardship.

What is needed:

Every farm and croft in Scotland - regardless of size, type or location – operates on a sound financial footing and has the capacity to invest in its strengths in delivering for high-quality food production, climate, nature and/or its rural community.

Key policy outcomes include:

- Scotland’s agricultural sector is built on innovation, with all farmers and crofters applying appropriate technologies, precision farming and good farming practice across a diverse range of farm types and enterprises.
- There is an effective advisory service for Scottish agriculture, providing knowledge transfer, digital innovation, and skills development.
- Resource efficiency and soil health are the foundations for regenerative and sustainable agriculture.

Connections to other Themes include:

- Driving climate mitigation through emissions reductions in production systems via efficiency gains.
- Integrating land use/management decisions with biodiversity and species management, especially through grazing management.
- Directly linking support frameworks and reward mechanisms to beneficial agricultural practices.

Our Farming Productions Systems Strategy will include sections on:

- Innovation in all sectors to drive efficiency gains and improved margins.
- Utilising the collection and use of enterprise data to inform better decision making.
- Recognising the value of traditional farming and crofting practices in delivering multiple benefits.





Theme 3

Fairness in the Supply Chain

Our Goal:

Ensure farmers and crofters receive a fair share of the value in all supply chains and risk is equitably distributed.

What is needed:

Improved margins in existing and new markets are critical to the future viability of Scottish agriculture. Improved and stable producer returns are needed across all sectors through fairer supply chains, increased processing capacity, greater collaboration and better promotion.

Key policy outcomes include:

- Fair dealings legislation ensures fairness in all supply chains through contracts and price transparency.
- Producer organisations and co-operative models strengthen the position of primary producers.
- Shorter local supply chains and public procurement enhance domestic and local food resilience.

Our Fairness in the Supply Chain Strategy will include sections on:

- Advocating for fairer supply chain practices to underpin the position of primary producers.
- Lobbying for procurement commitments that make Scottish produce a priority for governments, agencies and local authorities.
- Identifying current and future opportunities and advocacy to ensure long term sustainability of Scottish Agriculture.



Connections to other Themes include:

- Enabling reinvestment in sustainable and efficient agricultural production systems.
- Supporting climate goals by localising supply and reducing storage and transport emissions.
- Ensuring agricultural support delivers tangible financial returns to farm businesses.



Theme 4

Land Use and Species Management

Our Goal:

The full recognition of farming and crofting as responsible land stewardship, balancing high-quality food production with the management of biodiversity and natural capital.

What is needed:

An integrated approach to deliver optimal land use, where land reform policy is built on land management for the delivery of mutually beneficial outcomes – economic, environmental and social. Safeguarding farming and crofting interests within policy measures intended to protect and enhance habitats and wildlife.



Key policy outcomes include:

- Scotland's fourth Land Use Strategy ensures optimal land use without binary choices between food, carbon, nature, etc.
- Farmers and crofters are fully rewarded and incentivised through pragmatic measures for habitat creation, peatland restoration, and species recovery.
- Active management and intervention prevents species conflicts relating to agricultural damage.

Our Land Use and Species Management Strategy will include sections on:

- Ensuring Scotland's land reform agenda has no unintended consequences for farming and crofting that might adversely impact on their viability and it does not further undermine the letting of agricultural land and property to the detriment of new entrants and developing agricultural businesses.
- The need for an effective 'shared approach' to species management that fully recognises agricultural damage and enables appropriate interventions where and when this happens.

Connections to other Themes include:

- Interaction with support schemes rewarding multifunctional land use.
- Informing climate mitigation through sequestration and ecosystem services.
- Recognising and managing adverse implications for production system viability, particularly in marginal and upland areas.



Theme 5 Climate Change

Our Goal:

Position Scottish agriculture as a climate solution through mitigation, adaptation, and resilience.

What is needed:

Recognition and reward for climate actions taken by farmers and crofters. Support for agricultural practices to reduce emissions, sequester carbon, and mitigate against and adapt to climate change through incentives and advice rather than regulation.

Key policy outcomes include:

- Agricultural emissions are significantly reduced through innovation, better carbon auditing, and improved nutrient efficiency – without a reduction in production.
- Scottish agriculture has the capacity to adapt to extreme weather events and related market volatility – both physically and financially.
- Carbon sequestration, including woodlands and peatlands, does not compromise agricultural interests and is widely undertaken on farms and crofts to a landscape scale.



Our Climate Change Strategy will include sections on:

- Future funding from the public and private sectors, including the supply chain.
- Mitigation and emphasising on-farm mitigation such as cover crops, slurry management, etc.
- Sequestration, especially focusing on woodlands and peatlands.
- Adaptation, with a focus on flooding, water scarcity, and pests and diseases.
- Generation relating to renewable energy technologies.
- Measuring, reporting and verification via technologies that measure and verify carbon.

Connections to other Themes include:

- Climate actions are central to policy design and ensuring alignment with Net Zero targets.
- Driving innovation in agricultural production systems and informing land use planning.
- Linkages to supply chain resilience through risk management.

Conclusion

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NFU Scotland's strategy for the right future policies for Scottish agriculture is explicit that each Theme reinforces and depends on the others:

- Support mechanisms must reward productive farming and crofting, including climate-smart and nature-friendly practices.
- Farming systems need supply chain confidence and land use flexibility.
- Supply chain fairness underpins economic viability, enabling reinvestment in farm business resilience and sustainable practices.
- Land use and species strategies rely on active farming and tailored local solutions.
- Climate objectives must be embedded across all themes to futureproof Scottish agriculture.

This NFU Scotland Policy Strategy lays the foundation for a profitable, resilient and thriving agricultural sector in Scotland - productive, fair, environmentally responsible, and adaptable.

NFU Scotland calls on both the Scottish and UK governments, all supply chain partners - both upstream and downstream - and the public to back this integrated approach and ensure farming and crofting in Scotland continues to nourish our people, our environment, and our communities.



Our Leadership, Our Voice

At the heart of NFU Scotland is a leadership team committed to securing a profitable, sustainable and resilient future for Scottish agriculture.

Our President and Vice Presidents are more than figureheads - they are active farmers, trusted voices and tireless advocates. Every meeting they attend, every policy they scrutinise, and every platform they speak from is driven by one goal: to deliver for our members.

Representing the full breadth of Scotland's farming and crofting communities, their leadership is central to our mission - influencing policy, protecting livelihoods and promoting the vital role of food producers across Scotland and beyond.

This document outlines our strategic policy priorities, but it's people who make it happen. Standing alongside our members, our leadership team continues to shape the future of Scottish agriculture with purpose and conviction.



NFU Scotland Presidential Team (L-R): Vice President Duncan Macalister, President Andrew Connon, Vice President Robert Neill

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