

CHAMPIONS FOR CHANGE

Benefits of sustainable practices

WORDS
MARTIN KENNEDY
Farmer, Perthshire

Continued overleaf

24,000

Scottish farmers and land managers generate enough renewable electricity to power over 24,000 homes for one day

(Scottish Energy Statistics Hub)



15.9%

Between 1990 and 2018, agriculture saw a 15.9% decrease in net emissions (1.4 MtCO₂e)

(Scottish Government, Scottish Greenhouse Gas Statistics 2018)

14.8%

Nitrous Oxide emissions in agriculture fell by 14.8% between 1990 and 2018

(Scottish Government, Scottish Greenhouse Gas Statistics 2018)

Martin Kennedy

→ Continued from previous



Below: Martin Kennedy



18%

Methane emissions in agriculture fell by 18% between 1990 and 2018

(Scottish Government, Scottish Greenhouse Gas Statistics 2018)

ALTHOUGH farmers, crofters, and environmentalists may have had their differences in the past, we also have important areas of common ground. Most importantly, I recognise that a sustainable agricultural sector can provide a wide range of public benefits, including habitat for wildlife, storage for carbon, recreation opportunities and tourism. That is why I am delighted to be part of the ‘Champions for Change’ project, led by NFU Scotland and the Scottish Wildlife Trust.

I know from experience that adopting more sustainable farming practices can benefit the environment, as well as the bottom line of my business. I’ve also been involved in agri-environment schemes since the outset of the very first Breadalbane Environmentally Sensitive Area (ESA), back in the ‘80s right up to the current Agri Environment and Climate Scheme (AECS), and have seen first-hand the wide range of benefits these schemes can deliver.

Since introducing highland cattle on the farm, the hill has improved greatly both in terms of biodiversity gain and productivity, but the measure that has delivered the biggest change here on the farm is a soil mapping programme. Each year, we sample 1/5 of farm to find out the pH level of our soils, but also the phosphate, potash and magnesium levels. This gives us a much better idea of the productive capacity of our soils, and optimises inputs.

Every year, two soil samples in every hectare are analysed and put onto a map which highlights areas that are low or high in nutrients. When we spread lime, this data is transferred to the tractor and as the tractor passes each area, it automatically adjusts the application rate of lime. This means that we are not only avoiding applying lime where it’s not required but means we can also apply extra where there is a deficit. The benefits of doing this are twofold: the soil is more productive for growing grass and arable crops, and the health of the soil is not compromised, meaning its carbon capture

“Since introducing Highland cattle on the farm, the hill has improved greatly both in terms of biodiversity gain and productivity”

capabilities are maximised. This process can also be used when applying other nutrients such as phosphate and potash.

The arable sector in Scotland has led the way here and many have been doing this type of soil testing for several years and are now reaping the benefits both in terms of optimising inputs and maximising soil condition, however we should be looking to engage more in the upland livestock areas where we know soil carbon capture can be improved.

We know that Scotland is leading the way in terms of production and environmental standards, but at the moment there are neither the mechanisms nor the funding in place to make more of a difference across the sector. We now have an opportunity to change the way land management policy operates which, will allow us to reverse biodiversity declines and mitigate against climate change, while at the same time improve on the sustainability of

36,000

In 2018, Scottish farmers managed the equivalent of 36,000 rugby pitches (89,000 acres) as Ecological Focus Areas

our food production systems. We must take full advantage of this opportunity which will not only address the issues and targets we have in front of us but with the UN Biodiversity Conference happening in May next year and the eyes of the world being on Glasgow for the UN Climate conference in November 2021, we have the opportunity to showcase best practice to countries across the globe. ♦

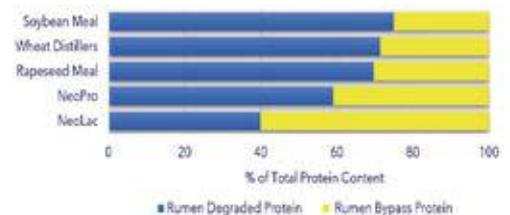


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