

Date of Meeting : 19 August 2020

Venue : Zoom

Committee : Next Generation

Present : Peter Moss (Chair), Matthew Steel, Michelle Stephen, Ben McClymont, Hamish Logan, Gary Bruce (invitee), John McCulloch (SAYFC), Martin Kennedy (NFUS Vice-President), Clare Slipper (NFUS Political Affairs Manager), Jenny Brunton (NFUS Policy Manager)

Apologies : Ian Dickson, Iain Livesey, Andrew Neilson, Ryan MacLean, Chris Scott-Park, Zoe Symington, John Howie, Andrew Jardine, Duncan Morrison, Andrew Taylor, Catherine Sloan (SAYFC)

Discussion on the 2021 Election Manifesto

1. Peter Moss, Next Generation Chair, welcomed the group and thanked NFUS Political Affairs Manager Clare Slipper for joining the meeting.
2. Ahead of the Scottish Parliamentary elections in Spring 2021, the political parties will develop manifestos setting the policy priorities of the election. Similarly, NFUS will be producing a manifesto document outlining key 'asks' with Clare Slipper asking the group to identify key issues or priorities for the Next Generation.
3. The group were asked for their thoughts on whether they believe that Scottish Government has delivered opportunities to New Entrants.
 - 3.1. Clare Slipper informed the group that 63% of respondents to the live consultation had responded that opportunities for new entrants had not been delivered by Scottish Government.
 - 3.2. The group agreed that the current system is underfunded, poorly managed and reliant on new entrants already having accessed land.

- 3.3. It was felt that the schemes offering financial support (New Entrant Capital Grant Scheme, Young Farmers Start-Up Grant Scheme New Entrants Start-Up Grant Scheme) had been badly administered and this is demonstrated by all three schemes being prematurely closed with no effort to replace these. They were all entirely reliant on the applicant having secured a minimum of 5 years access to land with the ability to outlay the money themselves before recouping this through the scheme payment, often a long process causing financial strain to fledgling businesses.
 - 3.4. The group would like to see future support for new entrants and young farmers administered with a simpler and fairer approach. A proposal was made that support could be determined by a local panel to ensure eligibility and necessity, but also to speed up the process and ensure timely payments whilst reducing the administrative burden.
 - 3.5. The group agreed that the 'Bounce Back Loan Scheme' offered businesses a vital lifeline and a similar low interest loan scheme could be rolled out for new entrants and young farmers. This would incentivise investment into fledgling businesses whilst also addressing the issues that these businesses face in accessing private funding.
 - 3.6. The group reiterated their support that changes to taxation is the key to a dynamic and fluid land sector in Scotland. The introduction of relief from Income Tax (not Corporation Tax) for rental income from agricultural land, where the tenant is not related to the owner; for new tenancies; and where relief increases with length of tenancy, would be of significant merit in improving land movement and reform in agriculture.
4. The group were asked for their thoughts on land reform and agricultural holdings.
 - 4.1. The group agreed that changes to planning legislation would allow for improved succession planning within farming businesses and allow these businesses to better capitalise of assets and aid retirement with increased rural housing.

- 4.2. The group were somewhat apprehensive about land reform as it was felt that the real implications of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2016 were not yet realised. Confidence needs to be built within the tenancy sector and fears of possible changes such as land tax and right to buy powers, fuels uncertainty and fear within the sector and hinder opportunities for the next generation.
- 4.3. The group were concerned at the options available to new entrants and the lack of viable units to sustain fledgling businesses. It is very difficult for new entrants to sustain and build businesses without a sustainable size of land and security of tenure.
- 4.4. The group also believed that going forward, support for new entrants and young farmers is also needed in the form of business planning. It was thought that the existing services offered through the Farm Advisory Service could be built upon with a need for this service to offer training opportunities.
5. The group were asked for what they believed Scottish Government's priorities with UK Ministers post-Brexit should be.
 - 5.1. The group emphasised their support for NFUS' position on maintaining a level playing field on standards and ensuring food production.
 - 5.2. Preserving the integrity of the internal market with the need for a level playing field to ensure Scottish businesses are not left with an unfair competitiveness disadvantage.
 - 5.3. The need for increased and improved promotion of the sector was highlighted with support for the work of levy bodies and the likes of Scotland Food and Drink agreed.
6. The group were asked for their thoughts on future Agricultural Policy (2021-2026)
 - 6.1. The group emphasised that they are fully supportive and advocates the measures outlined within NFUS' 'STEPS FOR CHANGE: A New Agricultural Policy for Scotland'.
 - 6.2. It was highlighted that businesses must be profitable to allow them to deliver environmental outcomes.

- 6.3. It was agreed that public procurement should be a priority for the next government, in particular to address health issues in schools and hospitals.
7. The group were asked for their thoughts on measures need to help farmers meet Scottish Government's climate change targets
 - 7.1. The group discussed the benefit of targeted grants for specific measures taken to improve farm efficiency whilst also improving the environmental impact.
 - 7.2. The need for increased investment into research and development, including research institutes, was raised with the need for a science based approach to decisions being taken.
 - 7.3. Gene Editing was highlighted as an issue where work can be made to reduce the potential negative impact to the climate whilst maintaining or increasing food production. The industry cannot be disadvantaged due to differing political views that does not consider the scientific work undertaken. This could potentially also cause divergence within the internal market.
 - 7.4. The group agreed that support for existing practices that are undertaken that already benefit the environment and biodiversity must not be overlooked. Currently many are not being recognised or rewarded for work they are doing and for this to continue or be built upon, it must be financially beneficial for farmers and crofters to do so.
 - 7.5. Concern was raised over the consistency of some approaches to carbon audits with different programmes providing different results and there not be a single recognised system. Some of this concern was due to requirements from buyers such as specific supermarkets requesting a particular programme was used and this may result in some businesses conducting numerous audits. Further research was needed to ensure these programmes are as accurate as possible and to provide a clearer picture on emissions and sequestration. Farmers need a system to allow for benchmarking against similar farming businesses.
8. The group were asked for their thoughts on the food supply chain.
 - 8.1. Food producers must be at the heart of 'Good Food Nation' policy.

- 8.2. The group emphasised their desire for food and farming to be integrated into the school curriculum, particular in more urbanised areas. This must go beyond Home Economics and include careers and health and wellbeing.
9. The group were asked for their thoughts on health and wellbeing in the farming community.
 - 9.1. Funding for bodies such as RSABI and SAYFC were thought to be essential in providing vital networks for rural communities alongside increased support for rural mental health services.
 - 9.2. The need for digital connectivity was stressed as an essential part of sustaining rural communities, business reliance and to preventing loneliness and isolation.
 - 9.3. Investment in local communities to ensure sufficient transport, childcare, health services was deemed necessary to sustain rural communities.
10. The group were asked for their thoughts on skills and employment in agriculture and rural areas.
 - 10.1. If the education system properly educates on food and farming then this will encourage young people into considering farming as a career option.
 - 10.2. Apprenticeships were considered as key to supporting future farming employees. LANTRA and Ringlink initiatives were supported but the group felt that a single united system would be best to provide a clear, joined up approach for both the potential apprenticeship and the employer.
 - 10.3. The terminology used in farming was viewed as a barrier to encouraging careers within the industry and that the sector needs to improve on promoting the diversity of skills needed.
11. The group were asked for any further thoughts or ideas to be consider when building NFUS manifesto.

11.1. Forestry was raised as an issue when high quality and actively farmed land was being taken out of production to plant blanket forestry. The group felt that this posed a serious threat to many farm businesses but particularly new entrants and that the approach to forestry needs to be much better targeted. This further exacerbates the issue with new entrants often only being in a position to access small and remote units when it is more economically incentivised to plant trees in these larger plots than invest in sustainable and productive farming methods, which also have a role to play in climate change mitigation.

Next Generation Chair Peter Moss provided an update on Next Generation initiatives.

12. A selection of 12 educational posters were published in June to highlight what was happening on farms and crofts in a friendly and educational manner. This came as a direct outcome of the Next Generation meeting in May.
13. To coincide with Scottish exam results, NFUS supported the #nowrongpath campaign and published a number of case studies to demonstrate the diversity of food and farming careers.
14. The suggestion of launching a project that focuses on the contribution of young farmers and NFU Scotland's Next Generation group to reducing greenhouse gas emissions and responding to climate change challenges is proceeding well. This project will take the form of a Climate Change Challenge competition. This project will allow the next generation of Scotland's farmers and crofters to outline the steps they are taking to tackle climate change and discuss the wider environmental benefits that can be delivered as a result.
15. The group discussed the progression of a UK Unions Next Generation webinar focusing on the theme of 'Green Finance' and the green economic recovery from COVID-19, emphasising that this can be achieved through climate friendly agricultural practices. The group are keen to explore how accessing green finance can support the next generation to improve their business efficiency and productivity.