



NEWS RELEASE

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INTERNATIONAL EVIDENCE THAT SCOTTISH AGRICULTURAL POLICY NEEDS RADICAL CHANGE OF DIRECTION, SAY SCF

Crofters claim that a senior Scottish National Party Euro-politician's remarks on the need to do away with 'business-as-usual' farming throw into serious doubt some of the Scottish Government's current proposals for the future of Scotland's agriculture.

The remarks, made on Tuesday by SNP's MEP Alyn Smith who is a member of the European Parliament's Rural Affairs and Agriculture Committee and is also the SNP's agriculture spokesman, have been welcomed by the Scottish Crofting Federation. The SCF say it gives further weight to arguments that many of the recommendations in the Pack Report which are being taken forward by the Scottish Government do not contribute to necessary deep and rapid agricultural change in Scotland towards less-intensive, smaller scale approaches, such as crofting.

The MEP was commenting on a new report from the United Nations which outlines the scale of the challenge facing farmers and governments to ensure global food security. The report, part of a major research project by the UN's food security body, warns that increasing land degradation, depletion of water resources and a loss of biodiversity are putting food production systems around the world at risk.

Alyn Smith argued that rising world population and "the inevitable environmental constraints" of climate change mean that many 'modernised' forms of farming are coming to an end. He said: "Intensification in the old manner of throwing more energy and more chemicals at farmland simply cannot work in the long run, and we can clearly see the looming threats of soil erosions, salinisation, eutrophication, amongst others, in ultimately limiting what we can produce: not to mention the ultimate limitations of some of the key resources in conventional agriculture, such as phosphates for fertiliser."

The MEP highlighted the importance of "extensive grazing on fragile hillsides", education in sustainable agriculture and the issue of land tenure reform.

SCF chief executive Patrick Krause welcomed the MEP's comments. Mr Krause said: "As Alyn Smith rightly points out, agricultural policies at a European level "don't necessarily stack up" at the moment and, as he also said, reports such as this one from the UN are a "motivation" to make the radical changes that are needed to make agriculture sustainable in the long-term.

"Report after report from the United Nations and other institutions of global governance are now declaring that, as individual producers and as nations, we need to leave behind high-input and high-energy use 'modernised' agricultural systems.

"But this is particularly difficult in Scotland as, traditionally, we have been proud of our 'improved' agricultural systems which have, in the past, been well thought of throughout Europe. Yet the basic motivation for this 'improvement' was to increase profit and personal wealth. Such 'improved' agriculture has, indeed, increased the financial wealth of the few and enabled cheaper food for the many. But, over the long-term, it is exhausting the fertility of the land – the very basis by which our food is produced – and requires inputs of fertiliser and pesticide that our world just cannot sustain. That 'improved' agriculture leads to the exhaustion of land and the erosion of societies was a message that crofters gave to the Napier Commission more than a century ago. Loud and clear, this is what organisations like the UN are now also telling us."

Mr Krause argued that Mr Smyth's words illustrate that the thrust of the Scottish Government's Pack Report on the future of agricultural support, which is focussed on trying to shore up Scotland's failing agri-industrial-establishment, is already alarmingly out-of-date.

He said: "Policy-makers need to ditch the old assumptions of 'efficiency' based on high input systems and unsustainable short-term yields. This kind of efficiency means cutting labour costs and putting more profit in fewer pockets. In the Highlands it is called 'Clearance'. Instead of 'Clearance' we need to marry appropriate scale technologies with what remains of our traditional knowledge of how to work with the land and live in community.

"In such a context, the small-scale, low intensity, communally oriented world of crofting provides a model for the country as a whole, and, because of this, the issue of land tenure is important for Scotland. We are calling on the government to endorse a policy of increasing the number of crofts in Scotland by 10,000 by the year 2020 and increasing the amount of Scottish land in crofting tenure to 25 per cent by 2030.

We believe that crofting, a form of land tenure that prizes community and has diverse agricultural activity at its heart, is indispensable to the radical transformation of agriculture as part of wider processes of social and cultural transformation. What is needed now is not agricultural 'improvement' but 'adaptation' to the reality of a world of material scarcity and constraint. Creating a genuinely sustainable food system will be among the great challenges of the modern era. In the Scottish context, the extension of crofting will be key to meeting it.

END

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NOTES TO EDITORS:

Alyn Smith's original comments on the United Nations report can be found here:

<http://www.alynsmith.eu/index.php?mact=News,cntnt01,detail,0&cntnt01articleid=978&cntnt01origid=15&cntnt01returnid=80>