



NEWS RELEASE

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CROFTERS TAKE CARE OF SOME OF SCOTLAND'S FINEST LAND

The Scottish Crofting Federation (SCF) have pointed out that crofters look after some of Scotland's most precious environment and deserve public support to do so.

"At this time when our agriculture policy is being reformed, no one can have failed to have noted the, largely justifiable, claims made for why public money should be given to farmers", said SCF board director Finlay Matheson, "but when the assertion is made that a larger share should be paid to holdings on more productive land the SCF questions what criteria are used to measure the worth of land and those who care for it. Scottish Government and those representing the big agri-businesses argue that they deem support for 'activity' as paramount. They use the word 'activity' because they can't use the word 'production' – to do so would mean they were calling for production linked subsidies which would be against World Trade Organisation rules. Whilst no one wants to see payments going to those who are not farming, 'slipper farmers', there are lots of different types of farming across Scotland and a large proportion of it is extensive livestock production on fragile land. Stocking rates on this land have to be low for environmental benefit but it is being suggested this type of land is under-active. Extensive livestock systems - predominant in the north and west highlands and islands - are often designated High Nature Value and deliver a range of public goods. These areas of natural constraint are as worthy, if not more so, of public support as land which is naturally more 'productive' but provides fewer other outputs."

Mr Matheson continued, "SCF is concerned that the Scottish Government, in allocating direct payments, is in danger of focusing too much on recompensing higher levels of 'activity' and not enough on rewarding the many public goods and gains that extensive systems deliver. As well as highly-prized livestock and crops, outputs include the maintenance of attractive landscapes and wildlife habitats on which other economic activities such as tourism depend. People from all over Scotland and the world come to visit crofting areas to see landscapes that are maintained by crofting families. Scottish Government has to broaden its appreciation of what different land management systems offer".

Matheson concluded "The current fixation on 'activity' and 'slipper farmers' isn't helpful to creating a more equitable and sustainable agriculture policy for Scotland".

END

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