



NEWS RELEASE

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CROFTING WELCOMES FOCUS ON RURAL COMMUNITIES IN AGRICULTURE BILL BUT SAYS THAT THE DEVIL WILL BE IN THE DETAILS

The Scottish Crofting Federation (SCF) has welcomed the Agriculture and Rural Communities Bill, which draft legislation seeks to provide a new framework for the delivery of agricultural and rural support across Scotland.

“It has been a year since Scottish Government consulted on its proposals for a post-Brexit agricultural support system and we are glad to see that the Bill has now been introduced to Scottish Parliament”, said Donna Smith, Chief Executive of the Scottish Crofting Federation. “The Bill explicitly aims to enable rural communities to thrive and to support the adoption and use of sustainable and regenerative agricultural practices. We know that crofting can and will deliver for these objectives if adequate and accessible support for crofters is put in place.”

The Agriculture and Rural Communities Bill provides a framework for support payments that seeks to replace the European Union’s Common Agricultural Policy. The Bill outlines overarching objectives and the powers that will be provided to Scottish Ministers to deliver support and schemes, as well as the purposes of support which include agriculture, food and drink, forestry, rural communities and rural businesses and knowledge, innovation, education, and training.

“The Bill includes some welcome provisions such as an obligation on Ministers to draft, every 5 years, a Rural Support Plan, which will give some stability for our sector”, continued Mrs Smith. “It also includes powers to cap support payments, although we are disappointed that there is no commitment to the redistribution or frontloading of payments, and we will continue to call for such a measure as this Bill progresses through Parliament. A lot is still to be decided and although we understand that this framework is necessary, the devil will be in the details”.

Mrs Smith concluded: “It is a concern that crofting does not feature widely within the Bill and its documents, despite SCF’s active involvement in the development of agricultural policy. Scottish Government seems to recognise the importance of some agricultural systems for Scotland’s unique biodiversity, but this has not yet been translated into a bold and explicit commitment to better support crofting. We hope that Government’s promise to provide open opportunities for participation will allow policymakers and officials to sit around the same tables as crofters, to make a strong case for crofting under a forward-looking Scottish Agricultural Policy.”

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