



NEWS RELEASE

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Date: 19/02/2024

SCF calls MSPs to amend agriculture bill to ensure a fairer distribution

SCF joined fellow organisations in a demonstration on Monday at the Scottish Parliament, to ask for a fairer agriculture bill.

The Agriculture and Rural Communities Bill as introduced does not live up to the Scottish Government's commitment to a just transition. While it calls for 'sustainable and regenerative agriculture' and is aimed at 'enabling rural communities to thrive', it does little to oblige policy makers to realise the stated objectives. Instead, it continues to privilege large-scale industrial farming corporations and wealthy private landowners.

Under the current system, most subsidies are awarded per hectare of land and based on land quality, so those with the most land and the best land receive the most money. In recent years, the bottom 40% of agricultural subsidy recipients received only 5% of the total agricultural budget while the top 10% received half of it.

Addressing the MSPs sitting on the Rural Affairs and Islands Committee, Donna Smith, CE of SCF said: "We are concerned that the Agriculture Bill is not in line with the wider government objectives, namely land reform and the commitment to a just transition. Crofting was a significant part of land reform in the past and the reason that there are still communities in many rural locations across the Highlands and Islands. The objectives of the agriculture bill, such as adopting sustainable agricultural practices and the production of high-quality food, require more people to have access to land in the same way."

The largest and most profitable farms and estates receive up to a million pounds a year of public money simply for owning farmland. This is money they don't need, which could be much better spent. Land-based subsidies and the carbon market inflate the value of land, putting it out of the reach of new entrants.

The proposed tiered system does little to promote nature and climate-friendly farming practices. At the same time, farmers and crofters committed to a real transformation of agriculture cannot access the grants necessary to transform and diversify their businesses towards more sustainable and nature friendly farming.

Donna Smith continued: "We believe that the agriculture bill is not fit for the purposes stated in the objectives, such as the production of high-quality food and nature restoration. It will not enable crofters and other small-scale producers to deliver on these objectives. There are no firm mechanisms to truly support rural communities, but rather a focus on large-scale industrial food production."

SCF therefore urges the Scottish Parliament for the following amendments of the framework bill:

- Introduce a duty in the bill for **mandatory redistribution of area-based payments** towards smaller producers, including those with holdings under 3ha.
- Include an **explicit commitment to promoting smaller-scale agricultural production**, including horticulture and local food networks.
- Implement a provision that aligns future agricultural policy with the wider policy objectives of land reform and the **diversification in ownership of, and control over, land**.