



Agriculture and Rural Communities Bill: what is needed to deliver for nature, climate and people?

Farming is vital to Scotland's future. As well as producing food, farmers and crofters manage three quarters of Scotland's land. Agriculture has a key role to play in tackling the climate and nature emergencies. Farmers and crofters must be supported to adopt the changes necessary to protect our environment.

Scottish Environment LINK members believe that the Bill must be strengthened to set a clear direction of travel towards a sustainable and regenerative agricultural system, with greater certainty for farmers and crofters as well as strong monitoring and evaluation requirements. LINK members support the following Stage 3 amendments:

- **21 (Ariane Burgess)** – requires Ministers to include targets to reduce agriculture's environmental impact in the Rural Support Plan
- **8 (Mairi Gougeon)** – strengthens the detail required in the Rural Support Plan
- **22 (Ariane Burgess)** - gives Ministers the power to set out a pathway in the Rural Support Plan to achieving desired outcomes which would reduce agriculture's impact on nature
- **9 and 12 (Mairi Gougeon)** – requires monitoring and evaluation of the support schemes included in the Rural Support Plan
- **10 (Mairi Gougeon)** – requires that Ministers report on support schemes and their effectiveness
- **10A and 10B (Rhoda Grant)** - ensures that any measures to redistribute funding are evaluated following the Plan period
- **10D (Rachael Hamilton)** – requires Ministers to take an interim review of the Rural Support Plan
- **26 (Ariane Burgess)** – requires evaluation of the Rural Support Plan
- **11 (Mairi Gougeon)** – requires Ministers to consult with public bodies and stakeholders when preparing the Rural Support Plan
- **30 (Ariane Burgess)** - requires Ministers to consider the distributional impact of support schemes and publish evidence of this thinking
- **32 (Ariane Burgess)** – limits capping powers to Tier 1 basic payments
- **33 and 34 (Ariane Burgess)** – introduces a specific power to frontload payments

Why do we need change?

Food production, and ultimately food security, depend on a stable climate and healthy ecosystems. Farmers are already experiencing the impact of climate change and, without tackling climate emissions and adapting to a warmer planet, our ability to produce food will be increasingly threatened.

The dominant farming methods today make farming Scotland's second biggest source of emissions and a major source of nature loss. But it doesn't have to be this way.

Sustainable and regenerative agriculture has the potential to be a solution to the twinned climate and biodiversity crises. The Bill must create a fair and equitable system that supports farmers to reduce their emissions, restore nature, and build resilience to a changing climate.



Scotland needs a new farm funding system that supports all farmers and crofters in the transition to sustainable farming.

The Scottish Government has made steps towards this through the Bill's process, but LINK members believe that the Bill must be strengthened further to set a clear direction of travel towards a sustainable and regenerative agricultural system, with greater certainty for farmers and crofters as well as strong monitoring and evaluation requirements.

LINK members strongly support the following amendments:

Strengthening the Rural Support Plan

Amendment 8, in the name of Mairi Gougeon

This amendment seeks to significantly strengthen the Bill by outlining the details of the content which should be included in the Rural Support Plan. This includes detail on the support provided in the Rural Support Plan, how financial support is to be divided between each support scheme, any measures intended to support small farmers, crofters and tenant farmers, and desired outcomes from the Plan.

As the Bill is framework legislation, the most important forthcoming agricultural policies will be set out in the Rural Support Plan. It is important that farmers, crofters, and parliamentarians will have a clear understanding of what the Rural Support Plan will include and how it will interact with other legislation and policies. Requiring this detail will ensure that industry has a clearer view of the direction of travel of agricultural policy, particularly as it relates to spending over the course of a Plan.

Amendment 21 in the name of Ariane Burgess

This seeks to place a duty on Ministers to include targets to reduce agriculture's environmental impact in the Rural Support Plan. It is the strong view of LINK's Food and Farming Group that targets are vital to achieve the objectives set out in the Scottish Government's Vision for Agriculture.

Amendment 22 in the name of Ariane Burgess

This amendment gives Ministers the power to set out a pathway to achieving desired outcomes which would reduce agriculture's impact on nature. LINK believes that setting out a clear pathway is necessary to both achieve these objectives while ensuring clarity for industry on future directions of travel.

Monitoring and evaluation

Amendment 9 and amendment 18, in the name of Mairi Gougeon

These amendments require that the support schemes included in each Rural Support Plan must be monitored, evaluated, and subsequently reported on.

LINK members support the requirement to evaluate the progress of each support scheme when setting future Rural Support Plans. This will ensure that support schemes are consistently evolving and improving, while increasing transparency around the spending of public funds. It is a similar requirement to the ex-post evaluation required as part of EU CAP Strategic Plans.



Amendment 10, in the name of Mairi Gougeon

This amendment requires that Ministers prepare and publish a report detailing any support schemes provided and their impacts, following the Plan period. It also gives powers for Ministers to prepare interim reports during the Plan period.

This amendment ensures greater transparency of the distribution of the agricultural budget, as well as any progress it has made towards named objectives. It also ensures that policy can be built upon and improved in the future.

While LINK members support amendment 10, LINK recommends amendment 26 as a stronger and more effective form of evaluation.

Amendments 10A and 10B, in the name of Rhoda Grant

These seek alter amendment 10 to ensure that any measures to redistribute funding are evaluated following the Plan period. This would increase transparency around funding and ensure that redistributive mechanisms are constantly being monitored and improved to ensure greater equity in the farm funding system.

Amendment 10D, in the name of Rachael Hamilton

This makes the interim review of support schemes mandatory. LINK members support this as it strengthens scrutiny and ensures that agriculture policy can continue to develop based on evidence and experience.

Amendment 26, in the name of Ariane Burgess

This amendment requires “ex-ante evaluation” (assessment done to predict impact prior to implementation) and “ex-post evaluation” (an evaluation of the effectiveness of policy after implementation).

Requirement to consult

Amendment 11, in the name of Mairi Gougeon

This amendment places a duty on Ministers to consult with representatives of farmers, crofters, land managers and those living and working in rural communities, as well as several named public bodies such as Food Standards Scotland and NatureScot.

LINK members believe that the Climate Change Committee should also be asked to provide independent advice as part of the process of developing future policy.

Redistribution and support

Amendment 30, in the name of Ariane Burgess

This requires Ministers to consider the distributional impact of support schemes and publish evidence of this thinking. Having regard to distributional and equalities impacts of policy is a key aspect of a Just Transition. This amendment serves to ensure that, as agriculture policy encourages a transition, it does so in a way that is just and fair while retaining flexibility to adopt redistributive measures to future circumstances.



Amendment 32, in the name of Ariane Burgess

This amendment ensures that any capping powers (ie. powers to limit financial support to an individual) are limited to Tier 1 basic payments. The application of such a cap to tier 1 payments (whose public policy objective is income support) is entirely justified – as it ensures that such support is focused on low income farmers/crofters. For other tiers, the public policy benefits (e.g. carbon savings or nature restoration) will be increase as payments increase – as payments will be based on delivery of specific outcomes. This means that capping would, in effect, cap the outcomes that could be delivered – which is not in the public interest.

Amendments 33 and 34, in the name of Ariane Burgess

These amendments give a specific power to frontload payments (ie. pay a higher base payment on the first few acres claimed) 33 specifies this should apply to the first 30 hectares of land while 34 allows the exact amount of land applicable to be determined in secondary legislation. Frontloading is a valuable tool in ensuring greater equity of support payments and can play a valuable role in making smaller farms and crofts more financially viable.

This response represents the collective view of LINK's Food and Farming Group. Members may also respond individually in order to raise more detailed issues that are important to their particular organisation.

Scottish Environment LINK is the forum for Scotland's voluntary environment community, with over 35 member bodies representing a broad spectrum of environmental interests with the common goal of contributing to a more environmentally sustainable society.

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