What should be the priorities of any future agricultural support system in Scotland? Are the needs of the agricultural sector in Scotland different from the rest of the UK?

1. Unprecedented changes are coming, on top of longstanding problems. Past policies have led to dependency, inefficiency and inequality in many cases and will not work for the future. 85% of all CAP support payments directed to those smaller farmers and crofters entitled to Less favoured area payments. The same figure in RUK is almost the exact opposite.

2. Government, parliament, industry and others must cooperate on a 10-15 year strategy for Scottish farming including the transition from the current support system. The ten – fifteen year plan integrating with Ambition 2030 (A growth Strategy for Farming, fishing, Food and Drink). Future policy should aim to support and reward efficiency, productivity and collaborative supply chains.

3. Scottish farmers must grasp the benefits of working collaboratively which will, among other things; strengthen their arm in the supply chain. Uptake of farm assurance and health schemes, which is widespread but not universal, must be encouraged.

What funding will Scotland’s agricultural sector require post-Brexit? What should future agricultural support in Scotland look like, and what goals should it seek to achieve?

4. There must be a transition period of no more than 3-5 years when funding and initially policies should not be changed radically. But industry must not sit back – businesses must use that period of relative continuity to start evolving and making the changes that are needed, while the farm support budget should still be at current levels. We recommend that government cap payments and release money so that new policies and schemes can be trialled and evaluated during the transition period with adequate funding. Devising schemes that better facilitate the closer integration of primary producers, processors and manufacturers to improve productivity.

5. After the transition period, we recognise that there continue to be an element of basic income support, but at much lower levels. Future farm funding must go on a menu of schemes to boost production efficiency, improve skills and training, and enhance natural capital and biodiversity – capped per farm, and tailored to regional or sectoral needs because one size does not fit all. The cap should be based on current receipts for small/medium recipients but
reduced from current levels for big recipients. Detailed policy must evolve, including how new entrants are supported.

6. Support should be designed to encourage producers to make better business decisions based upon efficiency and productivity rather than being channelled down a one size fits all path mandated by government.

- **How should a future agricultural policy seek to accommodate different sectors of the farming community, especially those in remote and less favoured areas, and crofters?**

7. Farm support is not a right, it’s an asset given by the public to help farmers and crofters improve their businesses and deliver what the marketplace does not fund. We recommend that a top priority is mindset change, to help farmers and crofters to become more progressive, entrepreneurial and resilient in a way that is already the culture in the unsupported sectors. All businesses must keep pace with the evolution of demand and societal preferences, and farming is no different.

8. Farmers, crofters and stakeholders must be involved in the regional tailoring of policies, which should reflect the huge diversity of Scotland’s farmland and the resulting regional differences in public value needs and priorities. Scotland has some very high quality land, and also vast amounts of permanent grassland and rough grazing. The specific needs of agriculture in less favoured areas, which is often high nature value farming, must be catered for.

- **What should be included in common frameworks between the UK and devolved administrations in relation to agriculture? What balance should it strike between having a common UK-wide approach and providing flexibility to Scotland’s needs?**

7. The definition of and timeframes associated with the transition period should be agreed across the whole of the UK. Regional tailoring of policy should reflect the additional challenges faced by food producers in remoter areas and island communities. During the transition, policies should not be changed radically. But industry must not sit back – businesses must use that period of relative continuity to start evolving and making the changes that are needed, while the farm support budget should still be at current levels. We recommend that government cap payments and release money so that new policies and schemes can be trialled and evaluated during the transition period with adequate funding.

8. The supply chain must be properly regulated by government, noting the role of both devolved and reserved powers, to make it operate more equitably. Government and industry must make companies more aware of the various avenues available for tackling supply chain issues, which are not limited to those parts of the chain that are regulated statutorily.
9. Common frameworks associated with access to skilled labour should be consistent across the whole of the UK.

- What should be done to meet the long-term labour needs of Scotland’s agricultural sector?

3. The public must be better informed about Scottish farming and what it delivers, and policies must be guided by real evidence about what the public values. A civic conversation, both informing and listening to the public, must start now.

14. The Scottish Food and Drink and farming industries should work hard to become more visible as a career option thereby attracting more young people, this will require sustained focus on explaining the opportunities in schools and further education establishments.

15. Generational renewal has been an issue for a long time and the opportunity to address it now must be taken.

- What role can innovation & technology have in improving productivity in Scottish agriculture?

16. Support schemes must be kept simple with clear objectives – and must not fall into the trap of trying to please everyone. Existing delivery infrastructure can be repurposed after necessary adjustments. Having less complex schemes may release some government resources which can be re-allocated.

17. All forms of technology are moving so fast that Digital Skills Training is absolutely crucial for operational purposes. Also all efforts must be made to assist those with learning difficulties to fulfill their potential.

18. There is a very significant role for innovation and technology in improving productivity. This is right across the food supply system but especially at the point of production through more efficient crop and livestock systems. Modern breeding techniques have the potential to improve varieties of crops and animals, and retaining and maintaining capability in this sensitive area should be supported. Technology has the potential to deliver more efficient and environmentally friendly systems, using more precise input and harvesting technologies on one hand and by designing diversity back into the farming systems on the other (e.g. mixed varieties; mixed species; better rotations; buffer systems; agroforestry systems). Digital agriculture, where comprehensive performance data is used to match productivity with resource (land, soil, water, nutrients) use will also play a part. Understanding and using knowledge of the microbiome in soil, plants and animals will also increase productivity and reduce inputs. Advance plant growing techniques (including Indoor Vertical Farming) are also highly aligned with Scotland’s natural assets (renewable energy; growing expertise; abundant high-quality water) and the
world’s needs (fresher, safer, year-round, more nutritious food). Social science must accompany technological innovation if it is to be accepted and get a social licence but will also be important to understand how agriculture integrates with the much bigger general Rural Economy and it will help discover and learn how social innovations can result in better overall outcomes. Tapping into the work of Scotland’s Main Research Providers (MRP’s) will deliver technologically innovative solutions. Some funding calls are very specific and often prescriptive, the challenge will be to try and make them more enabling and flexible.

19. Preserving and promoting the work of Scotland’s Main Research Providers is fundamental to delivering the above in support of a, “Future Strategy For Scottish Agriculture”. The MRP’s have an ongoing and significant role in contributing to, Transformation Change, Enhancing Natural Capital through creating decision support tools, Improving Production Efficiency and greater Supply Chain collaboration. The work of Scotland’s MRP’s is under increasing budgetary constraint, it is therefore important that the vital research and innovation work that they do is acknowledged. The future part they will play in improving productivity and efficiency, while safeguarding the natural environment will be fundamental to the delivery of Ambition 2030 and it’s aligned to a Future Strategy For Scottish Agriculture.

Regards

Archie

Archie J G Gibson
Executive Director
Agrico UK Limited

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