The questions are answered with this overarching background:

“The current payments are essential and must be retained at or above current levels. However it is equally essential that delivery routes must also change as the current system has led to dependency, inefficiency and inequality in many cases and will not work for the future”

**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?**

Our priorities should be to continue to reshape the attitudes and mindset of our farming communities, politicians, civil servants and rural economy participants, to be progressive and embrace change, encourage best practice in the stewardship of our countryside, and inspire all rural activity to protect our natural capital. Stability must be a focus of any change with a transition period of 3-5 years enabling a future system to be targeted, measurable and deliverable. Such a system must embrace other land use policies all with clear objectives combining production efficiency and further enhancement of the environment delivering a vibrant progressive and resilient industry.

Future policy priorities must also weave in the interests of public goods including biodiversity, wildlife and carbon sequestration and include joint public-private benefits – such as reducing waste and improving soils which are good for the individual business as well as the environment and society. These priorities will deliver benefits for individual businesses as well as the environment and society.

Overall, finance and budget cycles need be more mature and consensual and reflect the long term nature of the farming cycle and the timescales required to deliver the longs term societal issues and not be driven by pure parliamentary cycles and budget bargaining.

A clear demonstrable difference between Scottish and UK agriculture is Less Favoured Areas (LFA) being some 85% of the land area in Scotland compared to rest of the UK. The constraints within LFA mean there is little or no choice but livestock farming or forestry with regional variations. The sheep and suckler cow sectors are examples of LFASS funding supporting farming, crofting and rural populations on the most marginal agricultural land. Continued support is not only valid but vital, However these sectors like all the others must also learn to adapt and modernise with changing patterns of demand and environmental pressures.
Production systems, ecology and environmental schemes are hugely diverse not only in Scotland but across the UK as a whole. One size does not fit all neither within Scotland or the UK. The EU currently acknowledges the specific needs of agriculture in LFA particularly in preventing land abandonment with Scotland the only part of the UK to offer this direct support and must continue to be catered for.

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?

There must be a transition period of no more than 3-5 years, and this is critical for Scotland as a country where food production is major economic generator. Upwards of 7000 EU regulations are expected to change, and with 95% of food law currently overseen by the EU, Scotland must be enabled to model Scottish policy to chime with modern day agriculture, with modern efficiencies as well as accounting for rural crofting and small holding needs.

It should not be overlooked that Scotland already has a ‘High Health Status’ and budgets should protect this the reputation, by continuing to support our farm assurance and health schemes under Scotch PGI denomination and ensure there is a level playing field in trade for these prized credentials. Scotland also remains TB free and efforts should be made in policy to safeguard our reputation.

During the transition period Government should release money so that new policies and schemes can be trialed and evaluated with adequate funding to allow detailed policy to evolve following serious evaluation. Detailed policy must evolve (ie a carrot not stick approach), including how new entrants are supported and an outcome based approach to agri-environment

There should be a menu of schemes to improve productivity, skills and training, enhance natural capital tailored to regional and sectoral needs.

These policies should be agreed not imposed, as history tells us this will engender more collaboration and encourage the long term success of policies. Leading to a more vibrant, progressive and resilient industry whilst delivering food production, environmental enhancement, supporting rural communities and addressing public demands.
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?

All the different constituent parts of agriculture must consider that farm support is not a right - it’s an asset given by the taxpayer to help farmers and crofters improve their businesses and deliver what the marketplace does not fund. A top priority is nurturing new thinking and mindset change, to help farmers in all sectors and crofters become even more progressive, entrepreneurial and resilient in a way that is already the culture for some. All businesses must keep pace with the evolution of demand and societal preferences, and farming is no different.

After the transition period, there must continue to be an element of basic income support. Future farm funding must go on a menu of schemes to boost production efficiency, improve skills and training, and enhance natural capital and biodiversity and tailored to regional or sectoral needs because one size does not fit all as the established ‘Scottish clause’ highlights.

Farmers, crofters and stakeholders must be involved in the regional tailoring of policies, given 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.

It is in Scotland’s interest to keep people on the land and in rural communities, as we have a rural population which has been shaped by the physical land. Scotland is unique as a result but often fragile and these qualities are often what encourages tourism and the need for managed landscapes and a widespread settled workforce in our more remote areas.

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?

During the transition period policies should not be changed radically. Commonality should be sought where policy synergy makes logical sense and worked on and agreed during the transition period and beyond. In some cases mindset change will be even more important as agriculture must not sit back – businesses must use that period of relative continuity to start evolving and making the changes that are and will be needed while the farm support budget is at current levels.

The supply chain too, must be properly regulated by the Scottish and UK government, noting the role of both devolved and reserved powers, to make all
interests function more equitably with the market. Government and the industry must make companies more aware of the various avenues available for tackling supply chain issues, engage in the opportunity to review the regulation for this statutorily encompassing imports and export equally.

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

A mindset change across the board from farmers, politicians, education and the public. An appreciation of what is already being delivered through the production of high quality food and care of the environment.

The expansion of best practice including the use of modern technology, research and development, communication and collaboration should be encouraged and supported. Expanding increases in production efficiencies will reduce waste significantly delivering huge benefits to climate change and make businesses more sustainable.

Regulation for primary food production is essential however much of the regulation applicable to farming and crofting is overly complex resulting in a need to ensure that post Brexit simplified enabling regulations are essential.

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 is required as agriculture has become distanced from many urban dwellers.

Scottish farming and the businesses who rely on the sector must be more visible as career options to attract more young people. A major adjustment in focus from the educational sector in delivering curriculums for schools and FE going forward will encourage this.

Generational renewal remains a worrying issue and the opportunity to address it now must be taken by investigating how to free up farms for new blood and new entrants and facilitate the passing on of businesses.

The positive contribution of agriculture to climate change in terms of adaption and mitigation is an important issue for the industry to address going forward. It will require policy departments to work cohesively and pragmatically to ensure this can be delivered taking account of the diversity of land and sectors in Scotland.
What role can innovation & technology have in improving productivity in Scottish agriculture?

From a delivery perspective, support schemes must be kept simple with clear objectives – and must not fall into the trap of trying to please everyone. The existing IT delivery infrastructure has a wealth of data and the system could be repurposed to meet the new objectives for the sector.

In the longer term the aim must be integrated land management planning, where diverse activities such as farming, stewardship of the countryside and natural assets, forestry, and tourism are planned and overseen in a more holistic and strategic way. If farm support policies are consistent with other relevant government policies and legislation, then Scotland has a chance of being more sustainable and productive across the board with better outcomes for our population.

There is a very significant role for innovation and technology in improving productivity. This is across the food supply system but especially at the point of production through more efficient crop and livestock systems. Improving varieties of crops and animals should be a major emphasis but also more efficient and environmentally friendly systems will be possible by using more precise input and harvesting technologies on one hand and by designing diversity into the farming systems. Digital agriculture, where comprehensive performance data is used to match productivity with resource (land, soil, water, nutrients) should play a part. 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). All forms of technology are moving so fast that Digital Skills Training is absolutely crucial for operational purposes. Ensuring farming takes full advantage of new technologies means that grants/training could be explored. Preserving and promoting the work of Scotland’s Main Research Providers should also be a cornerstone of the support process, as they have a role to play in delivering this type of cutting edge innovation and making new technologies relevant to agriculture.

The role of farming, like the rest of the economy, will be under increasing scrutiny from a climate change perspective. The current international accounting methodology is slightly misleading, because farm emissions are classed as ‘Agriculture’ but some of farmers’ actions to reduce net emissions are hidden under ‘Energy’ or ‘Land Use, Land Use Change and Forestry’ and this should be pursued. Scottish Government policies for farming and climate change must give credit to farmers for all their positive actions.
Supplementary recommendation

The Agriculture Champions Report

The National Council of Rural Advisers Report

Examples of some actions already undertaken/noted

Scottish Government is currently conducting a Public survey to better understand how agriculture and the rural sector is currently understood and valued.

Modern Rural apprenticeship intakes are already +16%.

The Rural Leadership Programme has had great success and continues to grow.

The Advanced Plant Growth Centre is an international collaboration to advance the interest of precision controlled environment

The Irish Land Mobility Service programme of providing tax exemption on land rent as a way of freeing up new entrants access to land.

My thanks to the Ag Champion Chairs (also NCRA members) for their support

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