

Mairi Gougeon,
Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Islands,
Scottish Government,
Edinburgh
By email

5 December 2022

Dear Cabinet Secretary

Consultation on the new Scottish Agriculture Bill

We have responded through official channels to the Scottish Government's Agriculture Bill consultation and wanted to set out some further considerations which we believe are important to help us achieve a thriving food and drink sector for Scotland.

We very much support your overarching aim of ensuring that Scotland is a global leader in sustainable agricultural production. Farming is woven into Scotland's cultural fabric and continues to be the bedrock of our globally renowned food and drink industry.

As you know, both farming and the wider food and drink industry are facing significant challenges with spiralling production costs, a chronic shortage of labour, and an extremely difficult trading environment due to the cost-of-living crisis. These challenges are likely to remain in place for some time. As such, it is critical to make the right decisions now to help our agricultural sector survive and thrive.

The same decision-making process lies at the heart of our work to refresh the national food and drink strategy (Ambition 2030) and programmes of delivery which will underpin it. We are placing a significant focus on achieving our environmental and social goals to complement our important work to support businesses, jobs and communities through economic growth.

Scottish agriculture already makes a significant contribution to this combined effort and the future support framework must continue to support all elements, whilst putting food production at its heart. Ensuring our farmers and crofters can produce food profitably and sustainably provides a foundation to the wider industry and our overall success depends on ensuring a viable farm to fork supply chain.

We have huge ambitions for food and drink and firmly believe the industry can recover swiftly and grow. However, for this to happen we need a policy environment in Scotland that is fully aligned and complementary. We would

therefore ask that you ensure that this is factored into the thinking of how we shape our future agriculture policy.

Our reputation as a land of food and drink has served us well over the past 10 years. Our brand, underpinned by provenance, heritage and high animal welfare standards, is critical to our success. We have strong environmental credentials, which can be underplayed domestically but are respected across the world. Continuing to evolve how we produce our food and drink will further enhance our brand and reputation, enabling us to find even more new markets across the world. We ask that you keep this in sharp focus as your team develops future policies.

Another critical factor is ensuring Scotland's ongoing food security and supporting our farmers to be truly resilient in a continually volatile world. The proposed Bill is helpfully seeking to align with the main objectives of the EU's CAP, including "ensuring a fair income for farmers" and "improving the position of farmers in the food chain". We consider these to be vital to help protect the fundamental role that agriculture plays as the foundation of a successful food and drink industry in Scotland. This also has implications for growing Scotland's economy, including through the NSET objectives of Scotland as a modern trading nation.

Communities are fundamentally about the people within them. To ensure thriving communities we must protect the livelihoods of those who act as stewards for our rural landscapes and produce the food and drink we all enjoy – our farmers and crofters. We can ill afford to lose the knowledge and expertise of those currently leading and working in the sector and key to this is how we manage the transition.

Agriculture in Scotland, as with all other aspects of the food and drink supply chain, deserves a clean, green and prosperous future and our role is to work tirelessly to realise that future for the benefit of all who live and work here. We look forward to continuing our work with you to deliver the changes needed.

Yours sincerely,

John Davidson

Deputy Chief Executive