

NEWS RELEASE

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STFA CALLS FOR "TENANT AWARENESS"

As the farming industry's annual get together at the Royal Highland Show fast approaches, STFA is reminding tenants of the importance of proper representation and support. The Scottish Government has shown itself to be keen to work with stakeholder organisations and is responsive to their views. With an estimated one third of Scotland's farmers being tenants, it is vital their interests are represented to government so they get the support they need to steer them through the maze of tenancy legislation.

Speaking before heading down to Ingliston this week, Chairman Angus McCall said: "The four days at the Show are a great opportunity to discuss tenant affairs with members and this year there is plenty to talk about. With the current volatility in the market place and pressure on rents, there has probably never been a greater need for tenants to have a voice and be listened to.

"Rent notices are everywhere, and there is a concerted campaign by landlords and factors to force rents as high as possible regardless of economics. STFA has already expressed its reservations about the way recent rent reviews have been carried out. It is no coincidence that a rent review case has not appeared before the Land Court since the move away from statutory arbitration in the 2003 Act. Guidance from the court is desperately needed to take some of the heat and stress out of the process which is failing tenants at the moment.

"There is still a huge amount to do to try and pave the way for new entrants into the industry. The new entrant scheme instigated by the Scottish government in the SRDP has barely got past the starting post and, as things stand, the promised £10m could remain unspent. Tenancies have become like hens' teeth and, any available land, has been snapped up by large contract farming operations or neighbouring farmers for eye-watering rents. The whole debate about new entrants has been hijacked by attempts to introduce a freedom of contract model similar to the Farm Business Tenancies in England which have proved themselves to be a land agents charter over the border.

"The next few years will be pivotal for the tenanted sector as negotiations proceed with the remodelling of the Single Farm Payment and the move from a historic to a flatter rate system of support. STFA will be battling to ensure that SFP entitlement remains with the occupier of the land rather than the owner. Brian Pack's appointment to oversee the process is most welcome and we look forward to working with him over the coming months

"Finally STFA will be highlighting the need for "tenant awareness" during the show. Never have tenants needed to be more savvy. The penalty for not taking good accessible legal advice is high. Some welcome news for tenants is the review of the current legal system which many find themselves mired in. Lord Gill, the Lord Justice, recently criticised Scotland's legal system as "Victorian". It is hoped the report he will present to Scottish ministers at the end of June will pave the way for speedier, fairer and cheaper justice.

However, this forthcoming week tenants should put their worries behind them and enjoy a good day out at the Highland. With good weather and record livestock entries, it promises to be a relaxing day out at the show."

** see Scotsman article 09.05.09 <http://news.scotsman.com/Scotland/Senior-judge-hits-out-at-5250755.jp>

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