

News Release
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STFA SPEAKS TO PARLIAMENT

In giving evidence to MSPs on the Rural Affairs Committee today along with other stakeholders' the Scottish Tenant Farmers Association has broadly welcomed the principles behind the EU Commission's proposed reforms to the CAP. However, STFA told the committee that it had reservations over much of the detail which, if implemented, could have severe consequences to Scottish agriculture in general and the tenanted sector in particular.

There has been some controversy about the Commission's introduction of 2011 as a reference year. However, STFA has welcomed the intention to put measures in place to protect tenancies by removing the incentive for landlords to gain vacant possession by 2014 in order to take advantage of the new regime.

Speaking to the Committee, STFA representative Alan Boulton said: "This proposal does not go far enough and will not deter landlords who already hold entitlements from taking land back in hand. As it stands it will also have some unintended consequences for those already farming without entitlements who now find themselves unable to enter the system.

"We believe that the key to protecting tenancies and dealing fairly with new entrants is to find a robust way of defining active farmers in 2011 as eligible applicants. A simple way of achieving this could be by establishing proof of farming activity by way of the SAF in 2011 carrying through on the same land to 2014. Any genuine new entrants post 2011 would then qualify for allocation of entitlements through the national reserve. Linked to a continuously funded and continuously open new entrant scheme this could cater for all genuinely active farmers."

Speaking after the meeting STFA chairman Angus McCall commented: "There was a surprising amount of agreement around the table today, it would appear that the main bones of contention will centre around the implementation of the scheme rather than on the general direction of travel. This bodes well for future negotiations where a unified voice will be a powerful tool in fighting Scotland's corner. There are a number of issues to be resolved, not least managing the transitional period to allow time to adjust to the inevitable drop and redistribution of support payments.

"As expected the proposal to cap payments above €300k is causing disquiet amongst some organisations, but our recent round of member meetings has shown that this is not a big issue for tenant farmers many of whom in fact see capping as an opportunity to redistribute money, for instance through agri-environment schemes.

"We look forward to working with other organisations to create a new regime which will continue to underpin Scottish Agriculture by supporting active farmers while providing a sustainable rural development programme, meeting the required green targets and giving the public good value for its money."