

News Release
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MIXED REACTION FROM STFA ON FORESTRY LEASE PILOT

The Forestry Commission Scotland has announced it is trialling the concept of **leasing land from farmers and other landowners**, establishing new productive woodland through Forest Enterprise Scotland (the Forestry Commission Scotland agency that manages the government's forests) and handing that woodland back to the landowner at the end of the lease period.

The Scottish Tenant Farmers Association (STFA) has expressed its reservations over a new pilot proposed by Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS) to encourage the planting of trees in Scotland through a 10 year leasing scheme. STFA is concerned that, once again, public policy has been formulated without taking account of the different set of conditions under which tenant farmers operate and the impact that such a scheme may have on the tenanted sector.

The Forestry Commission is to be commended on its attempt to involve the farming industry in creating this new initiative, but it should recognise that with a third of Scotland's agricultural land tenanted, some provision should have been made to accommodate the aspirations of tenant farmers who have had the right to plant and harvest timber since 2003. There are already a number of tenants who are involved in tree planting under Rural Priorities and there may be many more who would be interested in taking part in this pilot project if their leases were to allow them to sub-let.

STFA also is wary of initiatives which will encourage land to be permanently removed from livestock production. Speaking the day after the Lairg sheep sales STFA chairman Angus McCall said; "It is ironic that after the tremendous sale of lambs yesterday which put a spring into the step of sheep men we should be talking about a scheme which could lead to extensive planting of some of the best marginal hill land at the expense of livestock production, when we should be discussing how to encourage sheep back onto the hills and glens. Unfortunately this scheme may well be seen as an attractive alternative to renting out land for farming and STFA is well aware of continuing efforts by landlords to take land out of secure tenure where possible. However, I am heartened to learn that land resumed from a tenancy against the tenant's will is not going to be eligible for the leasing scheme.

STFA representative Alastair Nairn from Glenlivet, who attended the Commission's launch of the leasing scheme in Stirling, welcomed the positive approach that FCS seemed to be taking although he expressed concerns as to the fate of the planted land after the expiry of the 10 year lease: "The Highlands of Scotland are full of examples of forestry plantations which have seen little of no maintenance and thinning and I am concerned that this type of initiative will go the same way.

"Trees are like any other crop, they need attention right up to the day they are harvested. I would like to have an assurance that these new plantings will be subject to agreements that will ensure adequate husbandry of the crop, maintenance of fencing and vermin control. An unkempt plantation not only is uneconomic and unsightly, but it also impacts on the neighbours. We must learn from the lessons of the past and make better use of public money."