

News Release
Scottish Tenant Farmers Association
Culmally Farm
Golspie
Sutherland
KW10 6TA
stfa@tfascotland.org.uk

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TENANT FARMERS CALL FOR GREATER CONTROL OVER TREE PLANTING ON FARMLAND

Tenant farmers in Scotland are becoming increasingly worried at the amount of land being lost to agriculture as a result of the Scottish Government's tree planting targets and enhanced subsidy payments.

Responding to calls from members STFA Chairman Angus McCall said: "The latest announcement to increase forestry grants by 10% will undoubtedly encourage more landowners to put more of their land under trees as is becoming apparent from reports on the ground. The worry is that this trend will continue with changes to agricultural support in the future. Tree planting is virtually unregulated, allowing potentially productive farmland to be removed from food production for generations without any planning control or public scrutiny.

"Instead of competing, farming and forestry should work together to make the best use of the land available. There are plenty of examples where landowners use tree planting to enhance livestock production, and the converse must be true as well. Tenant farmers can play their part too and should be encouraged to plant trees which can benefit their farming operations as well as making a contribution to climate change targets."

The Scottish Tenant Farmers Association is calling on the Scottish Government to encourage greater integration of land use to balance the needs of farming and to control tree planting on farmland.

The drive for more trees has led to the wholesale planting of some farms. The Scottish Forestry Commission and private investors have been purchasing a number of farms in the last few years usually outbidding farmers.

The Government has set ambitious tree planting targets but it must ensure that the best use is made of our land, whether it is publicly or privately owned. Reference is frequently made to the "right tree in the right place" but there is no mechanism to ensure this happens. The agricultural industry and local communities should be consulted on afforestation plans and the subsequent economic and social impact it may have on those communities, especially where it is proposed that to take whole farms out of agricultural production.

This week's publication of the Global Food and Farming Futures Foresight report has once again put food security at the top of the agenda, highlighting future demands on food with a rapidly increasing world population. Whilst STFA acknowledges the need for increased tree planting to meet climate change targets and to satisfy the demands of the timber industry, it does not believe that it should take place at the expense of agriculture and its prime purpose of producing food. Scotland's farmers are already playing their part in helping to mitigate climate change and have a good reputation in producing food with reduced inputs and subsequent impact on the environment.

STFA is writing to the Cabinet Secretary to stress the need for an integrated land management strategy and for controls over land to be taken out of agricultural use to ensure that land is managed in the best public interest.

For further information contact:

Angus McCall

Tel: 01463 633275

Mob: 07767 756840