

News Release
Scottish Tenant Farmers Association
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STFA WELCOMES NEW ENTRANT INITIATIVE

CAP reform, issues facing tenant farmers and opportunities for new entrants were discussed at some length today at a meeting with Cabinet Secretary Richard Lochhead, at Culmally Farm in Sutherland, hosted by Angus McCall, Chairman of the Scottish Tenant Farmers Association.

The plight of new entrants to agriculture and the lack of available land to let formed a large part of the discussion and attending tenant members were pleased at the Cabinet Secretary's positive response to STFA's proposal that the Scottish Government should initiate the creation of starter units for new entrants through Forestry Commission Scotland's holdings.

Speaking after the meeting STFA chairman Angus McCall said; "We raised the possibility of the Scottish Government using some of the land under its control to create starter units for young entrants and are pleased that the Cabinet Secretary is enthusiastic about the idea which has now taken a step forward. I understand that the Forestry Commission is now planning to release some land back into farming and actively looking to create opportunities for new entrants on the farms currently part of its investment portfolio.

"The lack of land available for let has been well documented over the last few years. The large estates seem reluctant to rent out land for new entrants and I am delighted that Richard Lochhead has given his backing to an initiative which may shed some light at the end of the tunnel for would be farmers. I hope that the government's example will encourage others to follow suit so the next generation of farmers is not lost."

Speaking at the meeting Richard Lochhead said he welcomed the chance to learn more about the difficult issues facing tenant farmers arising from the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy. He was told that the move to area-based support could have a serious impact on the future of tenanted sector and may lead to less land being rented out and the importance of robust activity criteria to ensure that productive farming was rewarded. The Cabinet Secretary was also reminded of the need to deliver support to those who are not currently receiving SFP and the need to remove support from "slipper farmers".

The continuing need for inward investment in tenanted farms through ongoing maintenance and improvements and the importance of security of tenure giving the tenant confidence to invest was also highlighted to Mr Lochhead during a short tour of the farm.

Commenting on the visit Angus McCall said; "We have had a really useful afternoon with Richard Lochhead and covered a range of topics. I was also pleased that he agreed with us that there is a dire need to tackle the way in which disputes are

resolved. Whereas the Land Court may be suitable for complex legal issues there is a need to develop a fast track affordable system so that farming businesses are not involved in a mire of litigation that can last years as demonstrated by several cases. STFA has been exploring the use of informal arbitration with SAAVA and other bodies and looks forward to making progress in developing a new method of dealing with disputes in the near future.”

Notes for editors:

Culmally Farm is 970 acre tenanted upland unit with 470 acres of arable and inbye and 500 acres of hill on the east coast of Sutherland. McCall family have rented the farm from Sutherland Estates since 1970.

Stocking on the farm - 110 cows, 400 ewes and 200 acres of barley, mainly grown for malting. The cattle enterprise consists of a 50 pedigree herd of Luing and 60 Simmental cross cows; steer calves sold forward store and heifers for breeding. The 400 flock is mainly North Country Cheviot and Cheviot Mule ewes with finished lambs sold through Mey Selections.

Barley is marketed through Highland Grain Ltd with some retained for feed.