

News Release  
Scottish Tenant Farmers Association  
Culmailly Farm  
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KW10 6TA

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STFA GIVES QUALIFIED WELCOME TO RURAL PRIORITIES  
ANNOUNCEMENT

The Scottish Tenant Farmers Association (STFA) has welcomed the Scottish Government's commitment to explore the feasibility of introducing continuous assessment for processing small-scale projects. For some time STFA has been critical of the competitive nature of the Rural Priorities scheme and its' points system which has disadvantaged small and medium size farming businesses and less ambitious projects.

Commenting on today's announcement STFAS Chairman Angus McCall said: "There are many family farms to whom Rural Priorities have been a closed book. These smaller farmers could have derived tremendous benefit from modest injections of capital to assist the sustainability of their businesses but, to date, they have felt themselves excluded from applying for business development or agri-environment projects because they are unable to achieve the necessary points.

"There are also a number of farmers who would like to play their part in contributing towards the national priorities of coping with climate change, protecting and enhancing biodiversity and landscapes, improving water quality as well as improving the viability and competitiveness of their businesses but do not want to commit themselves to a large scale agri-environment scheme. Provision should be made to enable them to undertake small-scale projects such as fencing off watercourses to preserve water quality and comply with increasing regulations on diffuse pollution. I would urge the Cabinet Secretary to pursue his commitment to give serious consideration to implement changes to allow access to funding for small projects outside the limited scope of Land Managers Options.

"With the bulk of our members medium size family farms, STFA also welcomes the decision to cap business developments, but would question how much effect a ceiling as high as £250,000 will have, however this measure has come far too late. It would have made more sense to set a ceiling at the start of the programme to allow maximum penetration of Rural Priorities and to have raised the ceiling towards the end of the scheme if necessary. Having taken the decision to reduce cap expenditure on business development projects, it is not fair that those applications already in the pipeline should be delayed until 2011. This will inevitably cause disruption to applicants who will have worked hard to do what is necessary to get their submissions on time. Shifting goalposts is simply not acceptable.

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