

News from the Farm Advisory Service:



FAS TV: Crofting Cattle Improvement Scheme

In this episode of FAS TV, we visit Knocknagael Farm to hear about the Scottish Government's Crofting Cattle Improvement Scheme which leases pedigree beef bulls to crofters who may not be able to afford, or have the facilities to winter and maintain a bull. We visit crofter George MacKay who discusses the benefits of the scheme for his business, and Sarah Balfour from SAC Consulting discusses the important considerations when bringing a new bull home to the farm.

To watch, use the QR code below or find us by searching for Scotland's Farm Advisory Service on YouTube



Farm Advisory Service Newsletters

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Understanding the importance of soil health

When talking about soil health, we often think about a rich brown soil, that's friable with good tilth. It has an "earthy" smell, indicating good aeration. Often earthworms are visible as you dig into it. As a farmer or crofter, it is important to understand whether a soil is in good health as this can build resilience on farm, a healthy soil is vital in withstanding extreme weather events and maximising crop growth.

The Farm Advisory Service (FAS) soil and nutrient management specialist advice option provides £1,000 of funding enabling you to bring in an expert

adviser to prepare a soil and nutrient management plan. An adviser can help you understand what your soil's current chemical properties mean in terms of yield potential. They can also assess compaction and erosion risk, as well as focusing on soil biodiversity and the overall soil health of your farm.

Up to £2,000 of funding is available for two special advice options through FAS. For advice on the best grant options for your business, help finding an adviser, and to apply for funding, contact FAS at advice@fas.scot or 0300 323 0161. More information can be found on the FAS website at www.fas.scot/advice-grants/.

Input costs: fertiliser update

The eye watering costs of 2022 and 2023 prompted or forced many farmers into thinking differently and reducing their fertiliser use.

It is anticipated that fertiliser use in 2023 was down 20%, a marked reduction from the trend seen in the preceding 10 years. The table below shows the difference in use in tonnage of key nutrients applied in the UK between 2012 and 2022 as reported by AIC fertiliser statistics report 2023.

Long term fertiliser use trends

Nutrient	Tons used in 2011/12 (000t)	Tons used in 2021/22 (000t)	Difference
Nitrogen	863	1000	- 13.7%
Phosphate	188	110	- 41.5%
Potash	259	197	- 23.9%
Sulphur	156	191	+ 22.4%

Sustaining lower inputs

Lower fertiliser use is good for the pocket and good for the environment, but we must consider how we make reduced use sustainable for our businesses in the long term. Sustainable reductions in fertiliser can be achieved through considering the following management practices:

- Maintaining an appropriate soil pH, phosphate, and potash levels for optimum availability of nutrients.
- Ensuring good soil structure encouraging healthy roots and uptakes of nutrient.
- Inclusion of legumes in rotations and grass swards.
- Applying nitrogen in suitable conditions when crop response will be greatest.
- Preparing feed budgets and measuring yields to match supply with demand of forage.
- Using yield information to assess response to nitrogen applications and establish an optimum rate.
- Maintain equipment and use technology to reduce waste and emissions.
- Make better use of organic manures and other available nutrient sources through analysis and preparation of an annual nutrient management plan.
- Inclusion of sulphur in grades to optimise nitrogen uptake.
- Target applications to the crops and grasses which will provide the greatest response.

Lorna Galloway, SAC Consulting

To read the full article, please visit:

www.fas.scot/article/agribusiness-news-march-2024-input-costs-fertiliser/

The return of the Agri-Environment Climate Scheme 2024



The Agri-Environment Climate Scheme (AECS) is Scotland's principal environmental scheme and the main mechanism of support for farmers and crofters looking to positively position themselves for nature net gain. The scheme offers participants set payments for agreed management practices that are tied to high nature value farming principles. It also offers supplementary support for capital infrastructure to help deliver specific management options.

With Scottish Government having previously announced the dual crises of climate change and biodiversity decline, AECS has a range of different land management options that aim to promote good practice. These include retention of winter stubble for wildlife and water quality, grazing exclusion periods to benefit national priority bird species or the sustainable management of semi-natural habitats, like species-rich grassland pastures, wetlands, areas of scrub or even extensive upland parcels. The scheme has been designed to offer something for everyone, regardless of business type, including options specifically for small units.

Applications

AECS is competitive as there is a limited budget, so proposals are chosen which offer the greatest benefits for nature. Each application is scored on a number of factors, including scale of delivery, national priorities, habitat linkage, long-term benefit, value for money and collaboration, along with other considerations. Prospective applicants are encouraged to develop comprehensive plans that build points across a number of these areas for the best chance of success. The points threshold is established annually for all applications, but only after the submission deadline so applicants and agents do not know in advance exactly how many points will be required for approval.

Broadly speaking the scheme offers support across three main areas, the first of these being environmental management options across land parcels and on the farm steading. These tend to focus on provision and management of farmland habitats and pollution mitigation. Secondly, AECS provides support for conversion to or continuation of organic farming practices and thirdly, support with improving slurry storage to bring a business up to six months storage capacity.

Each funding stream has its own application window for 2024 so it is crucial that businesses apply within the correct timeframe:

- Slurry stores: 14th February 2024 - 19th April 2024.
- Stand-alone organic conversion and maintenance: 1st February 2024 – 31st July 2024.
- Agri-environment: 1st February 2024 – 10th June 2024.

Note: If you are applying for organic conversion and maintenance as part of a single application with agri-environment management it must be submitted by the 10th June deadline.

This new funding round will see the return and expansion of some management options that were previously capped. In an effort to increase the support available for organic farming, the 1,000ha limit on claimable land has been removed, allowing businesses to maximise what they are eligible for. Also returning this year is funding for pond creation and restoration, though there is a cap on total claimable area – 2,000m² per application and 600m² per pond. The cap on the creation of hedgerows has been increased from 500m to 1,000m. In addition, the following capital support is also returning:

- Restoring drystone or flagstone dykes.
- Heather cutting, but not muirburn.
- Primary treatment of bracken – mechanised.
- Follow up treatment of bracken – mechanised.

Please note that the chemical control of bracken is no longer funded through AECS following the decision by the manufacturers of Asulam not to pursue authorisation for the chemical in the UK.

Those businesses interested in exploring their options are encouraged to get in touch with a local advisor as soon as possible, and where an application will impact a site designated for its nature value it is highly recommended that the business seek early engagement with NatureScot.

Alexander Pirie, SAC Consulting

Scotland's Farm Advisory Service (FAS) is funded by the Scottish Government, providing information and resources aimed at increasing the profitability and sustainability of farms and crofts. Grant support, a full programme of events, a subscription service for crofts and small farms, and a range of articles and publications form the core of this service which is designed to provide integrated advice for farmers and crofters across Scotland.



National Advice Hub
T: 0300 323 0161
E: advice@fas.scot
W: www.fas.scot

If you need more advice on any topic, the Farm Advisory Service has a range of support and help available:

Advice line

For free telephone advice on a wide variety of topics including cross compliance, water framework directive requirements, climate change and other technical issues call us on 0300 323 0161 or email advice@fas.scot. The advice line operates between 9am and 5pm Monday to Friday.

Bespoke Advice and Grants

FAS can also help you to increase the profitability and sustainability of your farming business through Scottish Government grants including Integrated Land Management Plans (ILMPs) – worth up to £1,200.

The ILMP will identify opportunities and cost savings for your business, based on an independent and confidential assessment of your business by an experienced farm business adviser of your choosing. As part of your plan you can choose to benefit from up to two further specialist advice plans.

Online

Our website contains articles, videos and much more at www.fas.scot



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