



Soil Association Scotland's Farming for the Future Knowledge Transfer Programme



**Final Report for
KTIF-011-2016**

January 2021

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1. PROJECT TITLE/APPLICANT

1.1 Title

Farming for the Future: KTIF/011/2016

1.2 Overview of Soil Association Scotland

[The Soil Association](https://www.soilassociation.org/)¹ established in 1946, is the UK's leading charity working for healthy, humane and sustainable food, farming and land use. The Soil Association is registered with the Charity Commission for England and Wales, charity number 206862 and with the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator, charity number SCO39168.

The Charity has a wholly owned subsidiary Soil Association Certification Limited, the UK's largest organic certification body. This is run as a not-for-profit company that delivers parts of the Charity's strategy and generates financial returns that are put back into the Charity's wider work. It also audits other schemes including FSC and PEFC forestry standards. The Charity is a company limited by guarantee and governed by Articles of Association. The governing body of the Charity is the Board of Trustees, who are also the directors for the purposes of company law.

The Soil Association (charity and certification body) currently employs around 240 people across the UK, with 22 full-time equivalent staff based in Scotland. Income to the Charity for the financial year 2019/20 was £9,208,000, with around 10% of that income attributable to Scotland. Income is received from a range of sources including government grants, trusts and foundations, programme partner organisations and private donations.²

[Soil Association Scotland](https://www.soilassociation.org/our-work-in-scotland/)³ was created in 2002, to provide a focus for the Charity's work in Scotland. The Charity has a long and successful track record of working with the Scottish Government and partners organisations to deliver programmes of work for sustainable and healthy food, farming and land use. Our programmes are delivered in partnership with a wide range of public and non-governmental organisations. These programmes aim to demonstrate and enable practical solutions for transforming the way we way eat, farm and care for the natural world to restore nature, a safe climate and health. Our current partnership programmes of work include:

- KTIF funded Operational Group 'Farming for Biodiversity' (KTIF/035/2020) to which will provide a practical management, environmental and business framework for farmers interested in implementing rotational conservation (mob) grazing.
- KTIF funded knowledge transfer 'Agroforestry in Action' project (KTIF/038/2020) which will increase interest in and adoption of agroforestry practices in Scotland by highlighting Scotland-specific best practice and resources and providing advice and support to increase tree planting on farms.

Rural Innovation Support Service which brings the right people together to help farmers and crofters across Scotland to and get their innovative ideas for solving a business challenge or developing a new business opportunity off the ground. (Delivered as part of the Scottish Rural Network in partnership with Scotland's Agricultural Organisation Society (SAOS), SAC Consulting and Scottish Food and Drink.)

- Food for Life Scotland which supports local authorities across Scotland to put more local food on the table and serve fresh, healthy, and sustainable meals in their schools through the Food for Life Served Here award. (Funded by the Scottish Government.) Our UK-wide National Lottery Community Fund Food Get Togethers project supports and facilitates regular community activities that connect people from all ages and backgrounds through food.

¹ <https://www.soilassociation.org/>

² <https://www.soilassociation.org/about-us/annual-review-and-finances/>

³ <https://www.soilassociation.org/our-work-in-scotland/>

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Farming for the Future (FFF) was a three-year knowledge transfer, skills development and innovation programme which commenced on 1 September 2018 and completed on 31 December 2020. The purpose of FFF was to support farmers and crofters across Scotland interested in productive and profitable farming and land use, using low-input and sustainable approaches to build financial and environmental resilience in a changing climate. FFF was part-funded by the Scottish Rural Development Programme's Knowledge Transfer and Innovation Fund with co-funding from Scottish Forestry, RSPB Scotland, Scottish Water and Quality Meat Scotland.

Over its lifetime, FFF sought to directly support and benefit in the region of 700 farmers and crofters who represent around 500 agricultural businesses across Scotland. We anticipated that many more would access knowledge and information through related dissemination activities and materials including webinars and downloads. FFF's key objectives were to:

- Build a strong knowledge and skills base for productive, profitable and sustainable agriculture
- Increase the economic and environmental performance of Scottish agriculture by promoting and supporting the practical implementation of actions

FFF sought to achieve its objectives by facilitating the delivery of interactive knowledge and skills development events and related demonstration and dissemination activities. FFF focused on low-input and sustainable farming and land-use covering four broad themes: (1) Soil management (2) Crop and grassland management (3) Animal health and productivity (4) Woodland creation and management and (5) Organic farming which is a SRDP National Priority. A key feature running across these themes was to promote multiple beneficial actions which are good for farming, the environment and climate change based on enabling farmers to know what resources they have and how to optimise these resources. In March 2020, face-to-face events were moved on-line to comply with Covid-19 restrictions.

840 farmers, crofters, land managers and other people working in agri-food businesses and services across participated in FFF events. The evaluation of FFF demonstrates a marked increase across knowledge, ability/skills and confidence (particularly knowledge) amongst participants. Results overall highlight a positive picture in terms of motivation and intention to adopt sustainable practices, and a change in attitudes towards practices, especially to farming and biodiversity, climate change, low input farming and woodland creation. Over 80% of those participating in FFF said they were or would consider implementing positive management changes as a result of attending an FFF event. FFF has demonstrated that there is a farmer-led demand for on-going support that values and builds on their knowledge and experience, and more opportunities for peer-to-peer support, co-creation and network building to increase skills, knowledge and confidence. Key recommendations arising from our experience of delivering the programme and findings from the evaluation include:

- Provide more opportunities (smaller groups of farmers meeting on a regular basis) which encourage greater participation with longer-term engagement.
- Use on-line/virtual events to reach a wider audience including those managing land in remote locations.
- Build on increasing interest amongst farmers and crofters in agroforestry.
- Support farmer-led innovation using the Operational Group model to help farmers develop their own solutions that work for their own business, and mainstream best practice for nature-based solutions.
- Support more capacity building and network development - building confidence and ability through innovation, skills and knowledge, and networks to share ideas and identify opportunities.
- Facilitate a more targeted landscape scale approach to enable farmers and land managers to collaborate and collectively deliver impactful environmental benefits across a shared place.
- Promote an outcome-based approach which gives farmers the responsibility to implement sustainable management practices which deliver integrated environmental and business benefits.
- Engage more with farmers and key stakeholders to identify and address barriers to the uptake of sustainable practices.

3. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

3.1 Aims and objectives

Farming for the Future (FFF) was a three-year knowledge transfer, skills development and innovation programme which commenced on 1 September 2018 and completed on 31 December 2020. The purpose of FFF was to support farmers and crofters across Scotland interested in productive and profitable farming and land use, using low-input and sustainable approaches to build financial and environmental resilience in a changing climate. FFF was part-funded by the Scottish Rural Development Programme's Knowledge Transfer and Innovation Fund with co-funding from Scottish Forestry, RSPB Scotland, Scottish Water and Quality Meat Scotland.

Over its lifetime, FFF sought to directly support and benefit in the region of 700 farmers and crofters who represent around 500 agricultural businesses across Scotland. We anticipated that many more would access knowledge and information through related dissemination activities and materials including webinars and downloads. The aims of and objectives of FFF were to:

Build a strong knowledge and skills base for productive, profitable and sustainable agriculture and land use amongst Scotland's rural communities by:

- Reaching and engaging new audiences of farmers, including new entrants and young people, to build their knowledge and skills for low-input and sustainable farming.
- Encouraging and enabling continuous professional learning and development for all farmers.
- Facilitating knowledge exchange, mentoring, networking and collaboration between farmers.
- Fostering and supporting farmer-led innovation.
- Raise awareness of the opportunities that technology and smart farming presents.

Increase the economic and environmental performance of Scottish agriculture by promoting and supporting the practical implementation of actions which:

- Improve long-term business viability.
- Reduce use of external inputs.
- Increase on-farm efficiency.
- Improve animal health and welfare.
- Improve soil health and function.
- Protect and enhance agro-ecosystems and biodiversity.
- Cut greenhouse gas emissions and sequester carbon.

FFF sought to achieve its aim and objectives by facilitating the delivery of interactive knowledge and skills development events and related demonstration, information and dissemination activities. FFF focused on low-input and sustainable farming and land-use covering four broad themes: (1) Soil management (2) Crop and grassland management (3) Animal health and productivity (4) Woodland creation and management and (5) Organic farming which is a SRDP National Priority.

A key feature of FFF was to promote multiple beneficial actions which are good for farming, the environment and climate change based on enabling farmers to know what resources they have and how to optimise these resources. FFF also encouraged collaboration between farmers and land managers for actions across multiple land holdings to deliver significant environmental, economic and social benefits at a landscape/ecosystem level.

FFF's aims and objectives had a very strong fit with the EU Rural Development Regulation (RDR) and SRDP-KTIF Priorities and supported specific objectives set out in 'Land Use Strategy 2016-2021' and 'Organic Ambitions: Scottish Organic Action Plan 2016-2020' and Scottish Government's policy to reduce emissions in the agriculture sector.

3.2 Activities

Farming for the Future delivered the following range of activities aimed at farmers, crofters and other land managers at locations across Scotland to achieve its objectives.

INTRODUCTORY EVENTS: one-day practical farm-based events led by expert speakers at locations around Scotland with a focus on: soil management; grassland and crop management; animal productivity and health; and woodland creation and management. Events were designed to accommodate between 18–25, aimed at all farmers who wanted a sound introduction to the FFF’s key themes by learning from leading experts and pioneer farmers.

SPECIALIST EVENTS: half-day events aimed at smaller groups of between 7–15 participants, for farmers who wanted to gain deeper insight into specific subjects, topical issues, challenges and best practical solutions, and have more regular opportunities to meet and learn from each other. These included:

Farm-based walk-and-talk events: led by host farmers and/or expert facilitators, aimed at farmers interested in coming together to share their knowledge and ideas for specific aspects of low-input, agroecological, organic farming.

Workshops: led by expert facilitators which provided a forum for discussion on a specific topic with practical/hands-on activities. Workshops were held on-farm or in an indoor venue depending on the subject matter.

Field labs: led by farmers with input from expert facilitators/ researchers where appropriate, aimed at overcoming specific practical challenges in the field using low-input and organic techniques. Typically, the same group met 3-4 times over the lifetime of the lab (usually 12-18 months) to follow the progress of novel/innovative management practices in action.

Webinars: online interactive seminars led by experts, with input from Soil Association facilitators aimed at farmers who wished to gain insight into to specific topics.

ADVICE AND SIGN-POSTING: advice and support including signposting to appropriate advisory services offered to all event participants to help implement measures and ensure good ideas come to fruition.

ANNUAL EVENTS: these were one day annual events to bring large groups of farmers, industry bodies and experts together to promote knowledge transfer and exchange with a focus on specific topical subjects around low-input and sustainable farming and help identify priorities for future action.⁴

SUPPORTING RESOURCES: these included information packs (for face-to-face event participants), email with links to resources (for webinar participants), case studies, films and uploaded webinars. Wider dissemination was promoted through: social media: tweeting links to news, resources, and highlights; highlighting events, case studies, best practice in industry journals; and Farm Advisory Service (FAS) – all results and information generated were offered/provided to the service – and other organisations.

3.4 Impact of COVID-19

From March 2020 – December 2020 all face-to-face events were discontinued to comply with Covid-19 restrictions and all events were moved on-line into webinar format. One of the advantages of the webinar format is that the number of participants per event can be significantly higher than for physical ones. Despite some technical challenges, FFF webinars proved to be very popular attracting a higher number of participants than face-to-face events. Since an event’s location was no longer an obstacle to participation, we reached a larger and wider audience including farmers and crofters managing land in more remote locations.

3.5 Opportunities and problems addressed

Industry need and demand

FFF was supported by a wide range of organisations including: Scottish Forestry, Quality Meat Scotland, NFU Scotland, Scottish Water, Woodland Trust Scotland, RSPB Scotland and James Hutton Institute. FFF

⁴ This did not proceed due to Covid-19 restrictions

content was informed through direct engagement with farmers and industry and research bodies. Based on this dialogue FFF focused on the following themes, which addressed industry and SRDP priorities.

Soil management

Healthy soil is a precious natural resource and essential to a successful and sustainable farming industry. Not only influencing how well grass and forage crops grow but the quality of the feed they produce. As soil plays such an integral part in farming it is a key objective of the programme is to increase farmers' knowledge, skills and understanding to be able to identify and resolve issues which affect their own soils, and improve its health, productivity and sustainability.

Grassland and crop management

Scotland is famous for the quality of its produce and maintaining the reputation and quality of our produce is important for the future health of our industry. The long-term viability of farming in Scotland depends on the sustainable management of our agricultural habitats. We need to achieve a balance between maximising production, conserving biodiversity and maintaining ecosystem functions.

Grassland and cropped land are important agricultural habitats in Scotland. Scotland's climate is well suited to growing grass. Beef, lamb, and milk are important Scottish products, and in Scotland there is the opportunity to use grass for their production in a way that is good for the animals, good for the environment, and good for the bottom line. With a substantial part of Scotland's ploughable area laid down to grass we need to consider how we can make best use of this asset.

Nearly 10% of the land in Scotland produces crops, and crops account for around a third of our agricultural output. Cereals, potatoes, and oilseed rape are the main crops produced in Scotland and are important ingredients of high-quality Scottish produce. Efficient use of resources is strongly related to reducing crop production costs and improving profitability. Efficient use of resources is also strongly related to a reduced environmental impact and protecting Scotland's natural capital.

Animal productivity and health

The Scottish livestock sector accounts for around 50% of all agricultural output, 80% of land used for agriculture, and delivers important economic and social benefits especially in fragile rural areas. Non-intensive livestock farming also plays a crucial role in maintaining iconic landscapes and wildlife habitats throughout Scotland, particularly in the Highlands and Islands where much of the land is classed as High Nature Value and sequesters and stores huge amounts of carbon in rough pasture and grassland. Around 70% of all participants on our KTIF programmes managed a livestock enterprise. A key priority for the livestock sector is to increase its productivity and profitability and continue to reduce its carbon footprint in a changing climate and economic landscape.

The Scottish Government has also made "reduce wastage by improving livestock health" a key action to reduce emissions and tackle climate change. The programme will complement and add value to the work of Quality Meat Scotland to reach and support more of Scotland's livestock farmers by promoting best management practices to improve productivity.

Woodland creation and management

There is increasing interest amongst farmers and crofters in the multiple environmental and economic benefits afforded by trees on farms and crofts – protection from soil erosion, shelter for livestock and crops, pollution abatement, provision of wood fuel, habitat for wildlife and timber/wood for sale etc. Promoting the benefits as a holistic package to farmers and crofters using the guiding principle "the right tree in the right place" will help contribute to the Scottish Government's woodland expansion objectives and the productive and sustainable management of existing woodland.

Organic farming

FFF supported the National Priority for organic farming by raising awareness of and encouraging interest in organic production across all appropriate programme activities. This involved showcasing successful

organic farms and growing enterprises as part of the farm walk-and-talk element of events, and signposting interested farmers, crofters and growers to appropriate advisory services.

Economic context

Improving the bottom line is paramount for farmers and a fundamental objective of the programme, which explicitly promotes the reduced use of purchased inputs (including synthetic fertilisers, feed concentrates, etc.) by increasing recycling, re-use and efficient management of existing on-farm resources.

All farms which adopt these principles should be able to demonstrate a range of tangible economic benefits including immediate financial savings as well as longer-term positive business impacts. Productive on-farm woodland provides a range of commercial and cost saving opportunities: biomass for on-farm energy use; timber and wood fuel for sale; wood chip for livestock bedding and timber for fencing; cost-effective shelter and shade for livestock; wind-breaks to reduce damage to crops.

FFF was designed to be responsive to farmers' needs. In March 2020, when Covid-19 restrictions were introduced, many farmers lost traditional markets e.g. supplying restaurant and hospitality businesses. After consulting with farmers, we expanded FFF content to include events designed to help farmers address challenges and explore new business opportunities e.g. selling on-line direct to new markets, local/short supply chain collaboration.

Environmental context

Based on scientific evidence, farms which adopt low-input and sustainable production techniques should have a beneficial impact on the environment.

Reduce greenhouse gas emissions

The agricultural and related land use sector in Scotland accounts for 23.4% of total greenhouse gas emissions. Emissions from the agriculture sector are largely non-CO₂ gases, with half due to nitrous oxide (N₂O) and 42% due to methane (CH₄). The main cause of agricultural N₂O emissions (298 times more potent than CO₂ in terms of their global warming potential) is the application of synthetic fertiliser to agricultural soils.

Farms which adopt alternative techniques including nitrogen-fixing legumes, green manures and crop rotation should reduce their direct N₂O emissions. CH₄ emissions (25 times more potent than CO₂) originate from livestock production. Best practice advice suggests that livestock farms which improve their efficiency and productivity across the business can significantly improve their on-farm carbon balance.

Sequester and store carbon

Farms which increase the use of organic fertilisers and fertility-building leys with legumes and cover crops, should further the production of soil organic matter which removes CO₂ from the atmosphere and stores it in the soil. Ensuring the viability of extensive livestock farms will help maintain significant carbon stores in rough pasture and grassland. Farms that plant trees should improve their on-farm carbon balance and make a valuable contribution to the Scottish Government's woodland planting objectives.

Protect soil and water quality

Erosion and climate change are cited by the Scottish Soil Framework as the biggest threats to Scotland's soils. Climate change will also exacerbate soil erosion, pollution and flood damage, but the threats can be minimised if appropriate strategies are adopted. Farms which increase their soil organic matter should improve water retention and drainage, and reduce the risk of soil erosion, flooding and diffuse pollution into freshwater and marine bodies (SEPA states that 18% of Scotland's water bodies are in less than 'good status' as a result of diffuse pollution from agriculture.) Evidence shows that trees on farms can also deliver these benefits and help absorb harmful ammonia emissions from livestock.

Benefit biodiversity

Farms which adopt low-input and organic management techniques, including actions supported through the SRDP Agri-environment-climate scheme, should benefit biodiversity. For example, meta-analysis studies show that organically farmed land supports a greater abundance and diversity of flora and fauna than non-organically farmed land: on average 34% more species (50% more for wild pollinators) and 50% higher numbers of wildlife.

A recent study also shows that fields around organic farms have more species of wild plants which are beneficial for birds, pollinators and other wildlife. Extensive beef production – suckler cows on low-input grassland – is crucial to the maintenance of many hill and upland habitats, and a range of wildlife including priority species which these habitats support. Farms which create new woodland should provide valuable habitat for a wide range of wildlife including pollinators and natural predators.

Social context

FFF sought to help reduce isolation amongst Scotland's farming community. Many of our programme participants commented on the social aspects afforded by the events and welcomed the opportunity to meet-up, chat and mix with other members of the farming community.

4. FINANCE

KTIF grant awarded: £209,302*

Total approved spend: £279,069

Spend on KTIF/011/2016 over lifetime of the programme: £278,294

KTIF award spent over lifetime of programme: £208,720

* The Scottish Government were informed of the underspends and a new budget produced and approved.

5. PROJECT AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The aim of Farming for the Future (FFF) was to support farmers and crofters across Scotland interested in productive and profitable farming and land use, using low-input and sustainable approaches to build financial and environmental resilience in a changing climate. FFF was industry and demand led and designed to be flexible in order to respond to new strategies, initiatives, policies and priorities as they arise. The objectives of 'Farming for the Future' were to:

Build a strong knowledge and skills base for productive, profitable and sustainable agriculture and land use amongst Scotland's rural communities by:

- Reaching and engaging new audiences of farmers, including new entrants and young people, to build their knowledge and skills for low-input and sustainable farming.
- Encouraging and enabling continuous professional learning and development for all farmers.
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- Cut greenhouse gas emissions and sequester carbon.



Farming for the Future Agroforestry event at Mains of Fincastle

5. PROJECT OUTCOMES

6.1 Evaluation methodology

Demographic and business information for all Farming for the Future (FFF) participants was gathered at the booking stage for events. Information regarding outputs – content, speakers, promotion, resources, photographs etc – was gathered from a dedicated programme file which is retained in electronic and paper format for compliance with KTIF grant and GDPR. The evaluation of FFF to measure its impact used a mix of quantitative and qualitative information. This information has been gathered from three sources.

1. Participants who completed a questionnaire immediately after attending an event.
2. Participants who completed a questionnaire around 6 months after attending an event.
3. Participants who completed a more detailed survey in January and February 2021. (65 responses were received from those participating across all topic areas). This evaluation focused on the programme's key objectives as set out in the original KTIF application to assess to what extent they had been met (short to medium term outcomes).
 - Changes in knowledge, skills/ability and confidence amongst FFF participants.
 - Facilitation of knowledge exchange, networking and collaboration (between different actors)
 - Foster and support farmer-led innovation.
 - Adoption of best-practice actions/sustainable land management techniques and delivery of related environmental and economic impacts/benefits.

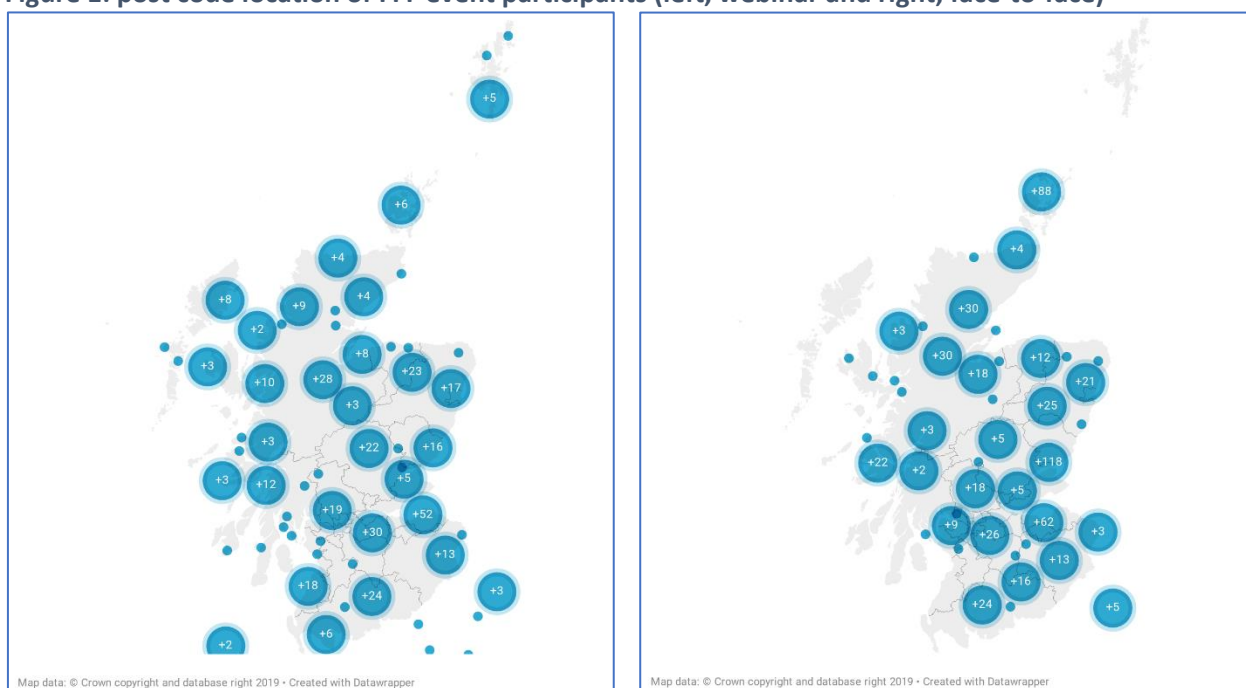
6.2 How aims/objectives were achieved

FFF objective 1: Reach and engage new audiences of farmers, including new entrants and young people, to build their knowledge and skills for low-input and sustainable farming

Participants

FFF engaged with a reasonably diverse/balanced mix of participants, particularly in terms of age and gender. A total of 840 farmers, crofters and other active land managers participated in FFF events. Of these participants: 35% were female, and 35% were aged 40 or under. Postcode locations of FFF participants show a good geographical reach, especially through events delivered through the webinar format. 26% (225) had been farming for less than five years.

Figure 1: post code location of FFF event participants (left, webinar and right, face-to-face)



Knowledge transfer and skill development events

The format of the events used a mix of knowledge transfer and exchange which were designed to be interactive – practically based, involve high levels of participation and encourage knowledge exchange and peer-to-peer learning.

Speakers and facilitators were selected for their knowledge and expertise, and importantly their ability to engage, enthuse and communicate effectively with the target audience. Events were held on farms across Scotland and put farmers at the forefront of demonstrating best practice in action.

The programme delivered: one day events to enable short presentations from expert speakers in the morning with Q&As, followed by lunch (to encourage informal networking and discussion) and a guided walk around a farm/site in the afternoon to demonstrate, and connect the theory with, best practice in action; and half day events which were farm-based using a walk and talk format.

21 face-to-face knowledge transfer events were delivered over the period October 2018 to February 2020 and 13 on-line events in webinar format delivered from April 2020 to December 2020 following the implementation of Covid-19 restrictions. 7 Field Lab meetings (face-to-face and online) were delivered over the lifetime of the programme. Event subject matter focused on soil management, grassland/crop management, woodland creation and agroforestry. Webinars also included topics which looked and challenges and new business opportunities arising from the impact of Covid-19 on farming businesses. Full details (content, speakers, sample feedback etc) of face-to-face events and webinars are provided in Annex 1 – Farming for the Future Events.

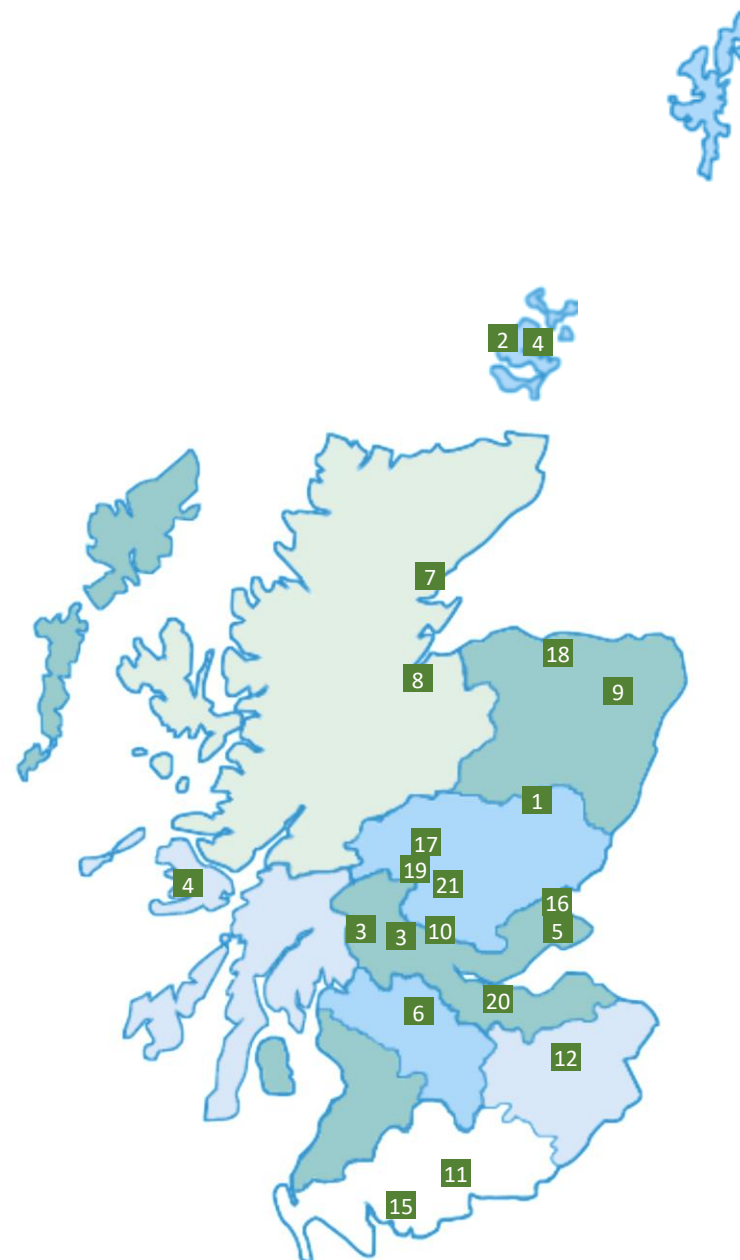
Table 2: FFF events held on-line

Date	Webinar
7 May 2020	Sell Direct Scotland: adapting your farm business during the pandemic
11 June 2020	Alternatives to Anthelmintics. Natural methods of worm control in sheep
23 & 30 June 2020	Tree planting on your farm: getting the right tree in the right place for the right reason
30 July 2020	Building Local Food Hubs. Practical and community elements of short supply chains
11 August 2020	Making Woodland Work for You: creation, management and funding on Scotland's west coast
25 August 2020	Farming with trees by the Lake of Menteith: tree planting for better water quality, crops and livestock grazing
21 October 2020	Planting Trees to Diversify Your Farm: woodland creation, management and funding
4 & 5 November 2020	Sell Local this Christmas: preparing your food business for seasonal trade
3 December 2020	Trees to Improve Your Farm: how agroforestry can help farm management and add income
15 December 2020	Sheep and Trees Q&A: small woodland creation on your farm
21 January 2021*	Money Grows on Trees: adding value to your farm with forestry

* This event was had to be rescheduled (originally for delivery on 19 November 2020) due to technical difficulties

Figure 2: map and key for face-to-face events

1	18 October 2018, Glen Clova, Angus. Making Woodland Work for You: creation, management and funding
2	7 November 2018, Sandwick, Orkney. How's your Silage? Getting the best out of what you've got
3	14 November 2018, Kippen, Stirling. How's your Silage? Getting the best out of what you've got
4	29 November 2018, Salen, Isle of Mull. How's your Silage? Getting the best out of what you've got
5	12 February 2019, Anstruther, Fife. Healthy land, healthy people, healthy profits: an introduction to holistic management
6	13 February 2019, Lanark, Lanarkshire. Making Woodland Work for You: creation and funding
7	23 February 2019, Golspie, Highland. How to Plant Trees on Your Farm: woodland creation, management and funding
8	26 February 2019, Inverness, Highland. Getting Greener Grass: how to make the most of your grazing season
9	26 February 2019, Inverurie, Aberdeenshire. Getting Greener Grass: how to make the most of your grazing season
10	27 February 2019, Perth, Perth & Kinross. Getting Greener Grass: how to make the most of your grazing season
11	28 February 2019, Lockerbie, Dumfries & Galloway. Getting Greener Grass: how to make the most of your grazing season
12	28 February 2019, Melrose, Scottish Borders. Getting Greener Grass: how to make the most of your grazing season
13	7 March 2019, Buchlyvie, Stirling. How to Plant Trees on Your Farm: woodland creation, management and funding
14	26 June 2019, Stromness, Orkney. Paddock Grazing for Profit: how grazing management can make you money
15	28 June 2019, Kirkcudbright, Dumfries and Galloway. Paddock Grazing for Profit: how grazing management can make you money
16	25 September 2019, Newburgh, Fife. Trees: a crop with many benefits. Agroforestry for livestock and arable farms
17	26 September 2019, Blair Atholl, Perthshire. Trees: a crop with many benefits. Agroforestry for livestock and arable farms
18	3 October 2019, Buckie, Moray. Money Grows on Trees
19	5 October 2019, Aberfeldy, Perth & Kinross. Farm Hack: regenerative grazing workshop
20	8 October 2019 Balerno, Midlothian. Making Woodland Work for You: exploring forestry opportunities on farm
21	5 December 2019, Birnham, Perth & Kinross. Agroforestry Workshop



Overall, the data evaluation suggests that all factors contributed positively to participant experience at FFF events. The quality/expertise of the facilitators and researchers were aspects of the programme that were highly rated, as well as the levels of interaction between participants and speakers, facilitators and other participants.

Table 3: factors contributing to participant experience

<i>At the event(s) you attended, did any of the following factors contribute particularly positively or negatively to your experience?</i> (Where 1 is particularly negatively and 5 is particularly positively). Please rate all that apply. If you have attended more than one event, please try to rate the contribution of the factors overall (n=65)	Rating
The quality (knowledge, expertise, communication etc) of the specialist / researcher	4.43
The quality (knowledge, expertise, communication etc) of the Soil Association Scotland facilitator	4.56
The agenda and topics covered	4.29
The size of the group (number of participants)	4.32
The level of interaction / exchange of ideas between participants	4.13
The level of interaction / exchange of ideas between participants and the specialist / researcher	4.14
The level of interaction / exchange of ideas between participants and the Soil Association Scotland facilitator	4.17
The information pack produced for the event	4.05

Sample of participants' comments:

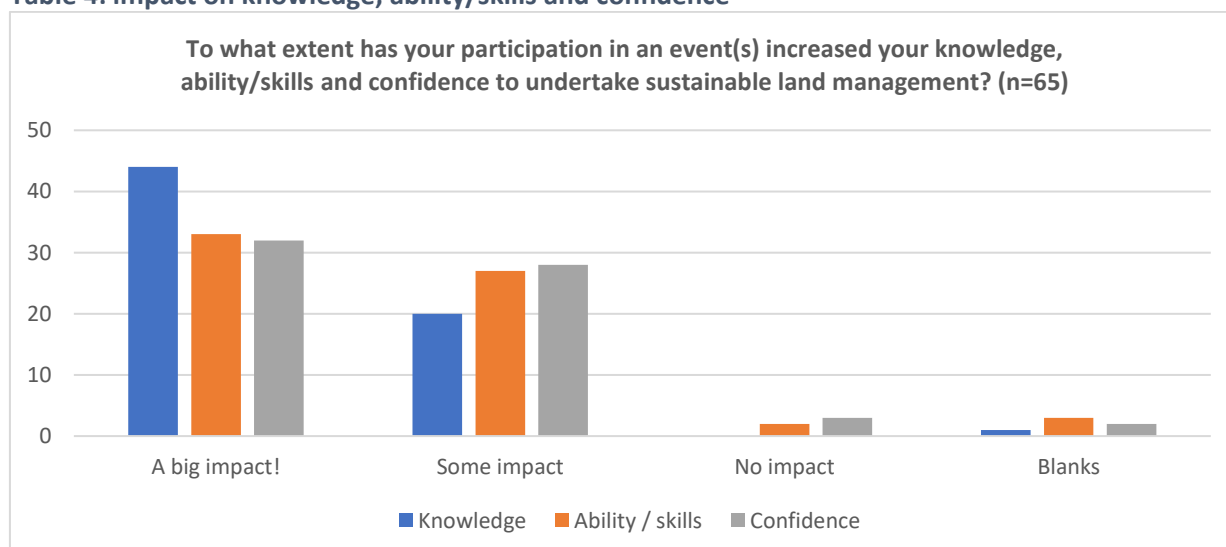
- *It was very well presented. The walk was very informative.*
- *More difficult last year due to Covid restrictions.*
- *Clem Sandison [Soil Association] is a fantastic facilitator and organizer who has been the key catalyst for the Mob Grazing Group's success and enthusiasm.*
- *Great packs, approachable facilitators, created good atmosphere for learning and made good use of specialists*

FFF objective 2: encouraging and enabling continuous professional learning and development for all farmers

Knowledge, ability/skills and confidence

The follow-up survey of 65 participants shows that there is evidence of marked increases across knowledge, ability/skills and confidence (particularly knowledge) amongst FFF participants.

Table 4: impact on knowledge, ability/skills and confidence



We received many comments from participants stating that they welcomed FFF as a good opportunity to learn more. Sample of participants' comments:

- *Enjoyed learning about holistic management and the process and steps of the system*
- *Appreciated learning about the benefits mob grazing can have on soil health*
- *Already farming mob grazing but enjoyed relearning*
- *Will spread the word about what he has learned and will investigate it more*
- *Will continue to learn from events like this*
- *Will investigate more practical learning*
- *The event was great. I have learned lots*

FFF objective 3: Facilitation of knowledge exchange, networking and collaboration (between different actors)

FFF facilitated relationship building and knowledge exchange with a wide range of other stakeholders including the Scottish Government, Scottish Forestry, SEPA, membership bodies (e.g. NFUS), NGOs/charities (e.g. RSPB Scotland) research providers (e.g. SRUC) and businesses. FFF events were cited by several organisations as being a good/useful to facilitate knowledge exchange (two-way flow of information) and engage directly with farmers and crofters.

Sample comments from participating organisations:

- *We [SEPA] work with farmers and other land managers to improve their land in a way to reduce diffuse pollution risk. The info gained today will enable me to point farmers in the right direction to reduce diffuse pollution risk by using trees in the right place*
- *I work for Scottish Forestry so it was hearing the owners motivation and opinions that was particularly interesting*

FFF objective 4: fostering and supporting farmer-led innovation

FFF delivered a series of Field Labs led by farmers with input from expert facilitators/researchers aimed at overcoming specific practical challenges in the field. Typically, the groups met 3-4 times over the lifetime of the lab to follow the progress of novel/innovative management practices in action. FFF Field Labs focused on two topics:

[Plant Teams](#)⁵: which explored the potential for growing different crops together to increase yield, reduce inputs, tackle pests and improve soil health in Scotland. Growing different crop species together is not a novel idea, but there's not enough information out there about what varieties people should use and for what purpose. For example, which cereal/legume mix for forage or silage? What if I want really high protein? And what would be right for local soil conditions? The field lab will feed into EU projects [DIVERSify](#) (through James Hutton) and [EU-ReMIX](#) (through SRUC's researcher Robin Walker) that aimed to answer these questions, and make consistent advice and tools available. Participating farmers and land managers trialled a plant team (e.g. peas and barley), comparing it to a nearby monoculture and sharing basic crop performance data.

[Mob Grazing](#)⁶: which explored the potential of a new grazing systems to build soil carbon, improve animal health and performance, reduce the costs of straw and winter feed and increase biodiversity in Scotland. A key outcome is that the Mob Grazing Field Lab evolved into an [Operational Group](#)⁷ funded by the Knowledge Innovation and Transfer Fund (KTIF/035/2020). The purpose of the group is to produce a benchmarking system to measure how mob grazing can build soil carbon, improve animal health and performance, reduce the costs of straw and winter feed and increase biodiversity.

⁵ <https://www.soilassociation.org/our-work-in-scotland/scotland-farming-programmes/field-labs/plant-teams/>

⁶ <https://www.soilassociation.org/our-work-in-scotland/scotland-farming-programmes/field-labs/mob-grazing-scotland/>

⁷ <https://www.soilassociation.org/our-work-in-scotland/scotland-farming-programmes/mob-grazing/meet-the-mob-grazers>

Mob Grazing Field Lab

Pioneering mob grazing in Scotland: what could the benefits of [mob grazing](#) be for Scottish farmers?



Trying new things together

Farming for the Future brought together a group of 16 farmers and crofters (pictured above) in a field lab to explore the potential of a new grazing system to build soil carbon, improve animal health and performance, reduce the costs of straw and winter feed and increase biodiversity.

Mob grazing, sometimes referred to as holistic planned grazing, is a rotational grazing system with a high stocking density, regular moving of livestock (every 1-3 days depending on the season), and a long recovery period, leading to taller plants with deeper root systems, and greater sward resilience. Soil Association licensee Sam Parsons is estate manager at Balcaskie, a 1,100 hectare mixed farm in Fife that's in organic conversion. Balcaskie are in their third year of mob grazing and Sam says the system is transforming the farm.

“Next year we’re going to be mob grazing the whole lot – that’s 350 cows!” he says. “It’s completely changed the way we manage our grassland and we’re looking at producing beef differently too. We’ve seen increased diversity in the grass, an increase in rooting structure and better drainage. We outwintered 25 cows this year and fattened a few outside and they were perfectly happy. Next year we’ll outwinter 80.”

He says without the field lab he would have needed “some serious persuasion” from the estate owner to make such a huge change. “It’s given me confidence to try it. We know we don’t have all the answers, but someone else in the group might. Who could I ask otherwise? In farming usually there are a million people telling you what to do and it involves buying something. This is peer-to-peer instead.”

Building an evidence base

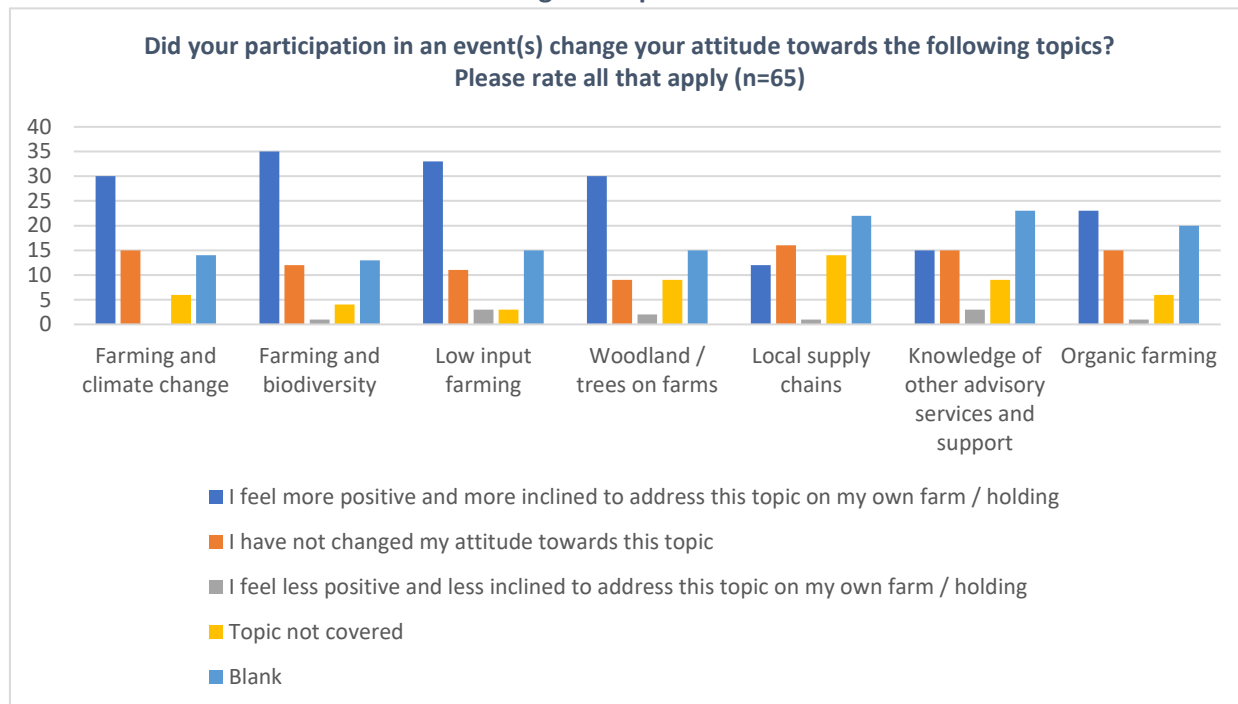
The field lab members are in different parts of Scotland, with different sized farms, at different stages of trying out mob grazing. But under the stewardship of our Farming and Land Use Manager Clem Sandison, they are supporting each other through meetings and a WhatsApp discussion group. Working with soil scientist Dr. Joanna Cloy from Scotland’s Rural College (SRUC) they are also establishing baselines to measure soil health and carbon levels and will be benchmarking their own farms to track outcomes.

FFF objective 5: adoption of best-practice actions/sustainable land management techniques and delivery of related environmental and economic impacts/benefits

Impact on attitude towards sustainable management practices

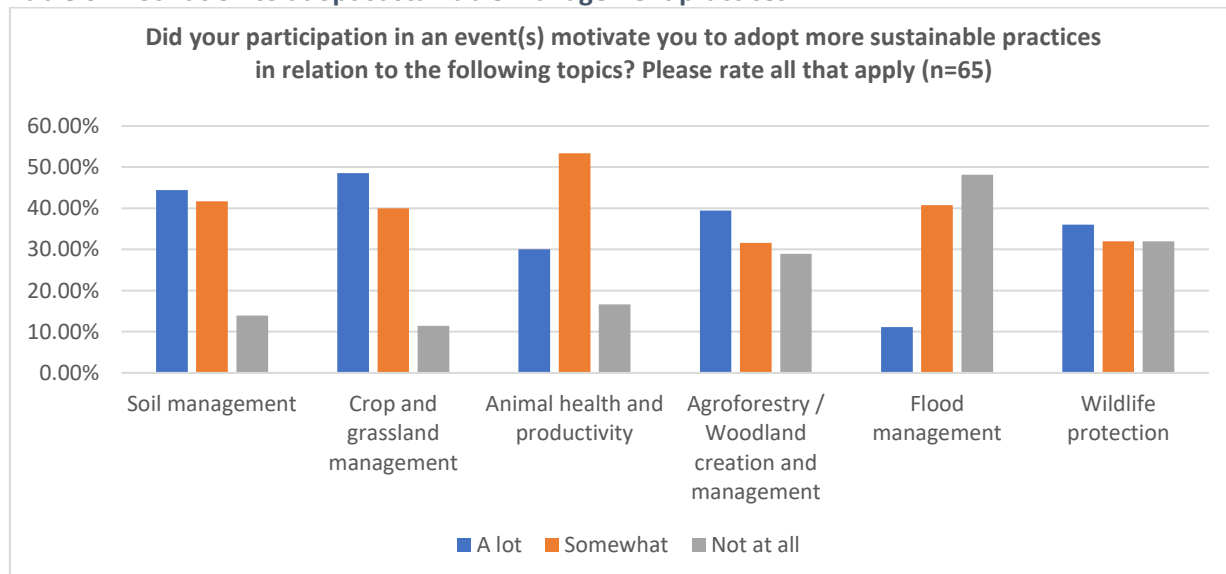
Analysis of survey data revealed that participants had changed their attitude most positively towards ‘farming and biodiversity’, ‘farming and climate change’, ‘low input farming’ and ‘woodland/trees on farms’. The evaluation results overall highlight a good picture in terms of motivation and intention to adopt sustainable practices.

Table 5: attitude towards sustainable management practices



Immediately after the events 85% of FFF participants indicated they would consider making changes as a result of attending an event. This is reflected in the follow-up survey of the 65 participants in early 2021 with over 85% saying that, where relevant, participation in an FFF event had motivated them to adopt more sustainable practices around soil management, crop and grassland management and animal health.

Table 6: motivation to adopt sustainable management practices



5.2 Milestones

FFF was successful in meeting its key end of programme milestones (Table 4). We had planned to hold a large one-day conference in 2020 but were unable to proceed due to Covid-19 restrictions.

Table 7: Key outputs, targets and actual achieved

Key outputs	Target/milestones	Actual achieved
Knowledge and skills events	40 introductory and specialist Knowledge and Skills Development Events delivered for 700+ farmers by 31 December 2020	41 events delivered for 840 individual farmers/crofters/other land managers resident in Scotland
Advice and signposting	Advice and support offered to 400 plus farmers by 31 December 2020	Advice and support offered to 840 farmers/crofters/others
Supporting resources	Suite of supporting resources produced and disseminated by 31 December 2020	Suite of supporting resources produced and disseminated

6. LESSONS LEARNED

6.1 Issues and challenges

Policy context

Farmers and crofters need support during the introduction of the transition period for rural funding in Scotland. The Scottish Government's policy is to promote approaches which 'enhance their role as stewards of our natural environment and embrace an integrated approach to land use which seeks to deliver multiple benefits from the land'. Helping farmers and crofters to plan as early as possible will be vital for ensuring long term financial sustainability and ability to continue to produce good food, as well as deliver policy objectives for the natural environment, climate change, rural development and Scotland's food and drink sector.

Programme context

Our own evidence, evidence from stakeholders (e.g. Woodland Trust Scotland) and evidence from the Strategic Research Programme (SEFARI) demonstrates that a more participatory approach with longer term relationships with farmers can increase environmental outcomes, especially for large scale/long term changes in land management.

We have learned from our programme delivery that a more participatory approach, greater understanding of barriers and drivers for success (e.g. cultural, policy, financial, perceptions), and development of peer-to-peer relationships would likely result in solutions that deliver bigger and better outcomes. We have found that there is a farmer appetite for on-going support that values and builds on their knowledge and experience (less prescriptive and more adaptive); and more opportunities for peer-to-peer support, co-creation and network building to increase skills, knowledge and confidence. This is especially relevant for large scale or long-term system changes e.g. implementation of agroforestry systems.

A more participatory and regional approach will encourage repeat attendance, networking, peer-learning, information sharing – to build the confidence and skills to aid decision-making and facilitate change to operate in a new funding and support environment post 2021.

Providing evidence that our programme work is effective and delivers positive impact is one of our key strategic objectives. Key improvements we are seeking to make to our monitoring and evaluation framework include: increasing the rate of evaluation responses from those participating in our programmes; and increasing our understanding of barriers to the uptake of certain land management practices (e.g. agroforestry) and informing measures to help address barriers.

7.2 Impacts

Impacts are the longer-term results that the programme aimed to achieve and would not normally be quantifiable within the lifetime of the programme. However, the evaluation provides an early insight into the likely longer-term environmental and economic impacts of the programme.

Environmental

Environmental benefits as described in section 3.5 from land management practice changes can be anticipated but are likely too soon to properly observe. FFF focused on enabling and empowering participants to implement changes they may hesitate to implement without the programme, and thus longer-term impacts of the theory of change are beyond the timeframe to be observed by the programme evaluation.

Economic

The evaluation found limited evidence to support economic benefits. Like environmental, these benefits may be too soon to observe. We believe FFF will improve economic performance, especially in the longer term as described in section 3.5.

Farms which adopt sustainable practices promoted by FFF should be able to demonstrate a range of tangible economic benefits including immediate financial savings as well as longer-term positive business impacts. Refining future programme content and associated materials which makes more explicit the links between reduced reliance on inputs and farm profitability should help to increase recognition of the economic benefits.

Social

Whilst many participants valued the opportunity to meet-up – especially for walk-and-talk events – few said that it provided the opportunity to increase social interaction in the longer-term due to the one-off nature of the knowledge and skills events. A key recommendation ‘provide more opportunities (smaller groups of farmers meeting on a regular basis) which encourage greater participation with longer-term engagement’ would help to foster increased social interaction.

Attractive farmed landscapes rich in wildlife are an invaluable asset for increasing public use, enjoyment and appreciation of the countryside – connecting more people with nature and sustainable food production. However, there was little recognition of these wider social benefits. Refining future programme content which makes the vital connection between how land is managed and restoring nature may help farmers and crofters to increase their own recognition as environmental managers.

8. COMMUNICATIONS AND ENGAGEMENT

8.1 Publicity

Farming for the Future (FFF) was marketed and advertised to the target audience using a wide range of sources (Table 6) including Farming Advisory Service (FAS). Monitoring and evaluation of the marketing methods used to attract and engage farmers helped to ensure we used the most cost-effective methods.

Table 8: sources of promotion and reach for FFF events

Source of promotion	Reach/readership	Events promoted
Soil Association Scotland Twitter	9,000+	All events
Soil Association Scotland Facebook	1500+	All events
Soil Association Scotland website farming page	1,800+	All events
Soil Association Scotland e-newsletter 'What's On'	2000+	All events
Soil Association Scotland emails contact list comprising individuals, industry bodies, park authorities, land management organisations, NGOs etc (list is GDPR compliant)	Estimate: 2,000+	Selected events according to topic and locality
Rural Matters (Twitter account for the Scottish Government's Agriculture and Rural Economy Directorate)	3,000+	All events
Farm Advisory Service website & twitter	Twitter: 3,000+	All events
The Scottish Farmer: journal & website	Journal: 16,000+ per edition; website: 3,000+	Selected events depending on topic
Scottish Rural Network	Twitter: 6,000+	All events
NFU Scotland local text alerts & weekly bulletin	Alerts: 50-150 depending on location	Events being held in locality of farmers receiving alerts/bulletins
Adverts in local and regional newspapers	See table 7	Events being held in locality of paper
Adverts/flyers to various farmers' marts, vets, agricultural suppliers and machinery rings	Estimate: 10 -100	Events being held in locality of businesses and groups
Community newsletters	Estimate: <1,000	Events being held in locality of newsletter
Farmers Journal	Unknown	Selected events

'Word of mouth' recommendation was also a popular method for participants learning about upcoming events. The number of those participating in the events and the demographics and locations of the participants, demonstrate that the marketing methods used reached and engaged a wide audience of farmers across Scotland.

A key part of the programme's communications strategy was to provide follow-up support to FFF participants and disseminate findings arising from FFF. This was provided using a range of channels including:

- Bespoke resource packs provided to all individuals participating in FFF events (prior to Covid-19 restrictions), and contacts and links to further advice and guidance (signposting) contained in email to those wishing to receive further information (around 90% uptake since introduction of GDPR).
- Suite of technical resources covering on Soil Association Scotland [website](https://www.soilassociation.org/our-work-in-scotland/farming-for-the-future/resources/).⁸

⁸ <https://www.soilassociation.org/our-work-in-scotland/farming-for-the-future/resources/>

- Soil Association Scotland [Twitter](#)⁹ and [Facebook](#)¹⁰ broadcasting news and highlights with relevant links.
- News page on Soil Association Scotland [website](#).¹¹
- Editorial in industry journals and websites including The Scottish Farmer and Scottish Association of Young Farmers.
- A series of short [films](#)¹² featured on YouTube.
 - Tree planting on your farm part 1: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ItwcKrLQf8A&list=PLiWAozVmDLEm3-1MsGllDr01X2bjOAQKM&index=66>
 - Tree planting on your farm part 2: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JTUVgjHUrXQ&t=12s>
 - Farming with Trees by the Lake of Menteith: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oE4GbzhBwxM&list=PLiWAozVmDLEm3-1MsGllDr01X2bjOAQKM&index=62&t=107s>
 - Building local food hubs: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EB1vEi4A9Rs&list=PLiWAozVmDLEm3-1MsGllDr01X2bjOAQKM&index=63>

Following each webinar/on-line event an email was sent out to participants with links to any information relevant to the event, providing details of who to contact with queries and providing links to the handy resources and case studies on our website. We also kept event attendees and interested parties up to date on progress and developments around our Field Labs. A recording of each event was uploaded to the Soil Association Scotland's YouTube channel to reach a wider audience that could not attend them live. This was supported with a strong presence in our [website](#), social and traditional media. By March 2021, these video resources had been viewed more than 1,000 times.

Table 8: reach of adverts placed in local and regional newspapers

Press title	Circulation per issue (by most recent data available)
Press and Journal	41,600
The Courier	31,500
The Southern Reporter	12,500
Carlisle & Lanark Gazette	1,900
Berwickshire News	3,600
John O'Groat Journal	3,500
Southern Reporter	7,000
Stirling Observer	3,700

⁹ https://twitter.com/SoilAssocScot?ref_src=twsrc%5Egoogle%7Ctwcamp%5Eserp%7Ctwgr%5Eauthor

¹⁰ <https://en-gb.facebook.com/soilassociationscotland/>

¹¹ <https://www.soilassociation.org/our-work-in-scotland/farming-for-the-future/scotland-farming-news/>

¹² [soil association scotland - YouTube](#)

9. KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

9.1 Key findings

The following summarises the key findings arising from the evaluation of Farming for the Future (FFF) and how it met its four programme objectives.

FFF objective 1: Reach and engage new audiences of farmers, including new entrants and young people, to build their knowledge and skills for low-input and sustainable farming

- FFF engaged with a diverse range and mix of people from across Scotland. FFF was valued by participants as providing high quality knowledge transfer events across various farming/land management topics.

FFF objective 2: encouraging and enabling continuous professional learning and development for all farmers

- There is good evidence of marked increases across knowledge, ability/skills and confidence amongst FFF participants.
- There is also good evidence that some FFF participants were very interested in trying out innovative approaches as exemplified by the Mob Grazing Field Lab to improve biodiversity and deliver business benefits.

FFF objective 3: Facilitation of knowledge exchange, networking and collaboration (between different actors)

- FFF facilitated relation building with other stakeholders such as Scottish Government, agencies (e.g. Scottish Water), membership organisations (e.g. NFUS), Research Providers (e.g. SRUC) and NGOs/charities (e.g. RSPB Scotland).
- FFF events were cited by several organisations as being a good/useful to facilitate knowledge exchange (two-way flow of information) and engaging directly with farmers and crofters.

FFF objective 4: fostering and supporting farmer-led innovation

- FFF delivered farmer-led Field Labs supporting on-farm innovation for practical ideas which work for farmers in the field.
- The FFF Mob Grazing Field Lab evolved into a fully-fledged Operational Group with funding from KTIF. The group will benchmark and demonstrate the benefits of regenerative grazing to other farmers.

FFF objective 5: adoption of best-practice actions/sustainable land management techniques and delivery of related environmental and economic impacts/benefits

- Results overall highlight a good picture in terms of motivation and intention to adopt sustainable practices and change in attitudes towards sustainable practices; especially in relation to farming and biodiversity, climate change and low input farming.
- Environmental and economic benefits from land management practice changes are largely too soon to properly observe. However, there is positive feedback about the perceived benefits of changes especially for biodiversity and climate change

9.2 Recommendations

Based on our learning from FFF and key findings arising from the evaluation we have identified the following areas which should be developed for a future Rural Knowledge and Innovation Services.

- Provide more opportunities (smaller groups of farmers meeting on a regular basis) which encourage greater participation with longer-term engagement. This is important where significant change and investment in land management practices are required e.g. peatland restoration, conversion to organic farming and agroforestry.
- Use on-line/virtual events to reach a wider audience including those managing land in remote locations.
- Build on increasing interest amongst farmers and crofters in agroforestry to deliver multiple business and environmental benefits. FFF woodland creation and agroforestry events were very well attended with excellent feedback.
- Support more capacity building and network development. Capacity building will increase confidence and ability by supporting innovation, developing skills and knowledge, and developing networks to share ideas and identify opportunities. Network development will also contribute to social renewal by reducing isolation and increase opportunities for local approaches.
- Promote an outcome-based approach which gives farmers the responsibility and flexibility (less prescriptive and more adaptive) to implement sustainable management practices which deliver integrated climate, nature and business benefits.
- Facilitate a more targeted landscape scale approach to enable farmers and land managers to collaborate and deliver impactful environmental benefits across a wider area. Farmland is often the weak link in the chain of ecological connectivity. Finding the best opportunities for nature and people – using the Ecological Coherence model – can join-up habitats across a wider area benefiting biodiversity, ecosystem health and people.
- Continue to support farmer-led innovation using the Operational Group model to mainstream best practice for nature-based solutions. Change requires innovation from the ground up: supporting those on the ground to develop their own solutions, overcome barriers, and identify drivers to transition to a productive, profitable and zero carbon future. This also depends on the development of networks of people who together can support, motivate, and work collaboratively to make change happen.
- Develop indicators and monitoring protocols to track changes in land management over longer time periods and data on land manager rationale, drivers, choice factors etc. that govern land management change.
- Increase recognition amongst the general public of the role that environmentally friendly farmers and crofters play in restoring nature, a safe climate and health – benefiting people, the environment and economy.

10. CONCLUSION

The evaluation demonstrates marked increases across knowledge, ability/skills and confidence (particularly knowledge) amongst Farming for the Future (FFF) participants. Results overall highlight a positive picture in terms of motivation and intention to adopt sustainable practices, and change in attitudes towards sustainable practices, especially in relation to farming and biodiversity, climate change and low input farming.

Significant action is needed to tackle climate change, halt biodiversity loss, restore healthy ecosystems, reduce pollution and protect Scotland's natural assets. Farmers in Scotland need to be supported to enhance their role as stewards of our natural environment, as well as improve their long-term financial sustainability and support a green recovery.

Farm businesses must be supported to transition to climate and nature friendly farming and embrace an integrated approach to land use that delivers multiple benefits, as well as meeting growing demand for nature and climate friendly food. This support must also help farmers and crofters prepare to operate in a new funding and support environment following the transition period for rural funding in Scotland.

FFF has demonstrated that there is a farmer-led demand for on-going support that values and builds on their knowledge and experience, and more opportunities for peer-to-peer support, co-creation and network building to increase skills, knowledge and confidence. In summary, our recommendations for future knowledge transfer, skills development and innovation programmes are to:

- Provide more opportunities (smaller groups of farmers meeting on a regular basis) which encourage greater participation with longer-term engagement.
- Increase understanding of the barriers to the uptake of certain land management practices and explore/devise solutions with farmers, policy makers and other stakeholders.
- Support more capacity building and network development – building confidence and ability by supporting innovation, developing skills and knowledge, and developing networks to share ideas and identify opportunities.
- Build on increasing interest amongst farmers and crofters in agroforestry to deliver multiple business and environmental benefits.
- Promote an outcome-based approach which gives farmers the responsibility and flexibility (less prescriptive and more adaptive) to implement sustainable management practices which deliver integrated environmental and business benefits.
- Encourage more farmers to carry out environmental recording and monitoring to measure the impact of their practices – a key element of an outcome-based approach to farming.
- Facilitate a more targeted landscape scale approach to enable farmers and land managers to collaborate and collectively deliver impactful environmental benefits across a shared place.
- Continue to support farmer-led innovation using the Operational Group model to support farmers to develop their own solutions that work for their own business, and mainstream best practice for nature-based solutions.
- Develop indicators and monitoring protocols to track changes in land management over longer time periods.
- Increase recognition amongst farmers and crofters of the role they play in restoring nature, a safe climate and health.