

## Improvements to land use and production key

The Scottish Government commitment to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to net-zero by 2045 will have a major impact on future agricultural and environmental support policies.

In particular, there will be an even greater emphasis on encouraging hill farmers and crofters to improve the cost-effectiveness of their production systems and thereby reduce emissions.



And the range of production-oriented research we are conducting at Kirkton and Auchtertyre – from improving soil and grassland management, through increasing livestock performance, to using technology to aid decision-making - is all aimed at understanding what may be practical or economically viable to implement.

But we have also been looking at how other types of land management can be integrated into hill farms such as ours.

To this end, we worked closely with the Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park and Peatland Action a few years ago to restore over 16 km of degraded peat hags along the spine of one of our mountains.

We have also engaged in agri-environment actions - such as creating water margins and wader scrapes in the low ground and implementing a moorland management plan on the hills - through the current Agri-Environment Climate Scheme.

And in addition to planting over 200 ha of montane woodland in one of our glens 20 years ago, we have also planted a lot more trees alongside waterways and in small shelter belts in the lower parts of the farm in recent years.

Why all this focus on non-agricultural management?

Firstly, making changes to production systems will help in reducing emissions from any farm or croft. But the scale of the overall challenge means that only doing that will be nowhere near enough to help Scotland get to net zero by 2045.

Hence other actions –such a woodland creation and peatland restoration – will be essential to ensure that hill farms and crofts also sequester even more carbon over the coming years.

Secondly - and just as importantly - Scotland has been in a biodiversity crisis for just as long, if not longer, than we have been in a climate emergency.

Although actions taken to address climate challenges will also have biodiversity benefits, there will be a continuing need for more targeted actions to assist other wildlife, such as wading birds.

Being seen to address both the climate emergency and biodiversity crisis will be essential if Scotland's hill farms and crofts are to trade on our green credentials going forward.

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