

McCracken, D. 2019. Issues affecting viability of hill farming sought. *Press & Journal*, 21st January 2019. <https://www.pressreader.com/uk/the-press-and-journal-moray/20190121/282071983089541>

Issues affecting viability of hill farming sought

Change is always unsettling. Even more so when potential high level changes – such as access to international markets for lamb or the size of future Less Favoured Area Support Scheme payments – are not easily influenced by individual hill farmers and crofters.

But there are other challenges – such as improving livestock productivity, identifying grassland mixes better suited to the environment or marketing livestock products locally – which are more within any individual's direct control.



Many of these challenges are likely to be similar across the uplands of Scotland, but the importance of any one issue is likely to vary from area to area. Differences in climate, landscape and access to markets also mean that the solutions appropriate for any one issue may differ markedly from one part of upland Scotland to another.

So it is not surprising that a major constraint to addressing some of these issues can revolve around knowing what options may be available locally, what might already have been tried by someone else or how best to implement a change on the individual hill farm or croft.

However, a problem shared is a problem halved and there can certainly be strength in numbers in trying to identify and tackle any individual issue. To this end, I am working closely with Soil Association Scotland and a number of NFUS Regional Managers to organise three hill farming focused workshops over the next two months.

The rationale behind each workshop is threefold: to identify the major constraints affecting local hill farming viability; to consider what opportunities there might be to tackle those constraints; and - just as importantly - identify who within the local hill farming community would be willing to work collectively to investigate what solutions might be most appropriate to implement.

One output from each workshop might be the identification of a local issue which Soil Association Scotland - or others within the Rural Innovation Support Service partnership - could help facilitate further discussion about. But equally, another output could simply be the realisation by individual hill farmers that they are not alone in facing a particular problem.

We recognise that three workshops – in Dingwall, Pitlochry and Lockerbie – will in no way cover the full extent of the uplands of Scotland. But we are keen to kick-start the wider conversation about how to tackle local hill farming issues.

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