Land reform
National Farmers Union, Scotland

We note tomorrow's Rural Affairs Committee agenda and want to underline that NFU Scotland is disappointed that we have not been invited to give evidence on land reform.

Land reform legislation will directly affect farmers and crofters, particularly in regard to community engagement. We believe that the Committee's scrutiny should reflect the full diversity of Scotland's landowners and land managers and provide the following information in advance of the session.

The 1000 hectare threshold introduced in the Act extends well beyond what might traditionally be considered a large estate. It has implications for extensive agriculture units, particularly in Less Favoured Areas, where farm businesses may manage significant areas of land as a consequence of the nature of their operations. The impact of land reform measures must therefore be assessed in the context of the agricultural businesses, rather than landholding size alone.

Land reform must recognise the diversity of Scotlands farming and crofting sector. Farmers and crofters manage much of Scotland's rural landscape, supporting food production, biodiversity, environmental management and rural economies. Many own the land they farm, while others operate through tenancies, crofting arrangements or a combination of owned and rented land. Land reform policy must recognise these different circumstances and the practical implications for agricultural businesses.

NFU Scotland has consistently emphasised the need for land reform to be grounded in practical evidence and to deliver workable outcomes. Agricultural operations are commercial activities shaped by seasonal demands, business viability, workforce requirements and the need to make timely management decisions. Community engagement obligations could have significant implications to how farms operate, potentially adding administrative burdens costs and delays.

Community engagement requirements must be clearly defined, proportionate and practical to implement**.** They should support constructive dialogue without unnecessarily interfering with routine agricultural operations or imposing disproportionate requirements on farm businesses. The framework must recognise existing relationships and established engagement practices, while providing clarity about when obligations apply, what is expected of land managers and how compliance will be assessed.

Land reform must strike a balance between community interests and the practical realities of managing viable agricultural businesses. NFU Scotland's engagement on land reform legislation has highlighted the importance of considering the consequences of legislative changes for those who own, occupy and work the land. Poorly designed or disproportionate requirements risk creating uncertainty,

discouraging investment and undermining confidence in land management and agricultural tenancies. Effective scrutiny must consider these potential consequences alongside the policy objectives of reform.

The farming and crofting sector must be properly represented in the Committee's scrutiny. Land reform is not solely an issue for Scotland's largest landowners; it has direct implications for agricultural businesses of all sizes and the communities they sustain. NFU Scotland's evidence would help ensure that the legislation reflects the realities of farming and crofting, avoids unintended consequences and delivers requirements that are fair, proportionate and workable in practice.

Agricultural operations and land management decisions are fundamentally business decisions, shaped by commercial, seasonal and operational pressures. Community engagement obligations could therefore directly affect the day-to-day operation of farms, potentially introducing additional bureaucracy, costs, complexity and delays. These implications must be properly understood and considered.

Community engagement must be meaningful, proportionate and clearly defined. Routine agricultural activities and business decisions should not be subject to unnecessarily burdensome consultation requirements, particularly where effective engagement and longstanding community relationships already exist.

Land reform is not simply an issue for large estates; it is an issue for Scotland's farming sector. The agricultural sector's involvement in the Committee's scrutiny is essential to ensure that the practical implications for farmers and crofters are fully understood and that the resulting requirements are proportionate and workable.

We hope that there will be a further opportunity for us to give evidence on this issue going forward.