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The Scottish Parliament
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Dear Mark,

In advance of the first Rural Affairs Committee evidence session this week on the short, snapshot inquiry into the Rural Support Plan (RSP) I would like to provide some background.

As the Committee will be aware, in March 2026 we laid and published the “Rural Support Plan: 2026-2031” alongside the “Rural Support Plan 2026-2031: Support within the Four Tier Framework” and the “Consultation Statement to accompany Rural Support Plan 2026-2031”.

The RSP sets out Scottish Ministers’ strategic priorities for the plan period, the support available and collates the breadth of the agricultural reform work into a single strategic and coherent package to meet the requirements of the Agriculture and Rural Communities (Scotland) Act 2024 (“the ARC Act”).

It sets out our commitment to provide a period of certainty, investment and preparation. It reinforces our approach of partnership working with rural stakeholders to ensure changes in support work for our farmers, crofters and land managers; the draft RSP itself was brought before a range of stakeholders as part of this commitment at the end of 2025 ahead of finalisation. It makes plain that it is active farmers and crofters who will receive continued investment and support to deliver Scotland’s Vision for Agriculture.

A clear structure for agricultural support schemes

The RSP marks the launch of our four-tier framework to provide conditional payments under Base, Enhanced, Elective and Complementary tiers. This approach was consulted upon during the ARC Act consultation process and was further refined during the on-going process of agricultural reform.

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In the first instance the framework reflects what is currently available through legacy Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) support, including the Scottish Rural Development Programme (SRDP) and other existing support, mapped into the new four-tier framework.

This framework sets the structure for how we intend to deliver support in future and demonstrates the alignment between support, tiers, strategic outcomes and ARC Act objectives. It is within this context that agricultural reform will continue to develop.

Clarity over timescales and stakeholder engagement

Each RSP covers a five-year period with the first being 2026-2031 and the ARC Act sets clear requirements on timescales for any amended RSP, subsequent RSP periods and on monitoring, evaluating, reporting and engaging on the RSP.

The RSP is based upon significant and detailed co-development and engagement on agricultural reform with stakeholders and user research with farmers and crofters. This is set out in the RSP itself and in the accompanying statement on consultation.

We also publish an Agricultural Reform Route Map to provide advance notice and subsequent detail of upcoming changes such as those undertaken in 2025 and 2026. The Route Map will continue to be updated to cover future years as agricultural reform progresses and this will be reflected in subsequent RSP amendments.

Ministers have established a Land, Agriculture and Nature Delivery (LAND) Group which is due to hold its first meeting on 1 October 2026. This multi-disciplinary group has been drawn together to help both the Scottish Government and stakeholders better understand our complex land-based system.

It will provide a platform for holistic, strategic discussions and offer advice on the interactions, tensions and benefits between sectoral policies, actions, and associated delivery plans. It will focus on key areas including agriculture, forestry, peatland, biodiversity, wildlife and species management and water (flooding resilience, water scarcity, and quality) - all of which are fundamental as we look to meet our land use aspirations. In addition, the group will explore the opportunities to align those aspirations with the broader economic growth ambitions of Scotland as part of our just transition.

The establishment of the LAND Group is in addition to stakeholder engagement at a policy level which will continue to be invaluable given the very detailed nature of individual policy development. That is why, in addition to the LAND Group, the Agriculture Policy Development Group will continue their work with officials as we move into the delivery phase of agricultural reform. This this will include engaging on the RSP where appropriate.

Proposals for funding

The RSP outlines the proposed budget approach for the five-year period, subject to the Scottish Budget. It is for this reason that any RSP amendments would naturally follow budget settlements - should any changes be required. With the launch of the four-tier framework and ahead of the upcoming budget process officials are working to align budgets to the framework to provide greater clarity and scrutiny.

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I have made a commitment to provide a period of certainty, investment and preparation. In addition, the RSP sets out that there will be no cliff edges in support and we will continue to deliver 70% of funding through direct payments but that farmers and crofters will need to do more for climate and nature. It makes plain that it is active farmers and crofters who will receive continued investment and support to deliver Scotland's Vision for Agriculture. We will continue to work in partnership with the sector as we progress change through agricultural reform.

Clarity around delivery of emissions reductions measures in agriculture

The RSP complements but does not cut across existing reporting towards the Climate Change Plan (CCP), which will continue as normal.

The RSP sets out how existing support contributes to the strategic outcomes and how these incorporate the ARC Act objective on "the facilitation of on-farm nature restoration, climate mitigation and adaptation" and align directly to the CCP key outcomes for agriculture.

We committed in the RSP to further publishing an Impact Monitoring Framework to "provide specific, objective measures to track progress against our strategic outcomes and sub-outcomes" and for this to be "the basis for baselining and future monitoring activities". It is anticipated this will be published in the Autumn, with a baseline report for 2025 to follow that and I will keep the committee updated on this work.

I trust this provides some useful background information, and I look forward to discussing these issues further when providing closing evidence at the Rural Affairs Committee inquiry.

Yours sincerely



JIM FAIRLIE