

FRIENDS OF THE SCOTSMAN /

Helping farms to deliver on environment and climate

Focus on 'natural capital', like soil and water quality, says **Ross Macleod**

Last year saw the publication of the Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust's vision statement on Farming through Brexit. As we start 2019, and at the time of writing with the ramifications of the Brexit debate still to fully materialise, we predicted in our vision statement that the current system of paying farmers per hectare will probably draw to a close by 2024. We also identified that as 60 per cent of farms are not profitable without support payments, their eventual withdrawal will have a serious impact on farm businesses. We recognised however that there is growing support for 'public benefits' like water quality, soil health, biodiversity and carbon storage. Indeed, the results of a Scottish Environment Link survey published in May 2018 indicated that 77 per cent of Scots want farming to deliver for environment and climate.

That is why the Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust is paying close attention to the development of natural capital, which can be defined as resources – geology, soil, air, water and all living things. We derive a wide range of benefits from these resources, often called ecosystem services, which make human life possible. By properly valuing natural capital, we can work to maintain such assets so that they provide a sustainable flow of benefits.

In 2016, the UK-based Natural Capital Coalition published a protocol, which provides a basis on which to identify, measure and value direct and indirect impacts and dependencies on natural capital. We propose to follow this systematic approach by applying it on our demonstration farms at Auchnerran in Aberdeenshire and at Loddington in Leicestershire. Having substantial baseline species, habitats and other data at both locations, we are well positioned to make progress.

This work will enable the trust to engage on equal terms with other stakeholders researching natural capital. It will allow us further means to assess game and wildlife management impacts and, of course, it will also allow us to contribute to development of agri-environment support schemes based on natural capital.

Ross Macleod, head of policy (Scotland) Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust



Why pancakes should give us food for thought



Our food system is broken, and the way we grow, process and consume should be of concern to all of us, writes **Anna Brand**

With Pancake Day or Shrove Tuesday next week, our thoughts turn towards food. It's a day for a pancake feast, and of course it has religious significance for many, but what other meaning can we take from Pancake Day?

Firstly, take the pancake itself. The milk, the wheat flour, the eggs – how were they produced? Is the milk from a nature-friendly dairy farm? Did the wheat field leave space for nesting and feeding birds? Are the hens happy and well looked-after? Were producers at home and overseas treated fairly? And what about the shop assistants and the restaurant staff – are they paid a living wage and given fair conditions?

And what about those who can't afford pancakes at all? The contrast between the traditional excess of Pancake Day and the meagreness of Lent is perhaps also significant, with overconsumption contributing to our ill-health, but with a large number of Scots who struggle to afford food.

Ultimately, what Pancake Day can teach us is that the way we grow, process, distribute and consume food should be of concern to all of us. Our food system is broken and needs fixing. We need to reduce the environmental impact of food, tackle diet-related poor health, create fairer conditions for workers and everyone in the food system, improve animal welfare, create more opportunities for people to grow their own food, and ensure the right to food for every person in Scotland.

A better food system in Scotland could be a reality. The Scottish Government have published a consul-

ation on becoming a Good Food Nation, proposing some changes that would help consider the food system in the round – from farm to fork to waste. This is certainly welcome, but the proposals don't go far enough.

Though it helpfully recognises the need to have regard to human rights and act on our other responsibilities, the consultation does too little to acknowledge the systemic problems we need to solve, or outline how the proposals would get us to where we need to be.

Last year, the Scottish Government published a 'Good Food Nation Programme of Measures', detailing what initiatives and actions are going on in different parts of the food system. While the programme details undoubtedly good things, this misses out the quite fundamental and ambitious changes that need to happen to become a Good Food Nation.

We need to stop tying ourselves in knots with contradicting food policies. We need to guarantee the right to food for all. We need to make sure that everyone who works in the food system is fairly treated. We need to better support farmers and crofters who already go above and beyond for wildlife, and support and encourage all food producers to produce nature-friendly, environmentally sustainable food for all, that contributes to healthy, well-nourished societies.

This is a big ask, and for that we need big solutions. This is why the Scottish Food Coalition – a network of organisations working together on food – are urging the government to introduce a Good Food Nation Bill to the Scottish Parliament, and create a new, ambitious law on food. This would set strong targets and require



PICTURE: TOBY WILLIAMS

a robust and practical National Food Plan to set out how we improve our food system, with duties on public bodies to lead the way.

The Scottish Government have made some welcome progress in thinking about this already, but we need to move further and faster and keep things on track. For this we need a statutory food commission with the power to oversee the whole food sys-

tem, and put their foot down when we take backward steps from achieving our goals. And we need to put the right to food in Scots law, because the most basic requirement is that everyone should have access to affordable, appropriate, healthy and sustainable food.

Done well, a Good Food Nation law should set the agenda for all things food. It would guide our future rural

and agricultural policies, affect health and social care, education, social security, planning, and justice.

This new law would benefit us all. So the Scottish Food Coalition is urging everyone to make their views heard during the consultation process. The consultation can be found at: <https://consult.gov.scot/food-and-drink/good-food-nation/>, and a simple e-action can be found at: <https://e-activist.com/page/36245/action/1>.

The Scottish Food Coalition is a network of organisations working on food, including major trade unions, health charities, environmental charities such as ourselves at RSPB Scotland, and groups representing animal welfare, community growing, crofters, and more. Anna Brand, land use policy officer, RSPB Scotland



↑ Sisters Emma, 9, left, and Joanne Russell, 11, get some pancake-tossing practice in for Shrove Tuesday next week

Forestry and wood playing vital role in meeting climate change target

Tree planting and timber use a simple, low-cost option, says **Stuart Goodall**

Reducing emissions is no longer enough to mitigate damaging climate change.

That is the simple message from Lord Deben, chairman of the Committee on Climate Change (CCC) – official independent adviser to the UK Government and devolved administrations on the very biggest of modern-day challenges.

Speaking at a meeting of Confor's All-Party Forestry Group at Westminster, Lord Deben laid down the plain facts; we have already seized the low-hanging fruit on emissions reduction and it is now also about removing carbon from the atmosphere.

Lord Deben was addressing MPs from across the political spectrum

and across the countries of the UK about how governments can deliver increased tree planting and greater use of home-grown wood, particularly in construction.

Successive reports by the CCC have highlighted the growing significance of forestry and wood in meeting climate change targets, describing tree planting and timber use as a "simple, low-cost option" to make a real impact.

The good news is that in Scotland, we are doing well. We are planting more trees than we have for a generation – expected to be around 10,000 hectares (or 25,000 acres) this year. We are also using more timber; around three-quarters of new homes in Scotland are built with timber frame, locking up carbon for decades.

In England and Wales, the picture is not so bright, with barely 2,000 hectares (5,000 acres) of forestry being planted annually and only 20 per cent of new-build homes using timber frame.

However, Lord Deben had a blunt message for the forestry and timber industry if it wants to see the UK Government pull policy levers to tackle this failure on planting and use of wood in construction: "Be very clear what you want – and speak with one voice."

This was vital, he said, because governments are not good at complex policy-making in specific business sectors.

They need straightforward, well-explained ideas that carry the support of a whole industry; they do not

want different sub-sectors speaking with multiple voices. That is a recipe for confusion and blockage when we need clarity and progress.

Lord Deben also highlighted the need to work with other sectors, including farmers.

Once the United Kingdom leaves the Common Agricultural Policy and current guarantees on funding come to an end, there will be real pressure on farm budgets, especially at the margins. Planting trees can be a real opportunity for diversification in land use.

This cross-sectoral approach is also at the heart of Scotland's new forestry strategy, published last month by Fergus Ewing, Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy.

The strategy begins by explaining

how trees are good for the environment, for people and for the economy – for wildlife, health and well-being, and for employment.

As with previous strategies, there is a strong sense that the forestry industry has to justify itself by being good for a wide range of other sectors – an interesting concept that most other industries don't feel the need to follow.

I have followed this forestry sector approach by enthusing above about how trees and timber deliver in the fight against climate change.

I hope that, in the future, those who are still instinctively critical about Scottish forestry will finally take the time to learn more about it so we can then keep up the good work with less need for frequent explanation.



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