

Submitted to Future Grant Support for Forestry
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Ministerial Foreword - Forestry in Scotland is a sector that we can be justly proud of.

1 - Introduction and Rationale for Providing Grant Support for Forestry

1. Do you agree that grant support for forestry should continue to be improved and developed as a discrete scheme within the overall package of land support?

Yes

Please explain your answer in the text box.:

There does need to be an overarching policy and delivery mechanism for forestry, as well as an integrated approach to forestry within the agricultural context. There is a need for support for different types of forestry, including commercial, amenity / biodiversity and farm woodland not only to meet demand for timber, but also to deliver on climate change and biodiversity objectives. The current Forestry Grant Scheme is not fit for purpose though as it doesn't deliver what is needed, particularly for farmers. Funding needs to be directed at agroforestry and native planting though, not to commercial forestry.

2. Are there any changes that would allow for better complementarity between the forestry and agriculture funding options?

Yes

Please explain your answer in the text box.:

1. Existing woodland on farms - Farm woodlands are a fantastic resource with so many benefits for farming and for nature.

Farm woodland can house cattle in winter, increasing the financial sustainability of the farm business, reducing inputs, providing a comfortable & natural environment for the livestock. We use grazed woodland to overwinter approx. 40 beef suckler cows. It is also home to red squirrels, nesting raven, red kite, pine marten, badger and lots of biodiversity. But the woodland is ageing and needs to be replenished.

The current scheme doesn't offer funding towards deer fencing for replenishing existing woodland on a small scale. The deer burden of red and roe deer in our location [Redacted], along with use for cattle necessitates deer fencing. The cost of deer fencing is unfortunately prohibitive for the farm business. Temporary deer fencing would suffice to keep stock and deer out of small pockets for a few years in order to facilitate some new planting and natural regeneration and should be a continuous ongoing process to ensure there is farm woodland here for future generations.

There has been some focus on 'trees and sheep' in the existing FGS, but serious consideration should be given to 'trees and cattle'.

2. Support small-scale planting on farms including field edges - The current scheme favours large blocks of new planting and seems to favour a commercial approach. It should support micro-scale native planting at farm scale, including field edges or creating pockets of woodland, for example, with funding for tree protection from deer and livestock on a small scale too. It would be possible to greatly increase space for nature on Scottish farms if there were incentives for this approach.

Greater funding should be directed towards native planting, as opposed to sitka spruce for example. The biodiversity benefits of native woodlands far outweigh commercial planting, particularly where densely planted and these plantations are less useful on farms too (often too dense to be accessible to livestock for shelter).

3. Financially burdensome woodlands - The scheme should recognise that managing woodland, particularly ageing woodland, on a small scale, as often the case on small - medium farms, is often financially burdensome, rather than rewarding. It is difficult to get forestry contractors to undertake work on small woodlands and it is expensive. Contractors can pick and choose bigger, more lucrative projects. Farmers such as ourselves also lack the expertise to manage woodlands. We have used Farm Advisory Service funding for support with this, but we are self-funding most of the (ongoing) advice we need.

4. Ineligibility for agricultural subsidy - Having planted a number of hedges and small woodlands on our farm under AECS and other schemes, it is extremely disappointing to find we are actually penalised by the existing BPS as each of these areas is then excluded from our BPS entitlement (we can provide multiple examples on our farm).

If the Scottish Government wants to promote agroecology, agroforestry and trees on farms, it needs to move away from this practice as it is a disincentive for farmers. It also, unfortunately, creates more paperwork as each hedge and small planted area is assigned a different field number for the Single Application Form, which has to be completed annually, even for these now BPS ineligible field areas.

5. Woodland and timber continues to be a useful source of fuel on farms and needs to be supported as such. Farms and rural areas do not have the same access to energy as urban areas and many are dependant on kerosene boilers, as opposed to gas. While many farmers are trying to incorporate renewable energy into their farm businesses, such as air and ground source heating, solar and small-scale wind, biomass and woodburning stoves remain important to farm businesses and even to prevent fuel poverty in rural areas.

While we have installed air source heat in one of our farm houses, it is expensive to run and we are, therefore, still reliant on a woodburning stove using timber felled from our on-farm woodlands. Sustainable continuous cover woodland management, such as we are trying to implement on our farm, should mean that we have a sustainable fuel source for the future, but we recognise that policies re. carbon emissions may make this more difficult in the future as there is push-back against burning food for fuel. This would be disadvantageous in rural area. It should be possible to gain the carbon sequestration benefits of woodland, the biodiversity benefits and provide valuable fuel and timber resources for farms.

6. Deer management - Our local deer management group (Angus South) have drawn their boundary just north of us, but we are facing an increasing burden from both roe and, increasingly, red deer. Deer fencing for afforestation in the Angus Glens is pushing red deer herds further south and onto the marginal agricultural land in winter. Much more needs to be done to manage deer in an integrated way and to acknowledge the burdens on farms as well as the upland estates. We simply do not have the resources to manage the deer ourselves and the regulation of deer culling and butchery has made it harder as there is no economic incentive. Even if we did manage the deer on our land, it has to be addressed across the region systematically.

7. Natural regeneration - The FGS needs to do more to support natural regeneration, including fencing to support it given the comments above re. deer. We have a 25ha former Forestry Commission woodland (planted circa 1967) comprising scots pine and larch, which is naturally regenerating with silver birch. Having lost approx. 16 ha of mature scots pine (1500-2000 trees) from that woodland to windblow during Storm Arwen, it is disappointing that the scheme requires substantial replanting, rather than allowing us to fence and facilitate the natural regeneration with birch that is already occurring in the woodland. We are hoping to replant with pockets of sessile oak and silver birch, to retain the woodland for nature and amenity, but the cost is a big factor for a non-commercial woodland and we have been advised by a well known forestry company that the only cost effective solution is spruce, which is not our vision for our woodland.

8. Quality of forestry advice - It is disappointing that most of the forestry companies do seem to take the 'commercial' view of afforestation, requiring scale and commercial species choices, such as spruce. Encouraging farmers to take a more ecological approach to tree planting and educating them about the benefits to livestock, particularly cattle, would be advantageous.

2 - Forests Delivering for Scotland's Climate Change Plan

3. How can the support package for forestry evolve to help tackle the climate emergency, to achieve net zero, and to ensure that our woodlands and forests are resilient to the future climate?

Please explain your answer in the text box.:

1. Significantly support the management and maintenance of existing woodland, not just the creation of new woodland.

The carbon market should include existing woodland where it is being managed and maintained for continuous forestry cover.

2. Enable micro-scale planting which could be delivered across almost all of Scotland's farms (where planting is appropriate). This could have a significant contribution to carbon storage and to farm ecosystems.

3. Tackling the climate emergency is vitally important to farms, which are bearing the brunt of climate change as we see wetter winters (with pressure on fields from poaching, burst drains during floods, erosion damage to fields and farm tracks, impacts on livestock wellbeing etc etc) and increasingly dry summers with water shortages for livestock and private water supplies and shrinking wet areas for farmland waders.

Farmers need to be supported to be part of the solution through appropriate planting and management support.

For a family farming business taking on a significant woodland planting scheme is daunting, particularly at scale and, at present, the carbon market is insufficiently developed to offer rewards in the short to medium term. Livestock farms, in particular, who carry some of the responsibility for emissions need to be better supported to plant on their farms. At present the forestry advisors and consultants are focussed on commercial forestry and few that we kind find (if any) are able to advise on how to integrate trees and cattle, despite the many benefits to cattle businesses of trees on the farm.

4. Private investment through natural capital and carbon schemes can make a valuable contribution to climate change. Do you agree that the grant support mechanism should have more flexibility to maximise the opportunities to blend private and public finance to support woodland creation,

Yes

Please explain your answer in the text box.:

Yes, but it remains unclear how small farmers and family farming businesses can access that private finance. Those estates and larger businesses who can afford consultancy firms, such as Savills, may be better positioned to do so. It would be ideal if a mechanism could be found to match up private investment with small farms / collaborative farm groups.

5. How could the current funding package be improved to stimulate woodland expansion and better management across a wide range of woodland types, including native and productive woodlands?

Please explain your answer in the text box.:

- It needs to offer greater flexibility, as opposed to existing prescriptive schemes.

- It needs to facilitate micro-scale planting on farms, which if delivered en masse across Scotland's farms, could deliver significant carbon sequestration and biodiversity benefits.

- The BPS entitlement system needs to stop penalising farmers for planting trees and hedges by removing them from eligible area for subsidy.

- It needs to do more to encourage and facilitate deer management, including both roe and red deer management.

- It needs to provide more support for the ongoing continuous cover management of existing woodlands, including providing deer fencing, including less expensive temporary fencing options.

- It needs to incentivise management which supports natural regeneration, not just new planting.

- It must not facilitate the planting of the wrong trees in the wrong places! In marginal upland context great care needs to be taken to avoid loss of threatened wader habitats particularly to commercial forestry schemes. Incorporating biodiversity assessments into the future agricultural support scheme, such as Nature Scot are trying to do under the Farming with Nature Programme, should help decision-makers and consultees gain greater understanding as to where the vulnerable species and habitats are. The existing system does not seem to work to protect nature from inappropriate sited plantations.

Integrated approach needed so that wader areas are known at a local and regional scale. Existing AECS scheme is unhelpful as location of wader managed areas is not public.

On the other hand, the right trees in the right places, should help greatly e.g. riparian planting for flood management or creation or expansion of black grouse habitats.

6. Do you agree that it should be a requirement of grant support that woodlands are managed to ensure that they become more resilient to the impacts of climate change and pests and disease?

Not sure

How can the grant scheme support this?:

3 - Integrating Woodlands on Farms and Crofts

7. Which of the following measures would help reduce the barriers for crofters and farmers wanting to include woodland as part of their farming business? Please select all that apply.

Better integration of support for woodland creation with farm support mechanisms, Knowing where to get reliable advice, Clearer guidance on grant options, Flexibility within options, Support with cashflow, Information on how current land use could continue with trees integrated throughout

Are there others not listed above?:

8. Establishing small woodlands can have higher costs. What specific mechanisms would better support small scale woodlands and woodland ownership?

Please explain your answer in the text box.:

As per previous answers, managing small woodlands can feel more like a liability than an asset, particularly as there are limited forestry companies in Scotland who can pick and choose more lucrative work.

- Need to allow natural regeneration where it is occurring rather than requiring re-stocking
- Greater financial support particularly for long-term, native planting for biodiversity benefit, as opposed to relatively short term commercial planting
- Supporting small woodland owners to buy and share equipment may help somewhat, but they often also lack human resource and skills as well as finance for woodland management
- Don't exclude the BPS entitlement for woodlands and hedges on farms
- Provide more support for deer management and make it easier to kill, process and eat venison!
- Substantial financial support for deer fencing and for individual tree protection to facilitate field edge planting

4 - Forests Delivering for People and Communities

9. How can forestry grants better support an increase in easily accessible, sustainably managed woodlands in urban and peri-urban areas?

Please explain your answer in the text box.:

10. How can grant support for forestry better enable rural communities to realise greater benefits from woodland to support community wealth building?

Please explain your answer in the text box.:

11. How can the forest regulatory and grant processes evolve to provide greater opportunities for communities to be involved in the development of forestry proposals?

Please explain your answer in the text box.:

12. How can the forestry regulatory and grant processes evolve to ensure that there is greater transparency about proposals and the decisions that have been made on them?

Please explain your answer in the text box.:

13. Forestry grants have been used to stimulate rural forestry businesses by providing support with capital costs. Do you agree that this has been an effective measure to stimulate rural business?

Not sure

a. How could this approach be used to support further forestry businesses?:

b. How could this approach be used to support further skills development?:

14. How could the FGS processes and rules be developed to encourage more companies and organisations to provide training positions within the forestry sector?

Please explain your answer in the text box.:

5 - Forests Delivering for Biodiversity and the Environment

15. The primary purpose of FGS is to encourage forestry expansion and sustainable forest management, of which a key benefit is the realisation of environmental benefits. How can future grant support better help to address biodiversity loss in Scotland including the regeneration and expansion of native woodlands?

Please explain your answer in the text box.:

- Needs targeted support for amenity / biodiversity woodlands, not just commercial schemes.
- Needs to make it easier and less onerous for small businesses to manage woodlands for nature.
- Need more foresters with an interest in sustainable continuous cover forestry, not just commercial schemes
- Need to tip the balance of support towards native planting and non-commercial schemes
- Need more support to facilitate natural regeneration of existing woodland (including financial support for deer fencing and deer management)

Is there any funding for expansion of existing native woodlands (as opposed to new plantation creation)? If so, I was not aware.

16. Herbivore browsing and damage can have a significant impact on biodiversity loss and restrict regeneration. How could forestry grant support mechanisms evolve to ensure effective management of deer populations at:

Landscape scale?:

See previous answers. In our experience boundaries of deer management areas are arbitrary and we are outwith the South Angus deer management area, despite having up to 80 red deer visiting our farm in winter and early spring. Increasing deer fencing and afforestation of the uplands seems to be pushing deer herds further south onto marginal upland farms. We have no resource (or skills) to undertake deer management. The roe deer burden in our area is also very significant and, again, we lack resources to manage, while even if we did, the population is so large in the wider area that our farm would quickly repopulate.

Small scale mixed land use?:

As above, we lack resources to effectively manage deer (roe and red) and feel that, even if we did, they would quickly repopulate. Need to broaden deer management areas beyond arbitrary lines on a map.

If you wish to make any other relevant comments, please do so in the text box below.

Please add your comments here.:

We would be happy to share more about our experiences with Forestry Scotland. We manage existing farm woodland, use it for outwintering cattle, have planted on a small scale and explored planting on a larger scale, but ultimately decided to sell due to inexperience with forestry and uncertainty of short-medium term financial return. We have also had good and bad experiences with forestry advisors and contractors. For small family farming businesses such as ours dabbling in forestry seems to be fraught with pitfalls, although the benefits of woodlands to our livestock business and for offsetting carbon and supporting biodiversity are significant.

About you

What is your name?

Name:
[Redacted]

What is your email address?

Email:
[Redacted]

Are you responding as an individual or an organisation?

Individual

What is your organisation?

Organisation:

[Redacted]

Scottish Forestry would like your permission to publish your response. Please indicate your publishing preference:

Publish response with name

We may share your response internally with other Scottish Forestry policy teams who may be addressing the issues you discuss. They may wish to contact you again in the future, but we require your permission to do so. Are you content for Scottish Forestry to contact you again in relation to this consultation exercise?

Yes

I confirm that I have read the privacy policy and consent to the data I provide being used as set out in the policy.

I consent