Cross-Party Group on Rural Policy

Tuesday 7th June 6-7:30pm (Teams)

‘Doing more with less’

Present

MSPs

Emma Harper MSP

Mercedes Villalba MSP

Ariane Burgess MSP

Speakers

Rhoda Meek - isleholiday.com

Andy Dean – Chief Executive Community Action Northumberland

Dr Ruth McAreavey - Reader in Sociology, Newcastle University

Professor Andrew Barnes - Professor of Rural Resource Economics, SRUC

Alexander Pirie – SAC Consulting

Professor Davy McCracken - Professor of Agricultural Ecology, SRUC

Attendees

Abi Williams	Food Ethics Council
Addey Williams	
Alisa Clark	Inspiralba
Alexa Green	SRUC
Alexander Pirie	SAC Consulting (Speaker)
Alistair Hamilton	SRUC
Alistair Stott	

Andrew Barnes	SRUC (Speaker)
Andrew Heald	Confor
Andy Dean	Community Action Northumberland (Speaker)
Anne McNeill	A Heart for Duns Development Trust
Ariane Burgess MSP	
Ashley Atkins	Office of Edward Mountain MSP
Carol Langston	SRUC
David Cameron	Community Land Scotland
David Gass	Rural Matters
David Miller	James Hutton Institute
David Nicholson	Musician
Davy McCracken	SRUC (Speaker)
Douglas Scott	Scottish Borders Council
Emma Harper MSP	Chair and Group Co-convener
Erin Boyle	
Fiona Mackenzie	University of the Highlands and Islands
Fiona Simpson	
Hilary Stubbs	MACS
Jane Atterton	SRUC
Jim Hume	National Rural Mental Health Forum
Katy Ewing	Southern Uplands partnership
Kira McDiarmid	
Lorna Philip	University of Aberdeen
Luisa Fernanda Riascos Caipe	SAC Consulting
Marcus Craigie	University of Aberdeen
Mark Shucksmith	Newcastle University
Mercedes Villalba MSP	

Michelle Flynn	SRUC
Mike Danson	
Rhoda Meek	isleholiday.com (Speaker)
Ruth McAreavey	University of Newcastle (Speaker)
Sharon Rice-Jones	Perth and Kinross LEADER
Silvia de Sousa	
Theona Morrison	Chair, Scottish Rural Action
Vanessa Halhead	Scottish Rural Action
William Addey	

Apologies

Ann MacSween	Historic Environment Scotland
Ann Packard	Chair, RSA Fellows Scotland and MCICH Network
Ariane Burgess MSP	MSP
David Henderson-Howat	Care Farming Scotland
Edward Mountain MSP	
Jenni Minto MSP	
John Mitchell	Anderson Strathern
Roger Turner	Rural Economies Consultant

Agenda item 1

Welcome, introductions and apologies

Emma Harper MSP (chair) welcomed everyone to the meeting.

She noted the MSPs in attendance and MSP apologies.

Emma Harper MSP asked those who feel comfortable to put into the chat where they are located so we can see where people are tuning in from with the idea of pulling together a map. The secretariate pulled together a map showing roughly where some of the attendees said they were based.

It was noted that all participants had been emailed the agenda and the list of attendees and that the Rural Policy Centre (RPC) as Secretariat has a note of all apologies received and would list them in the meeting minutes as usual. It was mentioned that the meeting would be recorded. No objections were raised.

It was reiterated that speakers' presentations would be uploaded to the CPG webpage within the RPC website as soon as possible after the meeting along with the unapproved minutes.

Group members were encouraged to send the RPC an email if amendments were required in the minutes. The minutes will be formally approved at the next meeting in September/October. It was noted that the Secretariat will include any action points, links etc. in the meeting minutes.

Agenda item 2

Approval of minutes and recap of action items

Emma Harper MSP noted that the Secretariat uploaded the recordings of the presentations from the March meeting to the web along with the meeting minute so those are available to access if anyone would like to watch again or to circulate to others who you think would be interested in seeing them.

Emma Harper MSP noted that the Secretariat of this Rural Policy CPG has also written to the Secretariat of the Women in Enterprise CPG to inform them of the topic of our last meeting in March and to alert them to the meeting minute and recording being available.

Emma Harper MSP motioned to approve minutes of the previous meeting. Minutes were approved (by Jim Hume and Abi Williams) and action items agreed.

Agenda item 3

Presentations and discussion

Emma Harper MSP explained that the theme for tonight's meeting is 'Doing more with less'. A number of speakers have been asked to give short presentations covering a wide variety of different topics. They have all been asked to structure their presentations to answer the following questions:

- What do you have less of (e.g., money, people, etc.)?
- What impact has this 'less' has on your activities or on the activities of those people who your work/organisation is supporting?
- What kinds of responses have been tried to deliver more or deliver better?
- What successes have been achieved?
- What would be your key message for the SG?
- We will run through all the presentations and then take questions and comments after all of our speakers.

Emma Harper MSP noted that the first speaker Rhoda Meek, needed to leave after her presentation to attend an Awards Ceremony as she has been nominated in the Top 100 Women in Tourism. The Group wished Rhoda all the best for the ceremony.

Emma Harper MSP introduced the five speakers covering a range of topics and regions on the theme of 'Doing more with less'. Professor Davy McCracken closed the presentations part of the evening by providing some reflections on overarching themes that were raised by the speakers.

- **Rhoda Meek**, isle20.com, isleholiday.com and isledevelop.com
    - Rhoda focused her discussion on the issue of housing on the Isle of Tiree and other islands in Scotland.
    - Rhoda showed a gif of several mapped areas on Tiree which depicted locations of homes which are owned by people who do not live on the island and which are usually vacant. She mentioned that 59% of these homes are not even holiday lets as they are owned by people who visit only once or twice a year, leaving the house to sit empty most of the time. This accounts for 27% of the island's entire housing stock. Only 54% of the houses are owned by permanent residents meaning that '46% of the lights are off on Tiree in the winter'. 80% of respondents to a recent Tiree Trust survey said that housing provision does not meet the needs of the community.
    - Rhoda mentioned that the Island of Tiree experiences less of everything due to a lack of housing including lack of key teachers, carers, firefighters, children, staff for hospitality, coast guards, or first responders as well as the loss of Gaelic language and culture. She noted examples such as key workers not getting placed in Tiree for ad hoc visits due to a lack of affordable housing.
    - Rhoda is introducing a holiday letting site specifically for the Scottish islands (isleholiday.com) in which all surplus profits will go towards supporting small businesses and housing projects in the islands.
    - Rhoda concluded with a list of asks for the Scottish Government
        - Encourage island authorities to demand that people list their properties on Isle holiday as part of their license commissions.
        - Speak with people who live on the islands to understand their needs rather than approaching with top-down ideas.
        - Let communities work out what they need and what they do not need in terms of skills.
        - Complete an islands impact assessment on all SG policies.
        - Treat our islands like the really fragile ecosystems they are.
    - Rhoda concluded by commending island communities for learning how to accomplish so much with less and asking the audience to imagine what they could do with more.
- **Andy Dean,** Chief Executive Community Action Northumberland
    - Andy discussed the Warm Hubs movement in Northumberland.

- Andy mentioned that fundamentally there are less people and more space between them which results in less services because services are much more expensive to deliver for all sectors. There is also greater difficulty in trying to access funding to try and make things happen because the scale is not big enough.
- Andy described the Warm Hubs as places within the local community where people can be assured of finding a safe, warm and friendly environment in which to enjoy refreshments, social activity, information and advice. These are all based in village halls or other community buildings. The buildings must be fit for purpose, energy efficient, easily accessible and warm in both temperature and comfort.
- Andy explained that they support organisations to run Warm Hubs. Small grants (£500) are provided to help improve the energy efficiency of buildings and organisations are checked for their governance and policies. The venues are all run by volunteers.
- An important aspect to the Warm Hubs is the ability to share pertinent information with the participants. Examples include carbon monoxide awareness, helping people get on the priority services registers of utility companies, slow cooker demonstrations, etc..
- Andy explained that this network enables them to apply for additional funding to continue Warm Hubs.
- Andy noted that the volunteers are critical to making the Warm Hubs successful.
- Andy concluded with some key messages including:
  - Grassroots initiatives are where long-term success comes from as they can transcend the 'comings and goings' of funding programmes and strategic policies.
  - While small is beautiful, the ability to join up initiatives and build networks makes a huge difference in terms of the impacts of (often small scale) funding and the ability for groups/projects to share learning with one another for everyone's benefit.

- **Dr Ruth McAreavey,** Reader in Sociology, Newcastle University
  - Ruth summarised the findings of her recent work in Northern Ireland focusing on the future of funding for rural community development (A_Review_of_Rural_Development_Funding_Web-final-1.pdf (ruralcommunitynetwork.org).
  - Ruth noted that the key issue is removal of LEADER funds and the very real likelihood that the amount of funds coming into rural Northern Ireland is going to be much less than it was.
  - Ruth reminded participants that the LEADER approach is about partnership-working, innovation, networking, bottom up development, grassroots engagement, cooperation and emphasis on both product and process. Ruth explained that these different elements have been

eroded over the past few years (principally by overly burdensome bureaucracy) and should be reintroduced.
    - Ruth mentioned the benefits of the LEADER approach which included: grassroots engagement and local voice, dovetailing with different agencies, be they local government or other third sector organisations, financial and technical support, collaboration within and between local communities, and job creation.
    - Ruth also touched on the less positive aspects of the LEADER approach which included: lack of gender representation (as fewer than 35% on average were female LAG (Local Action Groups) members and nearly 80% of the successful applications were led by men), lack of appropriate monitoring and evaluation, focus on spending rather than social impact as a success metric, and unequal capacity to participate in the programme.
    - Ruth concluded with messages for the Scottish Government which included:
        - Engaging with communities and starting where they are at which includes involving them in the design phase of any programme and a clear alignment of expectations; the Northern Ireland case very much demonstrated that expectations were sitting in different places and that caused tension throughout the LEADER programmes.
        - A real need also for targeted interventions to bring in people who have not been engaged before by creating multiple entry points into a programme and embedding predevelopment support into the process.
        - Management and audit monitoring needs to be adequate for the size of the fund.
        - A need for space for the trial of innovative processes.
- **Professor Andrew Barnes**, Professor of Rural Resource Economics, SRUC
    - Andrew focused on sustainable intensification and efficiency from an agricultural perspective.
    - Andrew discussed the key issue of doing more with less access to inputs which is pertinent given the current disruptions in supply chains.
    - Andrew explained that Scotland is becoming more efficient with outputs and compared to other countries it is doing reasonably well. However, there are variations in farm performance. Access to good land, levels of education, succession planning, age and attitude, come out as fairly constant drivers towards explaining the differences between the efficient use of resources compared to the those who were lagging. He explained that ways to improve efficiency include: adopting new technologies, changing the size of the business and changing the input-output mix.

    - Andrew explained that policy interventions such as removal of support, provision of advice, and education and research engagement can help to realise technological or management interventions for example in the form of uptake of new technologies or changes in farm planning or management.
    - Andrew mentioned that there is an ever-growing list of practices that seem to be cost effective (300 measures so far). These measures improve productivity but also help to support environmental goals as well. He recognised that these may not fit every farm, but that there is scope to demonstrate the effectiveness of these measures.
    - Andrew concluded that agricultural policy should be reformed to support mechanisms and technology adoption to help manage risk, engage in networks of best practice, and improve those efficiencies.
- **Alexander Pirie,** SAC Consulting, Net Zero Arran
    - Alex introduced the Net Zero Arran project which was started in 2019. He explained that net zero was an aspirational title. The group grew from 19 to 35 businesses in one year.
    - Alex explained the aim was to better understand the carbon auditing process, how it could be implemented at farm level and what the changes were likely to be.
    - Alex discussed that the project is contesting with less time to adapt and to mitigate against the challenges of climate change, increasingly challenging supply chains, and farmers having less availability of inputs that would allow them to normally carry-on conventional practice. This project has been able to identify key constraints that impact each of the group members, common themes that that they can identify and take coordinated collaborative action on in order to mitigate against some of those challenges, and thereby improve the carbon footprint of individual businesses, but also the agricultural carbon footprint of the island as a whole. Agrecalc was used to carbon audit each of the participating farms.
    - Some issues pertinent to farmers on the island are common themes across Scotland including overuse of inorganic fertiliser, overuse of fuel, particularly red diesel, and overreliance on purchased feed. Individual strategies are being developed with farmers to mitigate against that. Future meetings in the group will revolve around issues such as rush pasture management, grassland management, tree planting for conservation action, and promotion of pollinators.
    - Alex closed by stating that the group has found tremendous traction and has had great buy-in from the farmers. While not everybody in the group has the focus on carbon reduction there are some who are particularly driven by the conservation aspects and some who just want to be farming as efficiently as they can.
- **Professor Davy McCracken**, Professor of Agricultural Ecology, SRUC:

- Davy commented that he thought the speakers would discuss ‘lack of funding’ as a major issue but in reality, it was a complete ‘absence of funding’ that was a main issue discussed. However, he noted that, you cannot just throw money at issues but there is a need to ensure that funds are effective by ensuring local voices are involved.
- Davy mentioned that each presenter discussed the importance of collaborative action in terms of funding streams and bringing different individuals or communities together to try and achieve the desired goals or more importantly, in the first instance, identify what they desired goals should be. Each presentation discussed the importance of bringing people together and engaging them as part of the process.
- He noted that everybody highlighted the need for a bottom-up process to design the potential solutions and that grassroots involvement right from the start is key to ensure that all the voices are heard.

Key issues raised in the discussion included:

- ***Question raised about funding available for lack of transport in rural areas (in the context of potential challenges for rural people to access the Warm Hubs):*** Andy Dean mentioned that they were unable to find money for transport to the Warm Hubs, but that issue typically sorts itself out. There is an example of a warm hub which has raised money to pay community transport providers to pick up people to bring to their events. Andy mentioned that the rural transport problem in general is impossible to solve but they have worked with locals to enable them to find different solutions in different localities.
- ***Question raised about diversifying the agricultural population to get more from* more *people:*** Andrew Barnes was addressed directly for this question. He mentioned that although for example there are growing numbers of women in agriculture, there are some limitations in the data due to an abundance of older male farmers. He mentioned that it is difficult to find female farmers in the data they have. Agreed that it is important to diversify agriculture. Ruth McAreavey mentioned that gender imbalance was clear in the Ireland context in relation to the LEADER programme. She highlighted that the LEADER process for coming together mirrored that of local government which has historically not been as accessible to women. She noted that there is something there about how communities try to engage with different members of their society and mentioned that alternative forums to traditional committees should be considered to boost women's participation. Davy McCracken commented that we are in the midst of revising land management support policies and it is beholden on society in Scotland to identify what outcomes we want, how best to achieve that, and how to best use the money available to accomplish these goals. He asked if part of this money should go into initiatives which aim to diversify agriculture and if so, what this should look like.

- ***Question raised about whether access to land and land ownership limited the ability for people to get involved in agriculture:*** Ruth McAreavey mentioned that in her interviews with refugees there is evidence of a great desire to work in nature and on the land and so this idea of diversifying access to land is important and should be considered.
- ***Question raised about the possibility of providing young people interested in farming with advice about how to get into it (e.g., through assistance with applications and finding housing)***: Davy McCracken mentioned SRUC are looking at apprenticeships and on-farm training opportunities which require an individual to live and work on a farm during this period. There are a small number of dairy farms which currently participate in this. The idea is to give people a hands-on experience rather than requiring them to learn solely through a university setting.
- ***Question raised around whether presenters have practical tips for successful collaboration to ensure more diverse voices are heard****:* Alex Pirie mentioned that the Farm Advisory Service (FAS) is launching Fast Connect which will give people opportunities to engage in discussing topics which are important to them.
- ***Point raised about the importance of agricultural practices which require less inputs and are more sustainable yet may lead to less outputs.*** The importance of keeping traditions such as crofting alive and recognising other more sustainable methods of agriculture like Silvo pastoralism was also raised.
- ***Davy McCracken raised a point about the questions that we need to ask when considering what the future of agriculture looks like in Scotland.*** He mentioned that support for eco-agricultural practices typically comes from younger farmers. He mentioned that some of the questions that we may want to ask when considering future agriculture policy are: What do we want to use our food production in Scotland for; What type of food production systems do we use; and How much of our land do we want to use for other initiatives? He mentioned that while we are actively halfway through thinking how we want to change our agricultural Land Management support policies we have not considered what type of food systems we want to support in Scotland and how we want the outputs on those food systems to be used in Scotland as much as elsewhere? Emma Harper MSP noted that other committees could be involved in co-tackling these issues as is being done with other critical issues.
- ***Question asked to Ruth McAreavey around how to engage communities which are not engaged:*** Ruth noted that this is an ongoing challenge. In her work, she has attempted to engage with minoritised communities, including going through umbrella organisations, although this has not always been successful. She noted that one of the issues is that it takes time to build strong, trusted relationships to access these communities. It is important to

identify third party organisations which are already in contact with these communities and build up those relationships. She also advised that participation would occur in different forms and that having multiple entry points to a project will get more people involved.

Agenda item 4

No action items were set from this meeting.

AOB

- Emma Harper MSP noted that she hopes to sponsor an SRUC event in parliament after recess which she will keep everyone informed of.
- Emma Harper MSP noted that the Secretariat has not yet updated the mailing list for this Group but hopes to achieve this over the summer months.
- Emma Harper MSP reminded members to submit suggestions for speakers/topics/projects to feature at future meetings by emailing the Secretariat at rpc@sruc.ac.uk. It was noted that a Group member has previously suggested a presentation to update on Regional Land Use Partnerships and this has been noted.

Next Meeting: TBC – likely end of September or early October - more information to follow