



NEWS RELEASE

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Crofting Federation calls on Scottish Government to support the creation of small local abattoirs

The Scottish Crofting Federation (SCF) calls on the Scottish Government to give tangible support to the creation of small local abattoirs that can underpin the meat niche market Scotland seeks.

“The abattoir situation is very vexing,” said SCF Chair, Russell Smith. “We all agree that the niche, high provenance meat market is the way forward for Scotland, whatever happens regarding Europe. Yet high quality meat producers’ efforts are stymied by having such a scarcity of abattoirs and thus poor traceability. Animal welfare is compromised by vast transport distances and there is the added cost of travelling to and from the abattoir which can make direct selling unprofitable for small producers. Inexplicably, this cannot be compensated for in Less Favoured Area support. Look at a map showing red meat slaughtering facilities in the UK; it is not great elsewhere but Scotland is shamefully neglected, it is an abattoir desert.

Mr Smith continued, “The Skye abattoir is particularly frustrating: after seven years of campaigning and a huge input of voluntary time and effort, the community group now have fully costed, detailed plans for a micro-abattoir, and a site with planning permission. Their project is at a shovel-ready stage but they are held back by the Scottish Government’s interpretation of State Aid Rules which places a limit on public sector funding.

“We believe that this restriction should not apply. A case could be argued for there being market failure and that the abattoir will operate as a not-for-profit service to the crofting and farming community in a fragile rural area. The objectives of ensuring the highest standards of animal welfare and traceability are in line with Scottish Government food policy. We have taken this argument to Scottish Government and it will be re-visited, we are told. The feasibility study showed this to be the best business model and it could be replicated in other areas. Other European countries use micro-abattoirs to great socioeconomic effect.

“The sudden, unexpected closure of the Orkney abattoir was also announced recently,” Mr Smith continued, “putting at risk the islands’ reputation for high-quality food. It is clearly

unacceptable to transport animals for slaughter to the nearest facility in Dingwall, 150 miles away across the roughest stretch of UK coastal waters. Some of the islands' unique, high-provenance products, such as North Ronaldsay mutton, could simply disappear."

Mr Smith concluded, "If Scotland's food and drink industry is to thrive post-Brexit, the producers serving local, niche and high-quality markets must be enabled to do so, and, in the crofting areas, that means having access to local abattoir services. Without them, some of the country's iconic designated food products will be at risk, as well as the culture, landscape and environment of hill livestock production.

END

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