



NEWS RELEASE

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Crofting perspective on the ewe hogg scheme

The Scottish Crofting Federation (SCF) has broadly agreed with the NFUS on the necessity to curb the excessive claiming on the Scottish Upland Sheep Support Scheme (SUSSS) by some large farms and has offered further suggestions for improvement.

“This is a very significant scheme for crofters,” said Yvonne White, Vice-chair of the Scottish Crofting Federation (SCF), “offering a chance to those on Region three rough grazing to make up for their distressingly low basic payments. It has been misused though, with some large producers claiming not only on their replacements but on any number of ewe hogs, the surplus then being sold off. When it is large farms doing this it rapidly uses up the limited budget, depriving others, especially smaller producers, of benefiting from it. This was not the intention of the scheme and it is appropriate that the National Farmers Union for Scotland have recognised this and are proposing a limit on claims of a set percentage of the breeding flock, equivalent to actual replacements.

“Of course, the objective could be achieved most effectively by paying on those ewe hogs that are being retained as breeding replacements or on the number of gimmers, last year’s ewe hogs, taken into the breeding flock by putting to tup in November”, Ms White continued. “This would allow for maintaining flock numbers in regular ages, or for growing the flock size. But we appreciate that the Scottish Government are unlikely to take such a bold step that could require more administration.

“At this stage in the scheme the proposal from NFUS is a step in the right direction at least and should be relatively easy to accommodate in the administrative process, and will increase the payment per hogg. However, the percentage should be higher than proposed on the basis that those on Region Three land will likely have more losses, especially due to predation. 20% would do if you were taking 6 crops of lambs as lowland farmers might but most crofters would work to a 4 or 5 crop system and so payment should reflect a 30% replacement.

“To facilitate those with small numbers or those building up their flocks, such as new entrants”, Ms White added, “for those claiming 50 or fewer hogs the percentage criteria should not apply. This is relatively easy to accommodate administratively and is less complicated for the claimant when applying for smaller numbers.

“There are more issues such as the application window and retention dates – with no account currently being taken of weather and welfare of gatherers, the scheme being over bureaucratic and punitive, and the excessive amount of Region One in-bye allowed. As this is a complicated scheme and clearly needs to be revamped, we invite government officials to meet with ourselves and other upland sheep producers to discuss these practicalities and the way forward”.

END

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Notes to editors

- Pictures can be found at: <http://www.crofting.org>