

# Vision of farming in 2030

Carrie 18/11/13

**N**ext month the final conference for the FarmPath project is held in Brussels, where the findings of the study are to be presented.

The concept behind the work is to identify and assess ways of securing the future regional stability of agriculture in Europe — in essence, creating a vision for the future of farming.

The work on the EU-funded project has been carried out by the James Hutton Institute and involved stakeholder groups in north-east Scotland. However, the implications of the vision have a national resonance, and it is hoped policy makers will heed the findings.

Stakeholders comprised representatives from farms and estates, business, conservation and local authority interests and community groups, with an input from the former head of agri-business with the Clydesdale Bank, Iain Clark, who offered his own view of agricultural change over the next two decades.

I sat through one of the sessions recently and was impressed by the range of views and opinions that the project has unearthed.

The vision which emerged for farming in 2030 is firmly anchored in farm profitability and economic viability, with

profits coming from the market, the industry not undermined by cheap imports, and production subsidies rationalised to facilitate innovations on-farm.

There should be a clear and certain CAP which reduces the risks to farming incomes and supplies farmers with information to plan ahead appropriately.

One of the strongest messages is that in 2030 agriculture will

be a more powerful partner in the food supply chain, on an equal footing with major supermarkets, underpinned by greater cooperation and collaboration — a message to encourage the Scottish Agricultural Organisation Society.

Less reliance on subsidies is paralleled by the view that, with the taxpayer paying less, there will be greater public willingness to pay higher prices for food.

By asking the consumer to pay more, the role for Government is to improve the popular understanding of farm production, its associated costs, and the standards



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farmers must adhere to.

In 2030 farm businesses will be more diversified, and use more renewable production technology for on-farm energy consumption.

This will be accompanied by a more even spread of different types of renewable energy, rather than the current concentration on turbines.

In terms of Government action, there will be less red tape and a more transparent and accessible

planning system.

Overall, the vision sees a new breed of farmer amid a major cultural change. The farms of 2030 will not be “stuck in old ways of doing things”, rather they will be hubs of innovation and development, freed from official bureaucracy and supported by a positive, flexible Scottish Government’s Rural Payments and Inspections Directorate providing advice and guidance and less penalties.

In the new world, farmers will be viewed unequivocally as “custodians of the countryside”, interestingly a

description they once cherished before it was savaged by a former chairman of Scottish Natural Heritage.

Greater use of technology will be mirrored by precision farming, high-yielding and disease-free crops and less reliance on fertilisers. GM crops are to be in more general use.

In the wider context, farming will be seen as a desirable way of life, which appeals to younger people. Stakeholders have suggested that more profitable farming means more young people staying on farms, with farm incomes high enough that farmers are able to retire and make way for a younger generation.

It is also envisaged that the farming sector of the future offers better wages relative to other professions.

Earlier farming succession is a key part of the vision, and this would include a “whole landscape approach” and “cooperative working together.”

Underlying the vision is the need for a more cohesive approach by policy makers, more sustained education about food and its provenance, and redressing the disconnect between farmers and urban society.

Apple pie and motherhood? Perhaps, but where would we be without a vision for the future?