

Smallholding Scotland

Land is one of Scotland's greatest resources. It is a finite resource and one that is always under pressure to meet society's demands for food and drink, economic contribution, fuel and energy, housing, recreation and infrastructure, while allowing biodiversity and the natural environment to flourish and respond to the changing climate. It is important that those who enjoy the privilege of owning or managing this resource, even on a modest scale, appreciate the contribution that the sustainable stewardship and purposeful use of Scotland's land resource makes to the wellbeing of communities and the sustainability of our environment.

In 2016, including common grazings, the area of agricultural land in Scotland was 6.24 million hectares; this equates to 80% of Scotland's total land area. There were 51,896 agricultural holdings, of which around 20,000 are estimated to be smallholdings, occupying around 110,000ha or 2% of the agricultural land. However, these figures include only those small landholdings that are registered as agricultural and may be an underestimate of the total land area owned and managed for purposes other than agriculture in small landholdings. Smallholding Scotland reaches out to all those responsible for small landholdings and for that reason, we consider all small landholdings to be smallholdings.

Small subsistence farms were once found all over Scotland; like the Highlands, the Lowlands of Scotland experienced their own clearances and the subsequent urbanization of the population. Whilst there is no desire to return to the rural poverty and hardships of the 18th century, nevertheless, reconnecting Scotland's people with their land is an important aspect both of sustainable national development and the fostering of Scotland's cultural heritage.

There is no legal definition of a smallholding and the sector is diverse. Many smallholdings are small farms and these have an important role in the production of local, sustainable food, fuel or fibre. Other small landholdings may be managed for the purposes of outdoor recreation, for the preservation of rare and traditional breeds, for enabling reconnection with nature, for preserving and promoting flora, fauna and biodiversity, or for working with communities to give people the opportunity to learn about food, its production or other rural skills. In many cases, the generation of profit is not the main driver.

Smallholdings provide an important point of access to land for new entrants to agriculture, for those who want to farm part-time or on a smaller scale as well as other purposes. In many cases, the ownership of a small landholding is the achievement of a lifelong ambition and may represent a significant life change – and the consequent influx of a diverse range of skill sets into the sector is a positive aspect of smallholding that can enrich the local communities of which smallholdings are a part.

However, the management of a smallholding, with the often diverse range of activities carried out on the land, requires the acquisition and assimilation of an extensive skill set and knowledge base, and there is a clear need for a support network to enable the land manager to make good use of his /her smallholding.

Smallholding, at its best, embodies the principles of environmental sustainability, co-operation, entrepreneurialism and community, where people share a common vision of sustaining the environmental, agricultural, social and economic aspects of small-scale land management.

AIMS and PURPOSE

Established by smallholders, Smallholding Scotland is a unique, member-led organisation dedicated to representing, promoting and supporting smallholding across Scotland.

Our purpose is to promote and support the sustainable stewardship and the purposeful use of smallholdings.

We aim to do this by:

- Providing access to reliable, relevant and comprehensive information for smallholders.
- Signposting training, education and skills development opportunities provided by government and other reputable sources, as well as commissioning the same, where gaps in provision are identified. This will include, *inter alia*, improved methods of sustainable food and fibre production and processing, biodiversity and landscape enrichment, onsite energy use and production, efficient resource use.
- Supporting the sustainable local food sector through influencing thinking and policy on its development from small producers' point of view; and encouraging partnerships between producers and consumers.
- Working collaboratively with individuals and other organisations to promote and encourage sustainable and purposeful smallholding.
- Promoting smallholding and its positive contribution to local communities.
- Identifying and developing diversification and entrepreneurship opportunities for smallholdings.
- Encouraging smallholders to develop links to local communities for mutual benefit.
- Developing support, mentoring and co-operative networks within local smallholding communities and throughout Scotland.
- Commissioning and participating in research on smallholding, both in Scotland and further afield.
- Representing the interests of Scottish smallholders on a local, national and international level.
- Positively contributing to a sustainable Scottish rural economy, community and landscape.

Organisational Strategic Plan

In the **short term** (1-2 years) we intend to:

- *Recruit 500 members.*
- *Survey, collate, prioritise and align members' wants and needs to inform the information, training, member benefits and representation we will provide.*
- *Secure funding from local, national and international funding bodies to establish a web-based information hub for smallholders in Scotland, to include opportunities for education, knowledge transfer, skills development and environmental education.*
- *Represent members on topics within the devolved competence of the Scottish Parliament to the Scottish Parliament and executive, agencies and NGOs.*
- *Begin to build relationships with other organisations working on behalf of smallholders.*
- *Establish a range of member benefits, through third parties.*

In the **medium term** (3-5 years) we continue to build on the above and:

- *Increase membership to 1000 members.*
- *Represent members on topics where competence is reserved to the UK Parliament.*
- *Support formal and informal co-operation between smallholders, such as the establishment of equipment and marketing co-operatives.*
- *Signpost available funding/subsidies.*
- *Provide a space for like-minded individuals to come together, collect and share ideas and experience.*
- *Organise field labs and information days.*
- *Collate and provide access to international research on topics relevant to smallholding.*
- *Initiate research on smaller farming systems.*

In the **long term** (6-10 years) we intend to continue to build on all above and:

- *Increase membership to 2000 members.*
- *Represent members internationally.*
- *Identify and develop international partnerships.*