



EUROPEAN MOVEMENT IN SCOTLAND: HOLYROOD 2021 ELECTIONS

AGRICULTURE

Manifesto commitments recommended by EMiS

- Pursue regulatory alignment with the EU to allow smooth access to EU markets, and to minimise barriers in the event that Scotland rejoins the EU, whether as an independent country or part of the UK
- Advocate for targeted immigration measures to address labour shortages in agriculture, fisheries and food processing
- Maintain high animal welfare, environmental and food standards
- Push for full transparency and meaningful role for Scottish government in administration of UK “Shared Prosperity Fund” that will replace EU funding

Background

Farming remains an important industry for Scotland, and crofts and farms make a vital contribution to thriving rural communities. The total size of the Scottish agriculture sector in 2019 was £3.68 billion.

Trade friction and divergence: The EU market is key to Scottish agriculture. Scotland exports over £1.2 billion worth of food to the EU. 80% of red meat exports go to the EU. The UK is also heavily reliant on EU food suppliers (74% of the UK’s agri-food imports came from the EU in 2019).

It is too early to assess the full impact of the UK’s departure from the EU but, as of January 2021, there has already been major friction over the import and export of a range of food produce. Non-tariff barriers and certification requirements have increased costs and damaged competitiveness. Scottish companies can no longer export seed potatoes to the EU at all, because the negotiations did not give them listed status.

While the agreement contains some measures to encourage the EU and UK to minimise technical regulatory divergence and use shared international standards, those products subject to regulatory standards will now have to be certified separately for the EU and UK markets, adding cost and complexity for businesses.

Given the importance of the EU market, the Scottish Government should wherever possible seek to maintain the closest possible regulatory alignment,. This will reduce trade frictions, both now and in the future if Scotland rejoins the EU, whether as part of the UK or as an independent country.

Sector employment: Workers from EU countries have been an important source of regular and seasonal labour for rural communities, fisheries and agriculture. The Scottish Government should lobby the UK Government to address labour shortages in agriculture, fisheries and food processing. The UK's withdrawal from the EU, together with the new 'points-based immigration system', has led to predictions that migration into Scotland will fall by up to 50% and seasonal EU labour will be unobtainable or insufficient because of new visa costs and restrictions. This is compounded by evidence that 1.3 million migrants have left the UK in the last 18 months.

Environmental standards: Scotland has committed to maintaining high animal welfare, environmental and food standards as a result of the approval of the UK Withdrawal from the European Union (Continuity) (Scotland) Bill, and should therefore be able to stay aligned with EU rules where possible and practicable to do so. This should continue, notwithstanding the provisions of the UK Internal Market Act.

Rural development funding: Rural communities in Scotland have benefitted from rural development funding provided by the EU as part of the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP). This has supported the sustainability of many communities in Scotland, and it is important that this funding is replaced in the period following Brexit. (The programme provided £1.3 billion of funding between 2014-2020). EU funds will be replaced by the new UK "Shared Prosperity Fund", to be administered directly by the UK Government. It is important that there is full transparency about how this will be implemented in Scotland, and that the Scottish government should play a meaningful role in decisions over how the Fund is allocated in Scotland.

Gene editing: Gene editing has emerged as a potential fault line with the EU, with the European Court of Justice (ECJ) ruling that genome-edited plants should be treated as genetically modified organisms (GMOs). A consultation has been launched in England with a view to introducing gene editing. If approved this could have the consequence that domestic agricultural produce is shut out of the EU market unless there is a change in EU policy. This is currently subject to review within the EU, and requires careful consideration because of the risks associated with regulatory divergence from the EU.

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