

Fork to Farm Dialogue

2nd Session 17th March 2021

[Please refer to these slides when reading these notes](#)

Preliminaries

This session was lively with some great conversations and threads that will be further pulled out and untangled as the weeks go by.

20 people in attendance, again a mixture of farmers and food producers, along with policy officers from across local authorities.

The tone was set at the start of the meeting to reiterate that we are meeting to address *what more we can collectively do to mitigate against climate change*. We were reminded of the guiding principles that underpin these dialogues, the global nature of the dialogues and the COP26 connections.

We reviewed the 'direction of travel' that had emerged from the previous session – these can be seen on [slide 4](#).

We also clarified that we are taking a food systems approach and holistic approach to addressing these issues, thinking outside the box beyond conventional farm practices.

Participants then had 2 'speed networking' sessions to chat to other members of the group in small breakout rooms, framed around the question "*What do you enjoy the most about your work?*"

Data

The introduction session had thrown up some important questions around data, such as the exact local and regional greenhouse gas emissions from agriculture and farming. Abi shared researched slides (5-11) covering different aspects of the food system which covered:

Scottish and local agricultural CO₂e.

What do we currently produce in Scotland

Biodiversity loss/gain (Scotland)

Consumer habits – organic growth

This part of the presentation also flagged up what we don't know, eg impact of Brexit on farming, numbers of farming practicing regenerative agriculture, organics or agro-ecology, local biodiversity loss/gain, changing diets and more.

There were suggestions that answers for these could be sourced from:

- Soil Association registered organic farmers, those in conversion and those attending Field Labs and Innovative Farmer programmes.
- Local Authority for biodiversity count

Other suggestions for further sources of evidence welcome.

Discussion

The above slides prompted a broad discussion about 2 key issues that warrant further investigation. These were the key points raised:

1. Methane is a big driver of on farm emissions. David Finlay raised that new research coming out of Oxford shows that grass fed systems could be discounted from methane emissions calculations, given certain parameters.

2. Tree planting and forestry. Speculation that Forestry and Farming were often pitted against one another in a very crude argument. There are currently no grants for agri-environment schemes - funding is being prioritised for afforestation but being funneled into sitka spruce plantations.

More money is going into the pockets of big landowners in the uplands on previously tenanted farms, although plantation planting in the uplands has been shown via recent reports to not bring the carbon sequestration benefits promoted – more carbon is sequestered by peat bogs and moorland.

Planting on lowlands/pasture may bring carbon sequestration benefits but removes that land from food production. Broad agreement that tree planting should be on a site by site basis, not a top down decision – involving local people. Agroforestry and silvopasture can (and should) be considered.

3. Local Biodiversity loss/gain, specifically in South West Scotland. This could be obtained by contacting current or former Local Biodiversity Officers – details have subsequently been provided to follow this up.

Actions

- Abi to contact David to obtain a link to this and other grassfed livestock research.
- Abi to liaise with Ted and Morag to obtain reports on forestry operations and carbon sequestration.
- Abi will identify a witness to speak on farming and forestry at the next session.
- Abi will contact track down the local Biodiversity Action Plans and discuss with relevant officers.

Breakout Discussions

Participants then went into breakout rooms themed around the different spheres of the food system. In small groups, they were prompted to consider:

What's going well? What are the success stories, the good news?

What practices changes or innovations can you think of that are successful?

What questions have you raised during your discussion?

Output from these discussions were recorded via Padlets – an online flipchart/sticky note facility. The links below will take you to each Padlet:

Society <https://padlet.com/hello1122/co9b49pactzgfrb4> ,

Health <https://padlet.com/hello1122/fnrri7udmefkobo> ,

Environment <https://padlet.com/hello1122/zprxzifzptxmrwq8> ,

Politics <https://padlet.com/hello1122/cc9490kcg33c1wia> ,
Economy <https://padlet.com/hello1122/3z10i02hc1tgy0ul>

These Padlets will remain open for you to comment on – please add a new note if you think of any other good news of successful practices that are helping to reduce emissions across the food system.

There was limited time for feedback as the discussions above ran over, but we heard from 2 further topics that will be investigated further, with research shared and witnesses being called where appropriate.

Society: identified an increased uptake and interest in local food.

Question – an opportunity to look at what make local food more appealing? How can we encourage more of this and tap into these markets?

Health: Affordability vs low income – how can local food be more affordable?

Can we have some research on % of household income spent on food?

Should farmers stay out of health issues?

At this point we had to close the meeting as we had already run past 3pm.

In Session 3 we will pick up on the questions raised above, review evidence, listen to witnesses and ask questions, and enjoy further debate on the topics raised.

In the meantime, please add your thoughts to the Padlets so we can continue to draw out threads for further investigation.

Please contact Abi if you have anything you would like to share or present at future sessions. abi@propagate.org.uk, 07340 531506.