

Greater emphasis needed on environment to make farming more sustainable

We need to look at what lessons there are for future agricultural support mechanisms and policies for Scottish farmers, says **Dr Dave Parish**



Producing the food we eat isn't always straightforward.

This year has been particularly challenging with the extreme wet weather at the end of 2019, followed by record sunny conditions in spring predicted to severely impact the nation's wheat harvest in particular.

Because production can be so affected by various uncontrollable factors, subsidies are needed to provide some guarantee for farm businesses to keep food production going, otherwise we would be more heavily dependent on food imports. Different types of farm qualify for different subsidies and all farmers can also apply for additional funding through agri-environment schemes to help them do more to support farmland biodiversity.

There has been much scrutiny of the subsidy system which consumed around £500 million of public money in both 2014 and 2015 in Scotland and it seems likely that the nature of these payments will change in future. It is widely accepted that there needs to be a greater emphasis on environmental concerns to make farming more sustainable in the long term. There are lots of buzz words associated with this like Natural Capital and Ecosystem Services, but basically this means that farmers will probably need to produce food whilst reducing negative impacts they may have on the natural environment to qualify for payments. This may mean farmers will need to help reduce soil erosion on their land or slow the rate at which rainfall leaves the farm to reduce flood risk downstream, or perhaps do more to reduce carbon emissions or support struggling wildlife.

How this will be achieved is not yet clear. The Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust, with partners across Europe, is involved in a project called PARTRIDGE, funded by the EU North Sea Region Interreg programme, looking at agri-environment schemes and how they might be improved. This recently involved interviewing stakeholders in each of the partner countries

to better understand their perception of agri-environment schemes and farming's place within the wider environment. The results were illuminating.

The verdict on the current agri-environment scheme in Scotland was damning. The application procedure was seen as too complex, with farmers often hiring consultants to help, adding a significant cost with no guarantee of success. The scheme itself was found to be poorly financed, inflexible and prescriptive, forcing all farmers to follow the same guidelines regardless of where they were in the country and the nature of their farm. There was also some concern at the fact that the scheme isn't formally monitored to see if it's working. Random inspections check to see if farmers are sticking to their agreements, but no-one is looking to see if the 'wild bird seed for farmland birds' option has actually been used by birds, for example.

What lessons might there be for policy makers as they consider future agricultural support mechanisms? The interviewees were keen that farmers should be allowed to use their skills and local knowledge to achieve desired outcomes, with payments better covering all the costs involved and perhaps reflecting the results achieved rather than simply the actions carried out. For example, farmers might receive a flat rate based on their plan with top-ups available if they hit agreed targets. This would require a change in the way schemes are monitored, but this could easily include a role for the farmers themselves and would help show the public the environmental work that farmers do. Fortunately, the signs for future agricultural support look promising. NatureScot, the Scottish Government's conservation agency, has started a pilot scheme to look at a payment by results approach. This is a welcome development that stakeholders will be watching carefully.

Dr Dave Parish, Head of Scottish Lowland Research, Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust



Hearts need help to beat pandemic



The British Heart Foundation in Scotland needs the public's help now more than it ever has before, says **James Jopling**

There is no doubt the events of the last eight months have been unprecedented. It feels impossible to think that as the clocked ticked into 2020, any of us could have imagined what our personal and working lives would look like now, let alone the devastation to families and communities brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic.

What has not changed, however, is our commitment at the British Heart Foundation (BHF) to protect our life-saving work and support the 720,000 people living with heart and circulatory diseases in Scotland. A commitment that is only made possible with your help and generosity.

At a time when hearts need help more than ever, we urgently need your support.

Our research funded by you over the last 60 years has revolutionised how we prevent, diagnose and treat heart and circulatory diseases to save and improve lives.

But Covid-19 has put many people with these conditions at greater risk than ever.

We now know that those with established heart disease are at a higher risk of more severe complications of Covid-19. We have been working tirelessly throughout the pandemic; our researchers have joined the fight against Covid-19, and we're continuing to support patients and their families providing vital information through our Heart Helpline and the coronavirus pages on our website.

But the impact of the pandemic is the biggest challenge the BHF has faced. At a time when our research is needed most, our income has been devastated. As a result, we estimate we will have to cut in half what we

spend on new research this year - from around £100 million to £50m.

Such a staggering fall in income could have a devastating impact on UK cardiovascular research, the careers of bright young scientists, and advances towards better treatments and cures for people with heart and circulatory diseases.

As the biggest independent funder of research into heart and circulatory diseases in Scotland, our priority is to save and improve lives. At a time when our research is needed most, we can't slow down now. Too many lives are at stake.

These diseases sadly cause the deaths of 1,400 people in Scotland each month and three in ten deaths in Scotland each year.

We have made great progress in the 60 years since the BHF was formed. The number of people dying from heart and circulatory diseases in Scotland has fallen by half and we want to do more to help fund research into earlier diagnosis, more effective treatments, better outcomes and faster recovery.

As part of on-going efforts to protect life saving research, we are joining the Association of Medical Research Charities to call on the UK Government to establish a Life Sciences-Charity Partnership Fund. But we also urgently need your help to keep up the pace of our research. We rely solely on your donations and every single penny is important to us.

This year, I have been continually humbled and inspired by the response of our wonderful supporters and by the fortitude of our staff and partners to ensure we can continue our work at such challenging times. Since our shops reopened,



we have been delighted to receive so many donations and to see so many customers returning. Every donation by you, every item sold to you, makes a difference.

And to our very many fundraisers who've seen their challenges cancelled and their plans postponed, it has been amazing to see the fabulous creative ideas you have come up with to continue to raise money for us.

Over the last six decades, your support

and our scientists have helped save and improve millions of lives. Our priority is to ensure this pandemic doesn't change that and that together we can beat heartbreak forever. And we simply cannot do that without you.

For more about BHF's work and how you can support us, visit www.bhf.org.uk/starts-with-your-heart
James Jopling, Head of BHF Scotland

Income for research into heart and circulatory diseases has been devastated by the Covid-19 pandemic



How to deal with parenting stress as restrictions ramped up again

Kids are usually just being kids and it's the way we are feeling that can add stress, says **Clare Simpson**

Being a parent is the best thing that ever happened to me. As a single parent and now a grandmother, I know it has its challenges and isn't always easy. Add a global pandemic to the mix and things become even more difficult. However, by taking time for ourselves, we can create a positive environment for our family, which is vital during these uncertain times.

Keeping children entertained has become even more difficult as children adjust to a new routine and face more changes, which can lead to more challenging behaviour. As parents, we know the way we're feeling can affect how we react and at times like this when our stress levels are higher, we're more likely to be pushed to our limits.

Throughout the day we face numerous challenges, whether it's dealing

with a crying toddler who isn't getting their way or arguing with their siblings. It can sometimes feel like you're a fully-fledged ringleader at a circus. When I felt I'd had enough, it was more often because there was something else in my life causing added stress. It's important to consider our own frame of mind and make sure we're looking after ourselves in order to keep the peace.

At Parenting Across Scotland, we provide information for parents and carers online at parentingacrossscotland.org which signposts them to specialist help for almost any parenting issue as well as providing helplines parents can turn to if they need to talk. The charities involved work together to focus on parenting issues and to ensure all families across Scotland are valued and supported to give children the best possible start in life. We know

first-hand balancing everything is difficult enough for families at the best of times - and these are far from the best of times.

As restrictions start to increase again, you may be worried about how you will deal with the stress. I know it's easier said than done, but remember sometimes our children aren't trying to be testing, they are just simply being kids and it's often the way we're feeling at the time that can make a situation feel much worse.

Caring for yourself is vital, but often difficult to find time for. The Scottish Government's Parent Club website has tons of self-care ideas and wellness tips including structuring your day or having the kids help around the house. It also provides tried and tested tips to help prevent some of those challenging situations, including setting clear

house rules and consequences, recognising good behaviour, and setting clear rewards.

Parent Club recognises that families can face a variety of pressures that reach beyond coping with challenging situations with children, so they have launched a new directory which signposts parents to more specific support. This can be found at: parentclub.scot/family-support-directory.

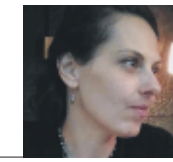
If talking to someone might help, you can call the Children 1st Parentline at

08000 282233, or chat to someone online. I encourage you to explore Parent Club which is full of helpful tips for dealing with tantrums or maintain a calm household when self-isolating. The digital hub includes advice and support from the online community created by parents for parents. Being a parent isn't easy, but you aren't alone.
Clare Simpson, Project Manager for Parenting Across Scotland



Healthcare could be locked into self-destructive cycle

We should be asking if there is a non-medical alternative to medical treatment to minimise our environmental impacts, says **Cristina Richie**



In 2017, the National Health Service's Health and Social Care sectors had a carbon output (CO2) of 27.1 million tons. Carbon emissions are accelerated by human activity and contribute to climate change.

Climate change causes healthcare problems related to extreme heat, outdoor air quality, flooding, vector-borne infection, respiratory disease, and water and food-related infection. The World Health Organisation reports that climate change currently causes over 150,000 deaths annually with a projected 250,000 additional deaths per year in the next ten to 30 years.

People affected by climate change cause an influx in hospital admissions. Treatments release more carbon, locking healthcare into a self-destructive cycle whereby medical care causes medical needs. For instance, air pollution is known to induce breathing difficulties. Inhalers are used to minimise the effects of air pollution, but inhaler use generates a significant amount of CO2, which exacerbates pollution. In response, the United Kingdom Climate Change Act of 2008 led to legally binding carbon reduction measures in healthcare. These are outlined in NHS Scotland's Climate Change Plan, with additional support from the Scottish Public Health Network and Scottish Managed Sustainable Health Network (SMASH), which addresses climate change health hazards.

As the climate plan is re-evaluated for efficacy and progress, the NHS has moved from greening hospital buildings, reworking hospital menus to include less meat, and encouraging carbon neutral transportation, to examining the carbon of medical practices like pharmaceu-

tical prescriptions and the environmental impact of single-use plastics. Yet, minimising the environmental impacts of healthcare is not only the responsibility of the NHS, but also the patients who it serves and the doctors who provide care.

One of the best ways for patients to participate in healthcare carbon reduction is simply to ask "is there a non-medical alternative?". And, moreover, the alternative may have fewer side-effects. Such is the case with diet and exercise to combat Type II diabetes instead of bariatric surgery.

Climate change health hazards, availability of healthcare services, and NHS capacity will be among the most urgent medical challenges for Scotland in the coming decades. Choices will need to be made as to which healthcare services should be retained and which should be cut to meet future carbon guidelines. Yet the pandemic has ushered in a renewed sense of social solidarity, the importance of personal preventative health measures, and minimising the impact on the NHS. It is precisely these virtues that will facilitate the strength and wisdom needed for sustainable healthcare.

On November 25 Dr. Richie will be giving a virtual talk on "Economic Policies for Medical Reproduction that Support the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals," at the Edinburgh Speaker Series Seminar, Ipm, University of Edinburgh.

Cristina Richie PhD is a Member of the Scottish Council on Human Bioethics, Fellow at the Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities, University of Edinburgh, and Lecturer in Philosophy and Ethics of Technology at Delft University of Technology (Netherlands)



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