

# **The Changing Role of Women in Farming, Crofting, and the Agricultural Industry: 2016-2021**

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# Research highlights

## Introduction and background

This project aimed to understand the impact of the recommendations of the Scottish Government's Women in Agriculture Taskforce (Scottish Government, 2019), and the influence of other initiatives that support 'women in agriculture', on women's experiences working on farms and in the agricultural industry in Scotland. This project involved individuals originally involved in baseline research (Shortall et al., 2017) for four follow-up online focus groups involving women and men farmers, crofters, and other representatives of the agricultural industry.

## Perspectives on the Women in Agriculture Taskforce activities and recommendations

Participants believed that the Taskforce **recommendations were appropriate and have resulted in tangible outputs, e.g. funding for women's training**. They wanted to know how the positive impact from the Taskforce recommendations could be ensured. Contrasting views arose regarding the responsibility of individuals, organisations, or Government, in changing the culture of women's role in agriculture.

## Perceptions of the (changing) role of women in farming and the agricultural sector

Participants perceived an **increase in young women accessing land, participating in agricultural activities, and becoming 'independent' farmers/crofters**, in addition to a growth of women-run farming businesses. There has been a significant amount of publicity about women farmers and crofters in mainstream and social media, and this **increasing visibility was viewed positively**. However, there remains insufficient diversity in the governance of key agricultural organisations, and there is a need to support greater diversity and inclusivity across Scottish agriculture.

## Succession

Participants believed that **whilst succession remains an issue, women are more commonly being identified as successors than they have in the past**. There has been a positive change over time and changing attitudes across generations are evident. It is increasingly acceptable for daughters of farming families to be successors, but this still appears to depend on whether there are male siblings and the interests of male siblings. The frequency of women inheriting crofting tenancies or croft ownership had not changed notably over the past five years, with participants citing a cultural difference between farming and crofting.

## Leadership

Despite the reported efforts of agricultural organisations to support the recruitment of women and their participation in agricultural leadership, key barriers remain. These **barriers include cultural assumptions, attitudes, and arguably unconscious bias**. The role of positive discrimination in supporting women's roles in agricultural leadership remained contentious, but it was proposed that board governance would improve with stronger female representation. It was agreed that the agricultural industry should **explore opportunities to overcome wider barriers to diversity**, ensuring the participation of those from non-farming backgrounds, different ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

## Training

The participants perceived that there had been **an increase in the uptake of agricultural training by women**, with many online meetings and training opportunities appearing to be women-led. Participants emphasised their interest in practical training opportunities. Scottish Government initiatives such as the 'Be Your Best Self' course and the Women in Agriculture Practical Training Fund were viewed very positively, having inspired female participants to seek further training opportunities, but concerns arose regarding the inequity of access to a similar training funding for young men.

## Childcare

Participants believed that **women remain the core provider of childcare on farms and crofts**, or the primary person organising childcare. However, individuals and organisations are more aware of the options to support women's participation in farming businesses and agricultural organisations, given childcare responsibilities. Female role models with families are important to demonstrate the potential role for women in agriculture. Childcare provision in rural areas remains challenging.

## Impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on women and men in farming

The shift to virtual meetings and events due to the **Covid-19 pandemic improved accessibility to knowledge exchange, networking, and agricultural governance** for women, as well as saving time on travel or presenting childcare difficulties. The pandemic provided a **'legitimising' window** of opportunity for greater female involvement in crofting activities (due to household mixing rules). However, female participants explained that **home-schooling children has impacted on their ability to do their job(s)**, maintain productivity, and that it excluded participation in some on-farm activities. Some reported lost income where diversification enterprises were impacted by lockdown restrictions. Some farm safety issues arose during the pandemic due to childcare requirements, and the impact of the pandemic on children and young people was a concern.

## Mental health

Participants raised concerns regarding mental health in agriculture. They noted that whilst **mental health is now being discussed more openly** (than it was five years ago), there is **still not enough attention and action taken to tackle the sources of stress** on farmers and others in agriculture. The Covid-19 pandemic added stress to male and female farmers, e.g. related to separation from family.

## Generational change

Participants believed that **the shift towards gender equality in agriculture was progressing with generational change**. They highlighted the important role of young men in changing attitudes to women in agriculture; many do not see barriers to women's participation. The belief that 'unpleasant attitudes' will be removed through generational renewal is an important point for further examination.

## Women's future plans and the sustainability of Scottish agriculture

Female participants described their intended and anticipated future plans, which included:

- engaging with training provision (online and practical),
- building brands and undertaking diversification activities,
- taking on board and strategic roles in agricultural organisations,
- mentoring young people and supporting new entrants to agriculture,
- becoming trainers and/or documenting personal experiences,
- buying land, renegotiating contracts and leases, expanding farms and developing land management strategies.

Female participants also aspired to **provide capable women with a higher profile in the agricultural industry**, to drive positive change.

The perspective was shared that women and young people have an important role to play in increasing diversity in agriculture, overcoming resistance to change, and therefore promoting sustainable innovations (e.g. regenerative agricultural practices). Stakeholder groups that engage with Scottish Government on agricultural policy development should be gender balanced and ensure diversity in views. **The main barriers to women in agriculture remain access to land for new entrants** (e.g. those from non-farming/crofting backgrounds) and the costs of starting new farming/crofting businesses.

# Summary research report

## 1. Introduction and background

This project aimed to understand the impact of the recommendations of the Scottish Government's Women in Agriculture Taskforce (Scottish Government, 2019), and the influence of other initiatives that support 'women in agriculture', on women's experiences working on farms and in the agricultural industry in Scotland. This follows on from baseline research commissioned by the Scottish Government in 2016 (see: Shortall et al., 2017).

## 2. Methodology

The baseline research included a series of focus groups with men and women involved in farming and crofting across Scotland (Shortall et al., 2017). This project sought to reunite these groups for **follow-up online focus groups**, therefore it involved re-contacting the focus group participants from 2016 and inviting their voluntary participation. Four focus groups were held in March 2021, each lasting 90 minutes, and using WebEx video conferencing software. The focus group participants comprised women and men who are active farmers or crofters, and/or who are involved in the agricultural industry; the groups were either women or men-only. A total of 18 women and four men attended the focus groups, with supplementary remote interviews undertaken with one woman and one man who had been unable to join the WebEx call due to technical issues. All participants agreed to the 'Chatham House rule' and therefore remain anonymous and unattributed to their comments outwith the focus group discussion.

The 'impact' focus group discussions explored the changes experienced by the participants in the intervening five years since the baseline research was undertaken, particularly considering subsequent Scottish Government interventions to support women in agriculture. A short pre-focus group online questionnaire and informed consent form were circulated to participants prior to each focus group. Focus group discussion points included perceived changes to the role of women in Scottish agriculture, access to training, leadership opportunities, the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, and participants' future plans. The focus groups also reflected on the recommendations from the Scottish Government's Women in Agriculture Taskforce. The focus group discussion guides and pre-focus group questionnaire were developed in conjunction with the Scottish Government's Women in Agriculture policy team. They are presented in Appendix A.

The focus group discussions and supplementary interviews were audio recorded and verbatim transcribed. The transcriptions, researcher notes, open questionnaire responses, and any further email text relating to the focus group discussions, were thematically coded. The following sections present a summary of the main discussion points and emerging themes.

## 3. Findings

### 3.1 Perspectives on the Women in Agriculture Taskforce activities and recommendations

#### **Focus group participants' perspectives on the Taskforce activities and recommendations:**

- **There has been good progress on some of the Taskforce recommendations, but concerns remain regarding critical issues of succession and gender equality in agricultural leadership.**
- **The Taskforce recommendations were considered appropriate and have resulted in tangible outputs, e.g. funding for women's training.**
- **There was some resistance to the establishment of the Scottish Government's Women in Agriculture Taskforce, and questions remain regarding ensuring positive impact from the Taskforce recommendations.**
- **Contrasting views arose regarding the responsibility of individuals, organisations, or Government, in changing the culture of women's role in agriculture.**

Focus group participants reflected on a summary of the Women in Agriculture Taskforce (the 'Taskforce') recommendations (see Appendix B). Their reflections on the recommendations included that:

- Succession remains a key issue and concerns were raised that there has been little change, (i.e. that succession remains heavily biased towards men), and that unless succession issues can be addressed, the other recommendations will not lead to a substantial change to women's participation in Scottish agriculture. (See also Section 3.3.)
- The recommendations relating to leadership are key. There was a consistent view that there was little evidence of change in agricultural leadership, which is important when increasing the visibility of women in agriculture. (See also Section 3.4.)
- Positive feedback was provided on the Women in Agriculture Practical Training Fund, considered a tangible output from the Taskforce, which will have 'marked outcomes' and that has 'shifted perceptions'. (See also Section 3.5.)
- Contrasting views were presented on whether there are inequalities in crofting legislation regarding women's rights in divorce cases. If new legislation is required to address these concerns, this process would have to be carefully scrutinised.
- Resolving rural childcare was challenging due to wider issues of accessibility and distance in remote rural areas. (See also Section 3.6.)
- Health and safety on farms shouldn't be gender specific, and that the same concerns and considerations apply to both men and women. (See also Section 3.8.)

Overall, participants believed that there has been good progress on some of the Taskforce recommendations and stated that the recommendations cannot be 'disagreed with'.

## Resistance to the Taskforce

However, it was noted that there was **resistance to the establishment and actions of the Taskforce**. Male participants mentioned that some of the key criticisms of the Taskforce or 'project' have been from women, in particular those who felt that they have become successful in the industry as a result of their own hard work, therefore questioning why others, in particular young women, should get the benefit of extra opportunities and support, over young men. Female participants also highlighted their initial scepticism, but described their realisation of their own privileged position (e.g. working in the agricultural industry with a majority of female staff, having strong local female role models, etc.). As described:

"I would say I've been so lucky in that I've always seen, since I started out, strong women. So for me, I was like 'what do you even need Women in Agriculture for? There's already women in agriculture, you are being silly!' But no, I really see that that's not the same picture across the country, not even across the island(s), folk might not see the same role models there so, no, it's definitely very valuable, what you are doing and from my own point of view, no, I only see the table being levelled and women's place, gone from strength to strength." [Crofting woman, focus group 1, participant 2]

The view was also expressed that it is not necessary for women in agriculture to be 'at the coalface' or high profile in order to support others or represent women in agriculture.

**Participants questioned the impact of the Taskforce and the recommendations.** They wanted to know 'what happens if none of the recommendations are achieved', 'what incentives are there for people to implement the recommendations', and 'how can different demands for government funding be prioritised, and who decides'?

## Responsibility for changing the culture

Contrasting views were shared concerning **where the responsibility lay regarding changing the culture of women's role in agriculture**. On one hand, the view was shared that implementing the recommendations is not the responsibility of individuals, but that of organisations/institutions in agriculture (especially government-based organisations). On the other hand, participants were concerned that government should not drive change, but instead provide safety nets and policy frameworks. Cultural change should be the responsibility of agricultural organisations and businesses, because they have a self-interest in facilitating industry capabilities and generating long term benefits. As described:

"I know, change happens, change happens in here and in here [gesticulating], it's in real people. It doesn't happen in governments. Get in amongst the good people and push them." [Farming man/man in agricultural industry, focus group 4, participant 3]

Male participants called for WIA initiatives to avoid the 'blame and victim' culture. Instead, **future policies should seek to create capability**, for example through increasing the visibility and representation of 'successful' women, providing training for positivity and confidence, but also to think carefully about allocating funding to ensure equality and equity in agriculture. One area not yet addressed relates to **how women perceive the agricultural industry**, rather than how the industry 'behaves' or perceives women. This is associated with the ongoing challenge to recruit women into agricultural leadership roles, and the perception that barriers to participation have been removed.

Many of these themes, concerns, and suggestions were considered in more depth later in the focus group discussions, without reference to the Taskforce recommendations, and they are presented further below.

## 3.2 Perceptions of the (changing) role of women in farming and the agricultural sector

Focus group participants stated that:

- Involving women in the industry is vital to the future of agriculture.
- It was perceived that more young women are accessing land, participating in agricultural activities, and becoming 'independent' farmers/crofters.
- There is increasing visibility of women in agriculture, through television programmes, agricultural organisations, and as farming ambassadors.
- There has been a significant change in attitudes and respect towards women in farming and crofting over past decades.
- Women are still considered to be the primary person managing the household and undertaking the majority of the childcare and administrative chores.
- There remains insufficient diversity in the governance of key agricultural organisations.
- Female participants were concerned about being identified as a valuable person in the agricultural industry due primarily to gender.
- There is a need to support greater diversity and inclusivity across Scottish agriculture.
- Supporting opportunities for new entrants (e.g. new tenancies and land access) could facilitate more women becoming farmers/crofters.
- Some participants believed that there is an important role for policy in driving change in attitudes towards women's role in agriculture, but others emphasised market forces and the changing economic prospects for farm businesses.

The participants agreed that **involving women in the industry is vital to the future of agriculture**, as described:

"I do feel very, very passionately about the role of women as practical, hands-on farmers and ... I believe that women are very, very good farmers and particularly with the emphasis on sustainability, on ethics, on welfare of animals and people, I think involving women – very strongly – in our industry is just vital in going forward. In terms of the way we connect with consumers, our integrity, our connection with the public." [Woman in agricultural industry, focus group 3, participant 5]

The participants described a **perception that there are more young women accessing land, participating in agricultural activities (e.g. attending marts, showing livestock, etc.), and becoming 'independent' farmers/crofters**. Male participants positively highlighted the growth in women-run farming businesses. It was a common view that **there has been a significant amount of publicity about women farmers and crofters** (i.e. in mainstream and social media)



and that “there are more women’s voices being heard talking publicly about agriculture and crofting” [Crofting woman, focus group 1, participant 4]. The increasing visibility of women in agriculture was considered ‘partly by design and partly having grown organically’, but overall change has been viewed positively, with participants highlighting the role of women in the ‘farming narrative’. **Women are becoming more visible in agricultural organisations** (see also ‘Leadership’, Section 3.4). The role of women in agriculture (and the rural economy more broadly) has been given increasing visibility due to farming television programmes such as ‘This Farming Life’ and ‘Countryfile’, as well as the **influence of positive female farming ambassadors**. There is more awareness of women being business partners, rather than only a ‘sidekick’ or ‘wife’. However, the media tends to miss the background tasks that are typically undertaken by women, as described:

“...obviously it doesn’t make for great TV watching someone fill in a crofting grant form or getting quotes from Harbro and McGregor’s or whatever but it’s still stuff that goes on and it tends to be, in my experience, meeting folk, the women, the wife, the girlfriend or whoever, that sits down and does the paperwork side of things. Not that that’s any less legitimate but maybe it’s not quite as glamorous...rather than being out at the sheep or the cows.” [Crofting woman, focus group 1, respondent 2]

Participants stressed that it remained important for television programmes about agriculture to feature women equally to men. The television programmes have brought a positive image to farming overall, not only of women, and the role of social media presentations of agriculture have become increasingly important.

Participants felt ‘positive’ and ‘encouraged’ about the future role of women in agriculture in Scotland. Experiences were shared that show the **significant change in attitudes and respect towards women in farming and crofting over past decades** (e.g. female participants recounting experiences of being asked to speak to a man when they answered office telephones, or regarding family planning in job interviews, etc.). The participants asserted that ‘change is happening’ but noted that people may be ‘impatient’ for change and fail to look back to compare with historic situations, and therefore to notice change over time. Others questioned the increased awareness of the role of women, whether women are feeling more confident, or if this related to trends in girls’ educational achievements. It was agreed that there is more publicity around gender issues today but debated whether there has been any further change beyond this. For example, **women are still considered to be the primary person managing the household, and undertaking the majority of the childcare and administrative chores**, i.e. the background tasks that are undervalued, and take up a lot of time.

## The diversity of agricultural governance

The perception was that **there remains insufficient diversity in the governance of key agricultural organisations**. A female participant asserted that she had not seen any change of attitudes and greater inclusivity amongst agricultural stakeholders. This contrasted with her experience in crofting, thus:

“I have never once been made to feel – in a crofting environment – ‘You’re a female. What are you doing here?’ or been looked down at. Whereas I sit in these meetings with farmer types - and you feel it off them. And that’s on Zoom. You know, you see their faces...”  
[Crofting woman, interviewee 1]

Male participants also highlighted an ongoing 'challenging culture' and the persistence of 'dinosaurs'. Male participants reported their experiences of women or others with different views speaking at agricultural meetings:

"I don't think it's that warm an environment, whether it's women or whether it's just speaking out, I think different opinions are still quite difficult to get across in some rooms [of] agricultural stakeholders." [Man in agricultural industry, focus group 4, participant 4]

Female participants also mentioned experiences of agricultural meetings where they have felt patronised. This perceived lack of diversity in turn limits the views integrated into decision-making, and led participants to suggest inviting people from different backgrounds (i.e. non-agricultural, cultural, etc.), mentoring them towards governance positions. This topic will be discussed further in the 'Leadership' (Section 3.4).

## The role of prominent women in agriculture

**Admiration was expressed for prominent, 'inspiring', women farmers and crofters**, but uncertainty whether these are 'confident women deciding to push themselves' or people who are very good at 'self-publicity'. Male participants perceived that there are more women working in the agricultural industry who are 'capable' and have got into the industry through their own merit. It is suggested that positive discrimination would be possible with continued celebration of female achievements in agriculture, in the media, or through being 'given' important roles. However, the view was also shared that when women are perceived as dominant and outspoken, their role can be counter-productive and 'put people off'. Furthermore, there were **concerns raised by female participants regarding being identified as a valuable person in the agricultural industry due primarily to gender**:

"I do have friends, women in agriculture who sometimes find that putting us in a box of being women in agriculture a bit of a cringe. And I sit sometimes uncomfortably with it because, like I said, I don't necessarily want to be identified because of my gender, I'd rather just be identified because somebody values what I do or what I can contribute rather than it's necessarily seen as 'just being a woman'." [Farming woman/woman in agricultural industry, focus group 2, participant 8]

Concerns were raised regarding alienating and excluding men, avoiding any sense of 'us and them'. Male participants highlighted the risk of creating an 'antagonistic' and critical atmosphere between men and women, which may do 'more harm than good'. Nonetheless, there was **a strong theme around the need to support greater diversity and inclusivity across Scottish agriculture**, beyond the focus on women. There is an ongoing role for broader societal change to support the role of women, not only in agriculture, therefore highlighting the ongoing importance of events that recognise gender inequality such as 'International Women's Day'<sup>1</sup>.

## Opportunities for new entrants

Another key theme in the focus group discussions regarding the changing role of women in agriculture was around the **opportunities for new entrants**. It was suggested that changes in

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1 It should be noted that one female focus group was held on International Women's Day, 8th March 2021.

the assignments of tenancies<sup>2</sup> could provide an opportunity for many more women to access agricultural tenancies. However, challenges remain regarding the high cost of accessing land through assignments, as well as set up costs for new entrant farmers. Opportunities for new entrant land access are further limited by the culture of leasing land to existing and known tenants, rather than providing opportunities to new entrants.

## Roles and responsibilities

Finally, there was a critical discussion amongst participants regarding roles and responsibilities in providing support for women in agriculture in Scotland. To some there is **an important role for policy in driving change in attitudes**: ‘if there is a legal framework around something then maybe it’s more likely to happen’. The view that ‘capable people should be rewarded’ was shared, in conjunction with the assertion that **imposing cultural change shouldn’t be through government interference** (e.g. imposing requirements for diversity). Instead, this should be resolved by market forces (although personal experiences shared highlighted ongoing gender pay disparities between men and women in agriculture). Indeed, it was suggested that the need to support the role of women is a necessity due to the lack of people in farming and reducing number of farming businesses. **The change in women’s role therefore may be due to changing economic prospects for farm businesses**, especially in marginal areas.

## 3.3 Succession

### Focus group participants stated that:

- **Whilst succession remains an issue, women are more commonly being identified as successors than they have in the past.**
- **Succession is now a topic that is more freely discussed amongst farming families.**
- **It is increasingly acceptable for daughters of farming families to be successors, but this still appears to depend on whether there are male siblings and the interests of male siblings.**
- **Succession processes that did not fairly consider female family members impacted negatively on family morale and that such processes were observed by younger generations was of concern.**
- **There appears to be ongoing generational differences in approaches to farm succession.**
- **Crofting participants believed the frequency of women inheriting crofting tenancies or croft ownership had not changed notably over the past five years, citing a cultural difference between farming and crofting.**

The cultural practice of male heirs inheriting farmland in Scotland was previously highlighted as a critical barrier to gender equality in agriculture (Shortall et al., 2017). The focus groups presented a slightly more positive picture. The view was shared that **whilst succession remains an issue, it**

<sup>2</sup> Relating to The Agricultural Holdings (Relinquishment and Assignment) (Scotland) Regulations 2020.

**does not affect women as much as it once did**, and there has been a positive change over time. Furthermore, **succession is now a topic that is much more freely discussed amongst farming families**, supported by prominent advocates of succession planning within the agricultural industry. Individual farmers view succession as a higher priority, and one that aligns with their wish to support the next generation of farmers. The participants believed that it is **becoming more 'relaxed' and 'acceptable' amongst farming families for daughters to be successors, but this does still appear to depend on whether there are male siblings, and their interest in becoming successors**. Caution was also raised regarding variability across geographical regions with regard to changing attitudes to succession.

### Family farming succession experiences

One female participant shared her personal experience of succession, in which she was disadvantaged due to gender and perceived traditional views on the part of her family. This experience has shaped her view that succession processes have not progressed far with regard to gender equality, and that succession is a perennial discussion within Young Farmers' clubs in Scotland is also considered an indicator of slow change. **Participants raised concerns for the next generation witnessing these types of succession processes, and the impact on farming family morale**. Participants also questioned whether if they had been more proactive earlier their daughters would have shown greater interest in being the farm successor or business owner. Others described their planned succession processes that will involve female successors, highlighting the importance of maintaining a profitable, diversified farming business to pass on to the next generation. The shift to capabilities rather than gender remains however, an aspiration, as described:

“... we're still not actively choosing second girls if there's an oldest boy or even any girls if there's an oldest boy in some families, it's still very much there. And I do think we're getting to the point now where the most capable will prevail.” [Man in agricultural industry, focus group 4, participant 4]

### Experiences of succession observed through professional roles and farming communities

Participants described their professional experiences that illustrate contradictions regarding a changing succession culture. It was noted that those in different agricultural professions will see different cases of farm succession, according to their role in the process (e.g. supporting problematic succession processes, observing functional processes, etc.), which might shape viewpoints. Nonetheless, there appear to be **ongoing generational differences in approaches to succession**, with examples shared of older women 'pulling up the ladder' to 'protect the patriarchy', and women in their 30s and 40s who have married onto farms being uncertain as to whether they are entitled to have a say in the farming business. One participant was disappointed to see the 'undercurrent' on neighbouring farms that daughters will marry another farmer if they want to farm. This was not the case for all participants. A male participant highlighted the role of his wife in a positive succession process:

“When dad [stepped away] my wife then had to step into the gap that he left. And we had started the whole succession planning thing, I mean dad has been very good, as far as

that's gone... I think dad was a bit miffed actually, to be perfectly honest, he thought that 'oh I'm going away, I'm going to have to employ somebody to replace my dad', well he was a bit pissed off that I didn't!...But the reality is, that my wife [wife's name] stepped into the breach more than ably... She's nae a tractor driving wife, but she does all the books, she does all the Ofgem submissions, all the cattle work, the paperwork but she's an absolute godsend out in the calving shed... There's obviously been a big shift in our business and [wife's name] has filled that breach." [Farming man, focus group 4, participant 1]

### Female succession in crofting

**Crofting participants believed the frequency of women inheriting crofting tenancies or croft ownership had not changed notably over the past five years.** Women have become successors, but this is considered to relate to local circumstances rather than how women are being brought into crofting. The perception was that there is a **'cultural divide' between crofting and farming** regarding succession, and the role of women. Succession in crofting is believed to be predominantly determined by who is interested to inherit (i.e. rather than primogeniture). It is suggested that any reform of succession law would require a geographically-tailored approach, and for policy to be applied with caution to avoid undoing positive change:

"But the thing is, if it's sort of already working, you need to (work) in certain areas. It's this thing about agriculture in Scotland – it's diverse because of the ground type and the climate and geographically, etc. So, if you have one template, it's not going to suit everything."  
[Crofting woman, interviewee 1]

## 3.4 Leadership

Focus group participants stated that:

- They had mixed views as to whether there had been any notable change to the recruitment and role of women in agricultural leadership.
- Agricultural organisations are making efforts to have greater gender equality (e.g. through the recruitment of female board members), but there remains a need for further attention to this issue.
- It remains difficult to recruit women to governance positions within key agricultural organisations, due to barriers such as time, 'cultural assumptions', and attitudes, for example, the norm of selecting people who are 'known' for leadership positions.
- There was apparent resistance to 'outspoken women'.
- Some women may be more confident now in attending and participating in agricultural meetings and requesting that meetings are arranged to be more inclusive.
- Agricultural and crofting organisations are dominated by female staff, however, discrimination against women remains in parts of the agricultural industry.
- The role of positive discrimination in supporting women's roles in agricultural leadership was contentious. It was proposed that board governance would improve with stronger female representation.

- **Uncertainty persists regarding whether women have been appointed due to gender or merit, but there are challenges associated with a perceived meritocracy in agriculture.**
- **The issue of women in agriculture should be broadened to look at opportunities for diversity and the removal of prejudice towards ‘other’ groups, not only women.**
- **It is important to have a broad mix of people in agricultural leadership roles, including men and women from non-farming backgrounds.**

The focus groups involved **significant deliberations regarding whether there had been any change to the level of recruitment and role of women in agricultural leadership**. Participants stated that there had been a ‘change in the right direction’, demonstrated through the appointment of women in positions of leadership in agricultural organisations, and their related skills (e.g. not being aggressive, being good communicators, having conflict management skills, etc.). Others believed that a ‘fundamental shift was happening’ in agricultural leadership, which is related to generational change (see Section 3.9).

### **Barriers to women participating in agricultural governance**

Participants noted, however, that **it remains difficult to recruit women to governance positions within key agricultural organisations**, despite the efforts of organisations to remove barriers, and reported that they are unsure how to further encourage women into these roles. Ongoing barriers to women’s leadership include **the time commitment required**, as described:

“I know for myself, there’s nothing hold me back from doing any of these things except time. By the time I’m finished here at home, organising and doing everything, I don’t have a whole lot of notion to go and start organising something else, to be honest.” [Farming woman, focus group 2, participant 4]

Barriers also include **‘cultural assumptions’ and attitudes**, for example, the norm of selecting people who are ‘known’ for leadership positions, which can perpetuate male leadership cycles/ male-dominated recruitment. Changing cultural assumptions are likely to be most difficult and take time to change. The lack of female representation in key agricultural organisations was believed to illustrate that no women were considered capable or that none were coming forward to be guided towards these roles. There was also the perception that there is an ‘element of resistance’, i.e. of women ‘taking over’, or “female agitators that are annoying everyone by saying what we think” [Crofting woman, focus group 1, participant 3]. This **apparent resistance to ‘outspoken women’** prohibits progressive dialogue, and the participants believed that women who are putting themselves forward are not being seriously considered for leadership roles.

### **Pace of change in the leadership of agricultural organisations**

**Agricultural organisations are making efforts to have greater gender equality**, with the aspiration to work towards gender-balanced boards, as well as the recruitment of female board members and female presidents. Nonetheless, others felt that there was a lot more change required, and that needed recognition. Female participants asserted that this change was not recognised by men, and that there **is still a need for ‘proper engagement’ with this issue in agricultural organisations**.



Nonetheless, male participants highlighted the ‘societal pressure’ for change, and the challenge to overcome initial barriers, but recognised the importance of normalising women’s leadership of agricultural businesses and organisation. The responsibility for change therefore does not only lie with female agricultural leaders, but that organisations must be leaders in the way that they attract women (e.g. incorporating greater flexible working or part-time roles, etc). Women’s confidence remains a barrier to their greater role in agricultural leadership, therefore it is suggested that if agricultural organisations are seeking women to apply to their boards, they must adapt to and accommodate the differences of women to men. This perspective contrasts with the experiences and views of a male participant, thus:

“...at the meetings I’ve been at that there are women present, it’s very difficult to see any visible actions and things going on which would put women off from partaking in such a meeting. But clearly a lot of women are feeling uncomfortable with doing it generally. I feel that there may be something in the psyche of the women rather than in the psyche of the agricultural bodies, that needs to be addressed.” [Farming man, focus group 4, participant 2]

### Inclusivity in agricultural governance

Nonetheless, some **women may be more confident now in attending and participating in agricultural meetings**, and **requesting that meetings are arranged to be more inclusive**, e.g. arranged around childcare responsibilities or off-farm work, having an online option to avoid travel, being able to bring babies, etc. There is a sense that people have become more receptive to being accommodating to requests that support inclusivity, for example:

“I don’t know whether that is from Women in Ag, but I do feel more confident in saying ‘well, yes, I’m a farmer but I’ve got a day job so perhaps of an evening’. I’m involved in a Scottish Government group, they always have meetings on a Friday. I don’t work on a Friday, I don’t have childcare and I turn round and said, ‘I can’t do that’, so that, for me... When you do turn round and say ‘yes, I’d like to be involved but I need a change, I need to be able to Zoom or call or speak to you’, people are more receptive, I feel, in the last few years. Maybe they always have been, maybe I’ve just not asked but I think they are.” [Farming woman, focus group 2, participant 2]

### Women’s leadership in crofting and other agricultural organisations

Crofting participants explained that **there had been strong female leadership in crofting for many years**, within local grazing committees and sheep stock clubs, as well as national level organisations, despite barriers of time, substantial volunteer work, etc. The Scottish Crofting Federation attempt to rotate the chair of the board on a biennial basis and alternate between genders. The participants highlighted the current efforts by the Crofting Commission to recruit new female board members and believe that the government could further influence the Crofting Commission to appoint women. **Similar gender balance occurs in other agricultural organisations, including the National Sheep Association (NSA) and the Scottish Association of Young Farmers’ Clubs (SAYFC)**, although it is noted that many female members of SAYFC do not continue in leadership roles when they leave school or college. Participants assert that the NSA has ‘never had

a problem with female representation' and that this is linked to the fact that sheep farming is a 'relatively poor industry' and that 'everyone can muck in'.

### Women playing supportive roles and industry discrimination

It was highlighted by men and women that **agricultural and crofting organisations are dominated by female staff**, which contrasts the gender balance of committees and boards. This is viewed critically by participants, who highlight the ongoing inequalities where male leaders are the 'front of house', with women playing supportive roles. However, **despite women appearing reluctant to take visible leadership roles in agriculture, it does not mean they do not have prominent roles in the management of farming businesses**. Furthermore, concerns were raised by male participants that **discrimination against women remains in parts of the agricultural industry, for example auction marts**. This was believed to be because people don't want to listen to female, high-pitched voices for a long period, but noted that this barrier could be overcome with use of technology. This difference may also be due to the mart being an intimidating environment, or that young women in agriculture are using direct sales or doing business outwith the mart.

### The role of positive discrimination

There was considerable discussion around the **role of positive discrimination in supporting women's roles in agricultural leadership**. Some described how they have changed their mind regarding the necessity of positive discrimination. Participants believed that positive discrimination could help more women into farming and help women who have no farming background but are interested in it as a career. Female participants considered the need to 'actively develop people and mentor them' and that **a perceived 'missing trick' was the use of positive discrimination**. It was suggested that this is implemented by many agricultural boards, in conjunction with identifying skills and experience, not only to appoint women, but also to identify others who lack confidence to put themselves forward. It was proposed that **if agricultural organisations were required by legislation to have gender equality at board level they would operate better** (i.e. that board governance would improve with stronger female representation). The Scottish Land Commission was highlighted as a positive example of a gender-balanced board.

The view was shared that **government influence is already driving positive discrimination**:

"I think support, a lot of it is coming down to government support for organisations as well and they find it difficult to attract funding and things. But I've been involved with three companies in the last five years or three boards that will need to get a woman, it's not been who is the best candidate, it has been 'we'll need to get a woman on the board', and that's only because they've been pressured into thinking like that." [Man in agricultural industry, focus group 4, participant 4]

A male participant recalled the discussion on one agricultural board regarding the appointment of a new director where conversation focussed on those women who are already in positions of leadership, and who are 'carrying a pretty heavy burden on behalf of the ladies'. The perception was shared that there is a 'limited number of women willing to come forward', and that there are not enough women in leadership positions or able to be approached (i.e. lacking visibility). Male participants highlighted agricultural organisations who are seeking to recruit women at board level, but noted that **they are 'selecting from a very small pool', which creates perceptions**



of **'tokenism'**. It is believed that there is no lack of talent, but there are only a few women in leadership roles where they can speak or represent others. Participants recognised that it might be a challenge to get the many other capable women to sit on boards, due to the perceived difficulties of being often the only women on a board.

Furthermore, **uncertainty persists regarding whether women have been appointed due to gender or merit**. Many participants explained that they would prefer a meritocracy. Participants raised concerns regarding 'engineering' equality at board level rather than recruiting board members on merit and ability, but added that 'something definitely needs to be done'. Others believed that women coming into leadership roles from 'grassroots' involvement would be more successful in the long term than those who are 'parachuted in' to leadership positions. This may take longer than critical external observers wish. Prominent women in agriculture have resisted the suggestion that they had been promoted due to positive discrimination rather than their own merit. Others highlighted the **challenges associated with a perceived meritocracy in agriculture**, and the perception that women must be not only 'as good' as men to gain leadership roles – 'but better'. Female participants experienced raising concerns at agricultural meetings and being given the response that these concerns were suitable for a women-only discussion.

## Removing prejudice and discrimination from Scottish agriculture

Participants proposed that **the issue of women in agriculture is broadened to look at opportunities for diversity and removing discrimination overall:**

"I think it's almost a pity that this totally focused on women because it actually is about opportunity for all, regardless of gender, race and all the rest of it. So, to some extent, I feel the focus on women particularly is maybe taking away from what should be a slightly wider approach. But positive discrimination, at the end of the day, I think what you want is that the best people, regardless of what sort of people they are, are able to get without barriers to where they can express their talents." [Farming man, focus group 4, participant 2]

Participants questioned whether there exists prejudice against women in agricultural leadership, or if there are prejudices facing many different types of people:

"So, there's a lot of prejudice – there's a lot of difficulties in... and I'm maybe missing the point here, but I don't think that women don't get opportunities that they could, but equally there are other people who don't get opportunities that they could as well." [Farming man, interviewee 1]

The **focus should be to remove prejudice towards 'other' groups, not only women** (e.g. low income, non-successors, etc). Participants' personal experiences illustrated that it can be difficult to integrate in to established farming networks, and therefore various types of 'new' people may have similar difficulties and will have to 'prove themselves' (i.e. not only women). The perception was expressed that **there are often the same types of people on many agricultural groups, especially government-appointed committees**. Participants therefore questioned whether that practice allowed for the flow of new ideas or different approaches:

"It seems to me that it's the same people doing these things all the time - sitting on these big groups...it's a lot of the same people and they've been doing it for quite a few years. So, you're not getting any new ideas, you're not getting anything different - it's the same old

thing. But the world's marched on considerably, so what was suitable even five years ago, isn't going to be suitable now." [Crofting woman, interviewee 1]

Participants believed that it is **important to have a broad mix of people in agricultural leadership roles, including men and women**, that it remains important to bring in new talent, and ensure that 'it's not the same people dominating'. This could help to change agriculture through increasing the number of people who have no issues of legacy or historical attitudes (i.e. 'baggage of the past').

### 3.5 Training

Focus group participants stated that:

- There appears to have been an increase in the uptake of agricultural training by women, with many online meetings, training courses, and knowledge exchange opportunities led by and attended by women.
- The value of training courses that seek to increase women's confidence and provide personal development was recognised.
- Participants emphasised their interest in practical training opportunities.
- Options for 'women-friendly' training models were discussed, as well as supporting women to become trainers, in turn supporting women's confidence through demonstrating valuable skills.
- All boards of agricultural organisations should complete and publicise their participation in unconscious bias training.
- Participants were aware of and participated in the 'Be Your Best Self' (BYBS) course, which was viewed as helpful and positive. Suggestions for improvement included alignment with participant's farming goals and sharing the course dates in advance.
- The Women in Agriculture Practical Training Fund had inspired female participants to seek further training opportunities, but there were concerns regarding the risk of inequalities between young women and men in agriculture.
- Post-Covid face-to-face meetings and training courses in farming and crofting should continue to support social connections and peer-to-peer learning.

Participants discussed the role and type of training that is critical to the role of women in agriculture in Scotland, and how that had changed over the past five years. The participants perceived that there had been **an increase in the uptake of agricultural training by women**, with many online meetings and training appearing to be women-led. Many people want to get training in agriculture, to increase their knowledge and credentials, both women and men.

#### Routes to find training

Participants explained that whilst they haven't completed any 'official' agricultural training, **they have taken up opportunities for training courses and knowledge exchange** offered by the Scottish Government, SRUC, the Soil Association, and others. This approach has been supported by **the**

**shift to a provision of online resources, events, and free training courses.** Participants mentioned that they have taken advantage of online training opportunities, which have apparently increased during the past year of Covid-19 lockdowns.

Participants are aware that they can approach different agricultural organisations for training (i.e. rather than only undertake that which is locally-provided). They mentioned that machinery rings have good training opportunities and highlighted the apparent gender balance of Ringlink's pre-apprenticeship scheme. Furthermore, many of the young people who are undertaking the pre-apprenticeship are from non-farming backgrounds. Others had searched unsuccessfully for training opportunities in their local area (e.g. regarding improving farming businesses rather than support diversification):

“I don't know really what I was looking for; I wasn't necessarily looking for anything, I just wanted to see what there was and didn't really successful find...anything!” [Farming woman/woman in agricultural industry, focus group 2, participant 5]

Participants also emphasised the need for good internet connectivity to ensure the success of the proposed digital training platform, and that there is a role for government and governmental agricultural organisations to facilitate access to online training. Participants were also of the view that digital training can be of high quality but would benefit from practical follow-up training.

### **Training provision that supports women's confidence**

Women and men **recognised the value of training courses that seek to increase women's confidence** and provide personal development, for example the Rural Leadership Programme. Personal development training can be a stimulus to confidence and capacity building amongst women, would benefit many women in agriculture and the wider industry. Participants who have previously worked in corporations mentioned how they had benefitted from training via this employment (e.g. understanding teamwork, individual strengths, etc.). It was highlighted that many women in agriculture may not know that this type of training is a possibility, or may be unable to commit the time, and therefore may need encouragement to invest in themselves through undertaking training.

**Participants emphasised their interest in practical training opportunities**, which would increase the number of skilled people on farms and crofts, therefore considered a 'win for everyone' rather than only related to gender. Nonetheless, crofting training specifically for women has been popular, and training courses for crofting overall have seen a shift from male to female-dominated student groups over the past decade, according to participants. Male participants explained that they understood that the recommendations for women-only training were to create safe environments for everyone to ask questions, whether they had previous experience.

**Participants discussed 'women-friendly' training models**, e.g. run from home, focussing on human connections and handing on skills, rather than only formal courses. One female participant explained that she was disappointed that she does not have anyone to pass on her crofting skills, due to her children living far away. She supports the idea of **women becoming trainers**, which would in turn **support the confidence of the women by showing that they do have valuable skills**. Participants also discussed the 'Farm Hack' concept as an alternative training option for women in agriculture, providing a convivial and supportive atmosphere for peer-to-peer training and skill-

sharing. Others highlighted the valuable role of the FAS mentorship grant, providing peer-to-peer learning, and reiterating that this training style may be more 'women-friendly'.

## Reflections on training and funding provided by the Scottish Government

Many focus group participants were aware of the training programme and funding that had been provided by the Scottish Government following the Women in Agriculture Taskforce recommendations. A female participant recounted her experience of undertaking leadership, diversity, and unconscious bias training, explaining that the delivery of the training was engaging and positive, and it was helpful to have follow-up session. The view was shared that **all boards of agricultural organisations should complete and publicise their participation in unconscious bias training.**

Participants mentioned their awareness of and participation in **the 'Be Your Best Self' (BYBS) course**, which was reportedly **very helpful and positive**. They were aware of others who had participated in and enjoyed the course, and who had recommended it to others. One participant recounted her experience on the BYBS course as **'genuinely life-changing'**. As a result of having completed BYBS, this participant applied to the Women in Agriculture Practical Training Fund to do further training, to support her career aspirations:

"So, I did the Scottish Government pilot course... and then I then set a goal... and I'll have a [name] qualification, so that's my next career aspiration. So that's all in a nutshell and it's not staged at all, it's completely true. The feedback from that course has been fabulous...It was that good, I can't speak about it highly enough." [Woman in agricultural industry, focus group 2, respondent 3]

Another participant described her approach to finding time for the BYBS course:

"Well, I actually nearly never did it because when I applied, well over a year ago to do it and hadn't heard anything more about it. And when it came round this last time I was like 'no, no, this won't do', but then I thought to myself, 'I'll just do it, it's only four mornings or something like that', yes it was difficult, but I stuck with it and I'm glad I did it!" [Farming woman, focus group 2, participant 4]

The **main criticisms** arising during participant discussions of the BYBS course included **the perceived focus on diversification opportunities on farms**, which did not fit with participant goals (i.e. it 'reaffirmed her plan of focussing on farming and not to diversify'), as well as **not knowing the dates of the course in advance**, and therefore being able to plan work/family life. Participants also explained that the BYBS course did not appeal to them because they have found previous 'talking' courses of limited use, too general to be not sufficiently practical, and only providing 'common sense' advice.

The **Women in Agriculture Practical Training Fund** had inspired female participants to seek further training opportunities, and they were enthused to hear about the opportunity to undertake 'tailored' training courses. For example, one participant plans to apply for funding for a tractor driving course, explaining that growing up she was told to 'do something other than farming', so she was not encouraged to learn to drive the tractor, and she has never since found a suitable opportunity and environment.

The training fund was considered positive for encouraging women's interest in agriculture, and

participants agreed that women-only courses are valuable. Male participants, however, questioned whether the individual training fund for women in agriculture was overcoming a real barrier to women, and whether it was good value for money. **Concerns were raised that the Scottish Government's Women in Agriculture Practical Training fund risked creating inequalities between young women and men in agriculture**, and between training providers, given the recognition that some young people are not 'well resourced' (e.g. whether from existing farming businesses). This fund could be very important for agricultural training, especially for those without 'means to pay'. Furthermore, participants highlighted their perception that there remains a 'degree of bias' towards the first son in supporting training opportunities, and therefore training provision for a second son can be overlooked. It is recommended that the fund should be 'means tested', as described:

"So, the Scottish Government has made available funding for women in agriculture to take up to six hundred or twelve hundred pounds free training, that is the one bit of the project that I would maybe take issue with... there will be farmers' girls or well-resourced girls who are at college just now that have the means to pay for these...Whereas there's kids out there, really hard-working kids that could be coming into the...[agricultural industry] but the idea of spending a hundred and eighty, to three hundred pounds on a course, just puts them off because they don't have any money... I know girls that aren't really that involved in farming but they are going away to do a course, that's going to help, it is going to help because they are going to fuel further interest... I think that should be means tested and if you think it's a problem getting women on courses because they don't want to go, then maybe you should look at women-only courses or that...But there are sixteen and seventeen year old boys at college just now with some quite affluent kids of some pretty good businesses that can't go on the same courses that they are getting to do, but any girl can. And that is going to polarise trainers just now." [Man in agricultural industry, focus group 4, participant 4]

### The value of face-to-face training

Finally, participants emphasised the need for necessary face-to-face meetings and training courses in farming and crofting that support social connections and peer-to-peer learning. When Covid-19 restrictions lift, participants requested that organisations reinstate physical meetings that allow for conversations and to make new connections, as described:

"...as lovely a time as we're all having on screen here, having these expensive but really necessary residential getaways or even if it's a day meeting, where there's more people learning over a cup of tea than there is during the scheduled chats and that, and I think that's maybe a valuable thing that we've maybe lost in the last year and a half, is not having the face-to-face and not having the quiet words with our peers, with other women, with other guys, that's been something that's really been missing. And I don't know if it's... [possible]... do more once restrictions lift, is to have – bring the face-to-face back and have those wee conversations that really push people on and make connections so that when you see each other in five years time it's, 'ah! Good to hear from you, how are you getting on, how did that work out for you?'" [Crofting woman, focus group 1, respondent 2]

Participants also highlighted the need for 'springboards', as well as the importance of connections and networks for supporting the role of women in agriculture.

## 3.6 Childcare

Focus group participants stated that:

- **Women remain the core provider of childcare on farms and crofts.**
- **Individuals and organisations are more aware of the options to support women’s participation in farming businesses and agricultural organisations, e.g. reducing physical barriers, having inclusive meetings online and at suitable times given childcare responsibilities, etc.**
- **Participants noted the importance of female role models who have families to demonstrate the potential for women’s role in agriculture.**

Participants believed that **women remain the core provider of childcare on farms and crofts**, or the primary person organising childcare. This is considered ‘inevitable’ and ‘nature at work’. If women are promoted to leadership roles, this does not lessen their role regarding childcare, as described:

“...other thing I’d say that is, the ones I know, and I have ones quite close to my family who have a lead role in a substantial business that are looking after kids, so there’s no change, to some extent, in the expectation of what else they’ll do but they are having a leader role in the business. That’s tough, that’s tough going so your thing about childcare, how you actually manage that. I think that – folk have to realise, you’ve got to make that work. So how they do that I think is really important.” [Farming man/man in agricultural industry, focus group 4, participant 3]

**Individuals and organisations are, however, more aware of the options to support women’s participation in farming businesses and agricultural organisations**, e.g. reducing physical barriers, having inclusive meetings online and at suitable times given childcare responsibilities, etc. These opportunities were also discussed at points in the focus group that considered ‘leadership’ (see Section 3.4). As explained:

“The fact is that we’ve got means and ways for people to participate in things at a distance or at different times of the day now, maybe this is more about meetings and organisations than actual physical farming but on that side of it, there are changes afoot which would make it, that particular barrier would be less now than it has been in the past, provided people are aware of the possibilities that would open up to them, you know, (...) you had a meeting at that particular time, for example.” [Farming man, focus group 4, respondent 2]

Participants noted the **importance of female role models who have families** to demonstrate the potential for women’s role in agriculture. Others recognised the ongoing challenge of remote rural areas in accessing childcare provision, and where farming families live far from extended family or local networks, therefore rely on external, costly, childcare providers.

### 3.7 Impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on women and men in farming

Focus group participants stated that:

- Farmers and crofters tend to be accustomed to isolation and maybe more resilient to lockdown conditions than wider society.
- The increase in online meetings has supported greater female participation.
- Women were considered more likely to seek social contact online.
- Virtual meetings and events have improved accessibility to knowledge exchange, networking, and agricultural governance, as well as saving time on travel or presenting childcare difficulties.
- Home-schooling children has impacted on women's ability to do their job(s) and maintain productivity, and it has excluded participation in on-farm activities, e.g. due to childcare.
- The pandemic has led to a regression in gender division of household responsibilities, and lost income where farms and crofts have diversified into holiday accommodation.
- Women and children have become more involved in family farms due to working from home and home-schooling, with implications for future agricultural training, or gender-equal succession processes.
- Farm safety issues arose during the pandemic due to childcare requirements.
- Concerns were raised regarding the impact of the pandemic and the increased isolation on children and young people, and the increased stress on male and female farmers due to separation from family.

Participants noted that **farmers and crofters tend to be accustomed to isolation** and maybe more resilient to lockdown conditions than wider society. Participants were glad that marts remained open and agricultural activity continued, for example:

“Well, it has been, living and working on the farm, it hasn't changed for us because farmers work in isolation anyway and I've been lucky enough to have this young apprentice who is now full-time with us coming in, so it's been absolutely amazing. And with my farming neighbours, we kind of work together anyway and because we're key workers, we're able to go to the market to take the sheep there or whatever. We've been – I'd almost say, dare I say, untouched by it in those terms.” [Farming woman, focus group 3, participant 2]

Others reflected on the advantages of living on farms and crofts during the Covid-19 pandemic, having space to go outside and be active, in contrast with family members in urban centres.

#### **Increase in online meetings has supported greater female participation**

**Women were considered more likely to seek social contact online**, and it was noted that farming women often supported men to attend online events (e.g. setting up Zoom meetings, but not



attending the meeting themselves). Female participants have enjoyed participating in online events, as well as not having to travel, saving time, and still interacting with others. **Virtual meetings and events have improved accessibility to knowledge exchange, networking, and agricultural governance, as well as saving time on travel or presenting childcare difficulties.** It is believed that the increase in online meetings has therefore **reduced these barriers to women's participation**, as described by a male participant:

“The other thing is, in the meetings I've been involved in, it's been quite clear that lots of people, including women, who would not – either because they had children or whatever else, have been able to participate in a meeting, because they weren't prepared to [travel to] Thainstone or Ingliston or wherever it might be, were able to participate because the meeting took place on a computer. And also because some of these meetings, in terms of length and the amount of time they involve, by their very nature, have been shorter and probably more concise and more concentrated which I think has actually made it possible for – I'm going to say women because I think they are the ones who might find it more difficult to attend otherwise, to take part. So that is something that has been visible... I hope it will carry on happening post-Covid.” [Farming man, focus group 4, respondent 2]

It has also become **easier during the pandemic to access international expertise**, with specialists providing short online sessions rather than being required to travel to formal meetings, conferences, etc. Participants noted that they had participated in numerous webinars and attended far more talks than they would have previously, and found they had access to a 'wealth of stuff' they didn't have previously (e.g. the Farm Advisory podcasts). This was an experience shared by both men and women. However, whilst participants welcomed the change to attending meetings from home without having to travel, they were also sorry to have missed meeting people in person and reflected that **the past year has led to lost connections and missed opportunities to make new connections with people** (see also Section 3.5).

### **Home-schooling has negatively impacted on female on-farm and off-farm careers**

Furthermore, female participants explained that **home-schooling children has impacted on their ability to do their job(s) and maintain productivity**, and that it **excluded participation in on-farm activities** where it was necessary to stay in the house with young children. Male participants recognised the impact on women employed in the agricultural industry who had been coping with children at home whilst they were working from home. One female participant explained that:

“I was working a fixed-term period, where deadlines didn't change. We had a real struggle in our household because we had no childcare. My husband's workload didn't change in terms of he couldn't take – or couldn't argue to say there wasn't as much work on the plate so naturally the childcare, from a safety perspective, fell more to me because we couldn't have my daughter feeding cows and sheep, in amongst cows and sheep. So, it actually... my husband was a wee bit more isolated because he was out on the farm continuing everything, I was stuck in with a two year old...naturally he couldn't do childcare and I had to...She's loved it, he's loved it, but there's just been fall outs and probably cost to me in terms of career and that sort of thing. It's a really messy conversation but that is me being very honest.” [Farming woman, focus group 2, participant 2]



Another participant described her differing experience that she described as 'lucky', due to the flexibility of her part time job and family childcare support. She enjoyed having her son with her every day during the pandemic, although she believed that her husband had worked 'more' in the past year due to the lack of opportunity to travel off-farm. Another explained that after lambing during the Spring 2020 lockdown, it became more difficult to juggle childcare as her farm-work was more office-based. Women with older children reported having to balance their 'management' with maintaining their own full-time employment. Concerns were raised that **the pandemic has 'set everything back a long way', regarding gender division in the household**, noting that this was not only an agricultural issue. The Covid-19 pandemic has also led to **lost income where farms and crofts have diversified into holiday accommodation**, leading to some female participants to seek new employment to maintain income.

### Women and children have become more involved in family farms

Female participants who typically work off-farm, and children of all ages, have become more 'connected' and involved with farm activities, due to lockdown. Participants explained that **due to working from home, they have become a greater part of what is going on every day** (e.g. livestock care). They believed that they now know more about what is happening on the farm and can provide more support. Others mention examples of women becoming much more active on family crofts during the Covid-19 lockdown. **Children have become more involved on the farm due to not being at school, gaining more 'hands-on experience'**. Participants highlighted the **value of online learning about farming, through YouTube videos or international workshops**, which has been very positive during the Covid-19 pandemic. This may have **implications for the willingness of farming children to study agriculture, or gender-equal succession processes**, as described for example:

"While we were home-schooling we grew loads of vegetables and my children, (my boy and girl child) raised piglets and up until that point neither of them had been particularly interested in farming and it was something that they did together and sold the pigs and sold the vegetables and bought trainers and whatever. But it was the first time that they'd had any hands-on experience on the farm, and I think that that has definitely made them more able to talk to their dad and also their grandparents, who are farmers. And also, in terms of succession, perhaps, because they were both involved, there's more of a kind of awareness that there's a possibility that either of them might take part. And something that did come up, on Facebook there was an advert for a quiz at SRUC which had an advert for a pig, I think it was Applied Animal Science, it wasn't an agricultural course but there was a piglet in the advert and I sent it to my daughter and she said, 'oh yeah, that sounds interesting', whereas before, there had been no sign that either of them would do anything farm-related." [Farming woman, focus group 2, respondent 1]

Participants also explained their perception that **the Covid-19 pandemic will give society the chance to evaluate 'what we want children to be doing'**, for example, pursuing vocational training for occupations such as agriculture. This will bring in more people at the 'ground level' and may be important when considering how to encourage more women into agriculture.

## Farm safety issues during the pandemic

Farm safety issues were addressed during the discussion of the impact of the pandemic. In some cases, it was explained that **due to childcare requirements it was necessary for children to be taken along with a parent in agricultural vehicles**, and/or 'abandoned' in the lambing shed (which was considered the 'safest place for them'). However, **participants were deeply concerned regarding the safety aspects of these practices and highlighted the risks to children in proximity to livestock**, in particular cattle. Whilst participants felt that they had been little impacted by the pandemic due to the nature of farming as an isolating and remote activity, participants were very **concerned for the impact of the pandemic and the increased isolation on children and young people**, in particular missing school and University experiences. The pandemic has also led to **increased stress due to separation from family**, and the inability to provide support networks to those in need (e.g. older parents), or to attend funerals, etc. The wider concerns about mental health in agriculture are reported in Section 3.8.

## The pandemic provided an opportunity to increase women's role on the farm/croft

Finally, participants explained that the **Covid-19 pandemic had provided a 'legitimising' window of opportunity for greater female involvement in crofting activities**, for example, where female partners provided support to male crofters due to the household mixing rules. One participant gave the specific example of a woman on furlough, who will now take up the training fund offer from the Scottish Government and may become involved in the leadership of the local sheep stock club,:

"I was just thinking about since Covid has happened, it's almost sort of inadvertently offered...not a legitimising, but just a window of opportunity, so our head shepherd, normally he would text everyone and say, 'I'm at the fank, can I get three bodies to come and help with dosing.' And folk would turn up but you can't really do that when we're all supposed to be standing 2 metres apart so he's been working quite a lot with his partner, so that's another woman that's getting involved... Obviously she's working at the fank and not working at her job so she was like, 'well can I get paid?' I was like, 'Well of course you can get paid because the other bodies aren't there to do it.' So, she's been working and now she's getting paid for that and now it's 'oh well the Women in Agriculture training fund is there, you've been working loads why don't we do training?' And it's that kind of domino effect of, if there's – at our next AGM it might be 'why don't you come and sit on the board, why don't you become part of the committee?' and that's a sort of way in." [Crofting woman, focus group 1, participant 1]

Another example arose where a young woman had not gone to University as planned due to the pandemic and instead undertook a key role in crofting work and sheep stock management. This has led to her reconsidering her choice of University subject and changing to a land management course. **These examples have reportedly had 'community impacts'**, and it is believed that the pandemic increased a focus on community and crofting life. The pandemic has created **an opportunity for women to become involved with crofting, which may encourage other women to also stay living locally** and to get involved, without the intimidation of joining a male-only group. Participants also believed that since and during the pandemic, people have been thinking more

about where their food comes from and seeking to become more self-sufficient. They asserted that this would translate into more people seeking a rural life.

### 3.8 Mental health

Focus group participants stated that:

- There remains insufficient attention and action taken to support the mental health of farmers and others in agriculture.
- The sources of stress in agriculture have not been identified and tackled.
- Covid-19 pandemic has had an impact on mental health in agriculture (although women were more likely to seek social contact online; see section 3.7)

Participants raised concerns regarding mental health in agriculture. They noted that whilst mental health is now being discussed more openly (than it was five years ago), **there is still not enough attention and action taken to support for the mental health of farmers** and others in agriculture.

As explained:

“I feel it is actually one of the biggest issues facing agriculture. Although moves are being made to open up and speak more about it, there is still not much being done to tackle the sources of stress on farmers and others in agriculture which lead to such poor mental health.” [Farming woman, focus group 2, participant 6, by email]

The **Covid-19 pandemic has had an impact on mental health in agriculture**, in particular during 2020, as a result of the cancellation of agricultural shows and other events in the agricultural calendar. Participants noted the importance of campaigns such as the #KeepTalking campaign, to encourage farmers to speak on the phone to each other during lockdown. The participants commented that the focus group discussions had themselves been a welcome opportunity to connect during the ongoing winter lockdown.

### 3.9 Generational change

Focus group participants stated that:

- The shift towards gender equality in agriculture is progressing with generational change.
- Children and young adults appear more confident, informed through and social media savvy, and active in developing agricultural businesses.
- Younger generations find it difficult to see or understand the bias against women in agriculture.
- The belief that ‘unpleasant attitudes’ will be removed through generational renewal is an important point for further examination.

Participants believed that **the shift towards gender equality in agriculture was progressing with generational change**. Perceptions were shared that children and young adults appear **‘much more confident’** (in part due to the influence of school), **informed through and social media savvy, and active in developing agricultural businesses** (e.g. willing to travel to follow business leads). They have benefitted from digital learning. Associations such as the SAYFC are considered ‘broad-minded’ and appear to have greater gender balance, but it is noted that some local clubs are more traditional and ‘historic’ regarding gender equality. Participants believed that young women are not intimidated to participate in agricultural meetings with older men. They asserted that **younger generations find it difficult to see or understand the bias against women in agriculture** that has affected their mothers. There is an important role for young men in changing attitudes to women in agriculture, with many not recognising barriers to women’s participation, as described:

“...you talked about whether younger women had a changing attitude, I don’t think it’s just the younger women, I think crucially as well, it’s also the younger men. Whereas before we had women that were fighting to get on and do things and felt like they shouldn’t have the barriers but the barriers were there, I think in the younger, male generation, I don’t think they see the barriers there in the same way at all. So, I think we’re in that almost win-win situation that you’ve got women that want to go for it and want to achieve and want to do well and you’ve got men that don’t see them as women and that being a barrier at all, which is great.” [Woman in agricultural industry, focus group 3, participant 3]

The view that new entrants and younger people coming into agriculture have an important role is matched by perceptions of a generational shift that is ‘controlling the industry’. The focus group participants asserted that **agricultural organisations must change with society**, and claimed that women and younger people are driving this change and seeking improvements (e.g. ‘sustainability’). Some attitudes from older generations may still exist in some agricultural organisations. **The belief that ‘unpleasant attitudes’ will be removed through generational renewal is an important point for further examination.**

### 3.10 Women’s future plans and the sustainability of Scottish agriculture

Focus group participants stated that:

- **Women will be more involved in the agricultural industry in future.**
- **Female participants’ intended and anticipated future plans give an insight into the future of the Scottish agricultural industry.**
- **Female participants aspired to provide capable women with a higher profile in the agricultural industry.**
- **Stakeholder groups that engage with Scottish Government on agricultural policy development should be gender-balanced and ensure diversity in views.**
- **The main barriers to women in agriculture remain access to land for new entrants (e.g. those from non-farming/crofting backgrounds) and the costs of starting new farming/crofting businesses.**

**Female participants described their intended and anticipated future plans**, which gave an insight into the future of the Scottish agricultural industry. Male participants were of the view that **there will be more women involved in the future of agriculture**, with the caveat that women may not be directly farming but involved to a greater extent in the agricultural industry. Female future plans therefore included: engaging with training provision (online and practical), changing off-farm/croft jobs, building brands and undertaking diversification activities, taking on board and strategic roles in agricultural organisations, mentoring young people and supporting new entrants to agriculture, raising both female and male children to become involved in farming if they want to, becoming trainers, documenting personal experiences, buying land, renegotiating contracts and leases, consolidating/expanding farms and farming businesses, providing on-farm/croft employment, contributing to local communities, and developing land management strategies (e.g. piloting regenerative agriculture). **Female participants also aspired to provide capable women with a higher profile in the agricultural industry**, to drive positive change, as described:

“I mean, the first thing I wrote down here was ‘what I hope to see that women in agriculture, as a concept, is irrelevant’ but actually, I’ve changed my mind on that. Where I hope we get to is that actually this isn’t needed and that gender does become irrelevant because the parity is there. But actually, what I’ve kind of come to realise, through my exposure to this sort of women in agriculture and these discussion groups and training, is that there is a real strength in women-only discussion. And I’ve never been a bra-burning feminist, but it’s just been really enlightening for me and I think ultimately what I’d like to see is, so many of the women that I’ve come across in the course of my work in women in ag, have just been so unbelievably capable. What I’d really like to see is them really starting to come through into leadership positions. So, they are already there, they are already influencing but they have that greater profile in the industry. Because I think you could really drive things forward that way.” [Woman in agricultural industry, focus group 2, participant 3]

The perspective was shared that women and young people have an important role to play in increasing diversity in agriculture, overcoming resistance to change, and therefore promoting sustainable innovations (e.g. building brands around local food and provenance). It is proposed that **stakeholder groups that engage with Scottish Government on agricultural policy development should be gender balanced and ensure diversity in views**.

The **main barriers to women in agriculture remain access to land for new entrants** (e.g. those from non-farming/crofting backgrounds) and the **costs of starting new farming/crofting businesses**, which are considered prohibitively expensive. Participants believed that more could be done to ‘free up’ crofts and provide greater new entrant land access, overcoming a perceived ‘hiatus’, as described:

“I think that people are coming to it as a lifestyle choice – which, obviously, it is – but... people are making a...trying to earn their living from it...So, I guess the pool of people that can actually afford the prices of crofts now that are on the market are those that they just want maybe some sheep or something. That they’re not actually interested in crofting per se - using the land and joining with the community in the townships and employing people to shear...There’s a lot of sheep stock clubs in Skye. You get agricultural support, but we pay out...wages to people for gathering, etc and that all goes directly into the local economy - because it’s young local people. So, they move about, you know - and it means

they stay here, they stay with their families...They've got very valuable skills and they help manage the land. So, that bit of support is...actually getting spread out amongst the community...Crofting is sort of diverse and people have always done a wee bit o' different things - whether it's fishing or B&B, or what have you. But the core activity is actually agricultural. So, I think that there's a danger there that, because of Covid, they're increasing the attractiveness of it - the fact that people have found that they can work from home. And I think that can dilute something that is actually very valuable for Scotland and generally for small-scale agriculture - and for biodiversity, etc. So, I think that's a concern." [Crofting woman, interviewee 1]

The Scottish Land Matching Service is highlighted as an ideal model for linking younger and older farming generations, 'to the benefit of both'. Finally, the view was shared that **providing access to capital for new entrants will need to be government financed** which could conflict with other current demands. Participants questioned how can these different demands be prioritised and who decides?

## 4. Conclusions

The focus groups have highlighted the impact of the Women in Agriculture Taskforce recommendations and the influence of the 'women in agriculture' movement, since the baseline research was undertaken in 2016 (Shortall et al., 2017), not least through the provision of 'life-changing' training (and funding for training) for women. **Positive steps towards further gender equality in agriculture are evident.** Nonetheless, there remain **ongoing concerns regarding the cultural practices of succession in agriculture, and the cultural assumptions and attitudes (arguably unconscious bias) in agricultural leadership.** There are mixed views regarding how best to overcome these issues and the responsibility of individuals, organisations, and the Government.

**The Covid-19 pandemic has impacted women and men differently,** although farmers and crofters as a group are considered to have fared well during lockdowns, due to an in-built resilience to isolation and the benefits of living and working remotely. Women may have been more likely to have suffered financially due to the impact on agri-tourism providers, but further analysis is necessary. Women, men, and children have all benefitted from attending online agricultural events, meetings, and through provision of resources for farming education. Women were more likely to seek social connection online. **The shift to online participation in agricultural events and governance has removed barriers to women's participation (notably time), but the predominance of female-led childcare and home-schooling has impacted negatively on women's agricultural careers.** The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on children's safety on farms and on mental health was highlighted, and there remains a lack of attention to the sources of stress in agriculture.

Key questions and areas for further examination remain regarding **the pace of change in overcoming barriers to gender equality in agriculture, the role of positive discrimination, and the influence of generational change.** An apparent self-perpetuating concern was that the small number of women in agricultural leadership roles led to a lack of visibility, and in turn a lack of awareness of the wide array of women capable to take on leadership roles. A critical discussion is

required regarding the **advantages and disadvantages of positive discrimination vs. a meritocracy (and its existence) in Scottish agriculture**. Whilst a shift is anticipated due to generational change, **evidence of ongoing unconscious bias and structural barriers to women's equal participation in agriculture must continue to be identified and tackled**.

An important overarching theme regarding **diversity and inclusivity in Scottish agriculture** emerged throughout the focus group discussions, extending beyond gender equality, but **seeking to ensure the participation of those from non-farming backgrounds, different ethnic and cultural backgrounds, as well as equity in allocation of public funding to support equality in Scottish agriculture** (e.g. not disadvantaging those from non-farming or low-income backgrounds). Finally, the provision of greater new entrant land access was recommended by Shortall et al. (2017) as a route to ensure greater egalitarianism in agriculture, and the likelihood of gender equality. Positive steps have been taken with the establishment of the Scottish Land Matching Service, and other initiatives that encourage young women to consider farming careers (e.g. Ringlink's pre-apprenticeship scheme). Nonetheless, **access to land for new entrants or non-successors, and high start-up costs for agricultural businesses, remain priority issues affecting women's role and participation in Scottish farming and crofting**.

## References

Scottish Government, (2019). *Women in Agriculture Taskforce: final report*. Agriculture and Rural Delivery Directorate, Scottish Government. 28th November 2019. 36pp.

Shortall, S.; Sutherland, L-A.; McKee, A.; Hopkins, J. (2017) *Women in farming and the agriculture sector*. Final Report for the Environment and Forestry Directorate, Rural and Environment Science and Analytical Services (RESAS) Division, Scottish Government. 9th June 2017. 184pp.



# Appendix A – Focus group outlines and pre-focus group questionnaire

## Pre-focus group questionnaire survey for participants

### Introductory text

This project aims to understand the impact of the Scottish Government’s Women in Agriculture policy focus and the cultural change associated with the grassroots women in agriculture movement.

We last spoke with you in 2016 and those discussions formed the basis of the research report [\*Women in Farming and the Agricultural Sector\*](#), published in June 2017. On the back of that report, the Scottish Government set up the Women in Agriculture Taskforce to recommend practical solutions to some of the issues raised.

The Final Report of the Women in Agriculture Taskforce was published in 2019. We are interested in hearing about your experiences over the last four years and gathering your perspectives on whether you think any changes have occurred for women in agriculture.

Thank you very much for your willingness to participate in this follow-up study. This short questionnaire will help to inform a targeted focus group discussion. Please complete and submit at your earliest convenience; please don’t hesitate to get in touch if you have any questions or queries.

Thank you again and we look forward to speaking soon.

Annie McKee and Lee-Ann Sutherland, The James Hutton Institute

### Participant consent [mandatory questions in online form]

|   |                          |
|---|--------------------------|
| I agree to take part in the above study: ‘Women in Agriculture: impact focus groups’. I understand that this pre-focus group questionnaire will inform the focus group within which I have agreed to participate. | [Please tick to confirm] |
| I confirm that I have read, or had read to me, and understand the purpose of this research project. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and these have been answered fully and explicitly.                | [Please tick to confirm] |
| I understand that my participation is voluntary, and I am free to withdraw at any time, without providing any reason and without my legal rights being affected.  | [Please tick to confirm] |
| I understand the study is being conducted by researchers from The James Hutton Institute.   | [Please tick to confirm] |



|   |                          |
|---|--------------------------|
| Any personal data collected via this consent form as well as following questionnaire will be kept confidential within the research team and stored securely. I understand that any personal data will be removed from the datasets prior to analysis and it will not be possible for me to be identified from any publications/outputs/reports. | [Please tick to confirm] |
|---|--------------------------|

**Privacy notice**

The James Hutton Institute (“Hutton”, “us” or “we”) will use your personal data for the purposes of the research undertaken in the project ‘Women in Agriculture – impact focus groups’. understand the impact of the recommendations of the Scottish Government’s Women in Agriculture Taskforce, and the influence of the ‘women in agriculture’ movement, on women’s experiences working on farms and in the agricultural industry. Our legal basis for processing your data is that it is necessary for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest in relation to research funded by the Scottish Government (Strategic Research programme 2016-2021).

Hutton is committed to protecting your personal data and adheres to the principles of the UK General Data Protection Regulation (‘UK GDPR’) and Data Protection Act (DPA) 2018 when processing your personal data.

Hutton is processing the following types of personal data about you:

- Name
- Email address
- Postal address

Your personal data will be stored securely at the servers of the James Hutton Institute and any access to it will be password protected and restricted only to the lead investigator.

We are the Data Controller over your personal data. We will not share your personal data unless required by law and shall only retain it for as long as is necessary to fulfil the research undertaken on the project and deliver project outcomes. Your personal data will not be transferred outside of the EEA. You have rights in relation to your personal data. Please see our Privacy Notice at [www.hutton.ac.uk/terms](http://www.hutton.ac.uk/terms) for further information or contact our Data Protection Officer on [dpo@hutton.ac.uk](mailto:dpo@hutton.ac.uk) or by telephone at 01382 346814.

**[Mandatory question:]**

|   |                          |
|---|--------------------------|
| I acknowledge that I have read and understood the privacy notice. | [Please tick to confirm] |
|---|--------------------------|

1. Participant name (to be anonymised): [open text/comment box]
2. Gender: [open text/comment box]
3. Occupation/Organisational affiliation: [open text/comment box]
4. Location: [open text/comment box]

5. Please confirm whether or not you participated in the Women in Agriculture focus groups held in 2016? (yes/no)
6. Please provide a brief summary of your agricultural background/career pathway (please describe, e.g. were you raised on a farm, did you undertake agricultural education, how did you come to work in agriculture?): [open text/ large comment box]
7. Do you belong to any agricultural organisations? (yes/no) [If yes:] Please list and add any membership responsibilities (i.e. whether a board member, director, etc.) [open text/ large comment box]
8. Are you aware of any women in agriculture groups or networks? (yes/no) [If yes:] Please list and detail when/where you have attended any events organised by such groups or networks. [open text/ large comment box]
9. Are you a member of any women in agriculture groups or networks? (yes/no) [If yes:] Please list and add any membership responsibilities (i.e. whether a board member, director, etc.) [open text/ large comment box]
10. Have you taken up any training or employment opportunities since 2016? (yes/no) [If yes:] Please describe: [open text/ large comment box]
11. Over the past four years, I have seen changes in:
  - the number of women in agricultural organisation leadership (yes/no/unsure)
  - media representation of women in agriculture(yes/no/unsure)
  - the likelihood of women inheriting farms(yes/no/unsure)
  - access to training for women in agriculture(yes/no/unsure)
12. Please add any further comments of your experience or awareness of initiatives to woman in agriculture over the past five years, to help to guide the focus group discussion: [open text/ large comment box]

## Focus group outline for women-only groups

We last spoke with you in 2016 and those discussions formed the basis of the research report [\*Women in Farming and the Agricultural Sector\*](#), published in June 2017. On the back of that report, the Scottish Government set up the Women in Agriculture Taskforce to recommend practical solutions to some of the issues raised.

The Final Report of the Women in Agriculture Taskforce was published in 2019. We are interested in hearing about your experiences over the last four years and gathering your perspectives on whether you think any changes have occurred for women in agriculture.

### Introduction

Start by asking them to briefly describe their role, location and for a reflection on how their lives have changed on their family farm/professionally since 2016.

## The Taskforce report

Provide a brief overview of the WIA Taskforce final report and its recommendations [see Appendix D].

1. If you have read the final report, what did you think of the WIA Taskforce report recommendations?

***Present slide summarising recommendations and give time for participants to read.***

- In your opinion, did they go far enough?
- What do you think were the most important points?
- What else could have been included?

2. Have you seen any evidence of change to the role of women in agriculture since we spoke to you back in 2016?

- How have men and women's roles changed, or not?
- Is the topic of women in agriculture being talked about more now?
- What kind of issues/concerns are you hearing as part of this discussion?
- In the pre-questionnaires, some of you indicated X change in media representation of women in agriculture today? Can you tell us more about that?
- In the pre-questionnaires, we asked about succession – please tell us more about that. Has the women in agriculture movement raised the profile of alternative succession pathways that prioritise daughters or other female family members?
- In the pre-questionnaires, we asked about representation in agricultural organisations. Has that changed? Some of you said x, others y – could you talk more about that? [If appropriate, prompt for routes to leadership.]
- What are the key issues for women employed in the agricultural sector today?

3. Has there been a change in access to training?

- Have you taken up any training or employment opportunities since 2016?
- What impact has this had on your life and work?
- The Scottish Government's 'Be Your Best Self' course is a personal development course for women living or working in Scottish agriculture that aims to improve women's confidence. Were you already aware of the course? Do you think it will make a difference?
- Would you recommend this or other training courses you have attended to other women? Why/why not?
- If you have not undertaken any training since 2016, what are the key barriers preventing you from doing so?
- Do childcare or care responsibilities impact your ability to take part in training?
- Are there good agricultural training opportunities for women in your area?

***If not already discussed in focus group:***

4. How has your daily life changed in the last year, during Covid-19?
- Do you think men and women have experienced this differently?
  - Do you have a support network of other women in agriculture?

**The future**

5. How have your plans for the future changed in the last four years?
- Are you happy with your current role?
  - Do you see opportunities for promotion in your employment?
  - Are there opportunities for diversification on your farm?
  - Do you intend to stay in farming and agriculture?

***If time allows:***

6. How do you see the future of farming and agriculture in Scotland?
- What can both men and women contribute to the sustainability of Scottish agriculture?
  - How can the work of the WIA Taskforce contribute to this?
  - How might further barriers for women be overcome?
  - What do you consider the role and responsibility of women and men in removing barriers to women in agriculture in Scotland?

Final thoughts and thanks.

**Focus group outline for men-only groups**

We last spoke with you in 2016 and those discussions contributed to the research report [Women in Farming and the Agricultural Sector](#), published in June 2017. On the back of that report, the Scottish Government set up the Women in Agriculture Taskforce to recommend practical solutions to some of the issues raised.

The Final Report of the Women in Agriculture Taskforce was published in 2019. We are interested in hearing about your experiences over the last four years, and gathering your perspectives on whether you think any progress has been made or any changes have occurred for women in agriculture.

## Introduction

Start by asking them to briefly describe their role, location and for a reflection on how their lives have changed on their family farm/professionally since 2016.

- Who does what on your farm? Physical labour, paperwork etc.
- Do women work in your farming business? e.g. wife, mother, sister, employee?
- Are they paid for their work?

## The Taskforce report

Provide a brief overview of the WIA Taskforce final report and its recommendations.

1. If you have read the final report, what did you think of the WIA Taskforce report recommendations?

***Present slide summarising recommendations and give time for participants to read.***

- In your opinion, did they go far enough?
- What do you think were the most important points?
- What else could have been included?

2. Have you seen any evidence of change to the role of women in agriculture since we spoke to you back in 2016?

- How have men and women's roles changed, or not?
- Is the topic of women in agriculture being talked about more now?
- What kind of issues/concerns are you hearing as part of this discussion?
- In the pre-questionnaires, some of you indicated X change in media representation of women in agriculture today? Can you tell us more about that?
- In the pre-questionnaires, we asked about succession – please tell us more about that. Has the women in agriculture movement raised the profile of alternative succession pathways that prioritise daughters or other female family members?
- In the pre-questionnaires, we asked about representation in agricultural organisations. Has that changed? Some of you said x, others y – could you talk more about that?
- What are the key issues for women employed in the agricultural sector today?

***If not already discussed during Question 2:***

3. Are women becoming better represented in farming and agricultural organisations?

- Have routes to leadership of agricultural organisations improved for women since 2016?
- What barriers remain that prevent women from participating (i.e. as members and/or in leadership roles)?

4. Are you involved in any agricultural training courses (i.e. as a trainer)?

- Are you aware of the Scottish Government 'Be Your Best Self' course – personal development training for women living or working in Scottish agriculture?
- What have you heard about it and do you know any women who have considered applying for it?
- Do you think it is as easy for women as men to take part in training?
- Are there good opportunities for women in this sector in your area?

### **The current situation**

Thinking about your recent experience of working in farming and agriculture.

5. Are women now as likely to inherit a farming business as men?

### ***If not already discussed during focus group:***

6. How has your daily life changed in the last year, during Covid-19?

- Are you in regular contact with other farmers or agricultural workers?
- How have your experiences, stresses or challenges compared to theirs?
- Do you think men and women have experienced this differently?

### **The future**

7. How have your plans for the future changed in the last three years?

- Are you happy with your current role?
- Do you see opportunities for development or diversification?
- Do you intend to stay in farming and agriculture?

### ***If time allows:***

8. How do you see the future of farming and agriculture in Scotland?

- What can both men and women contribute to the sustainability of Scottish agriculture?
- How can the work of the WIA Taskforce contribute to this?
- How might further barriers for women be overcome?
- What do you consider the role and responsibility of women and men in removing barriers to women in agriculture in Scotland?

Final thoughts and thanks.

# Appendix B – Slide of Taskforce recommendations

## Recommendations of the Women in Agriculture Taskforce



- **Leadership:** diversity and unconscious bias training; agricultural organisations
- **The Equality Charter for Scottish Agriculture:** compliance required for participation in stakeholder groups
- **Training:** digital training platform; training must be inclusive and accessible
- **Rural Childcare:** Increase availability of tailored childcare to meet rural demand
- **Succession:** Challenge the existing culture
- **New Entrants:** innovative routes to access land and capital
- **Health and Safety:** raise awareness of the health and safety risks to women
- **Crofting:** overcome issues with crofting legislation that disadvantages women
- **Overall recommendations:** review gender assumptions underpinning how the Scottish Government collects agricultural data; review impact by 2027.





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