



PRESS RELEASE

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BREXIT NO BARRIER TO RURAL BUSINESS ENHANCING SCOTLAND'S ECONOMIC ACTIVITY

New jobs are ready to be created by farms and estates if politicians deliver a Brexit deal which serves Scottish agriculture and rural business well.

That was the message from Scottish Land & Estates chairman David Johnstone as he addressed attendees at the Royal Highland Show today. Mr Johnstone said that SLE's Helping it Happen initiative demonstrated exactly why small businesses in particular had a vital role to play in increasing opportunities in rural areas - and that Brexit should not be seen as an unmovable hurdle in achieving increased growth.

Small businesses in remote rural Scotland provide 68% of private sector employment, with that figure standing at 54% for more accessible rural areas. By comparison, only 32% of private sector employees in the rest of Scotland are employed by small businesses.

Scottish Land & Estates added that despite the political turbulence, rural businesses had to continue to demonstrate to the public and government what they are delivering for Scotland – and bang the drum for policies that deliver for companies and workers based in these regions.

David Johnstone, chairman of Scottish Land & Estates, said: “Two years have now passed since the EU referendum and most of us will clearly recall the surprise at the result around Inghliston that day after the vote.

“The intervening period has seen polarised opinion and debate, none more so than at Westminster in recent days. Whilst we know the likely general direction for land management but we still don't know the detail, especially in Scotland where we are further behind in developing a long-term vision for the post-Brexit landscape. However, our members recognise that we cannot wait for the answers from government, nor can we expect politicians to solve every issue in rural Scotland.

“Since the referendum, our members - who are mostly small businesses - have continued to create jobs and opportunities through diversification into tourism and leisure, use of land for forestry, new energy projects as well as expanding traditional farming operations by finding new ways of selling and marketing produce. Whilst diversification can be important, often a fresh look at existing operations and adopting new arrangements, methods and contracts will deliver fresh impetus to a business.

“Whatever the outcome of Brexit negotiations, it is vital that farming and other land-based businesses are ready to adapt to the new conditions and also recognise our responsibility in building rural prosperity.”

Mr Johnstone added that land-based businesses had to be seen by public and politicians as integral to Scotland’s economy – not just an add on.

Mr Johnstone continued: “We need to demonstrate more visibly how farming and land-based businesses are creating jobs, delivering for the economy and making clear that where support is given that it is considered as investment in much the same ways as urban areas receive public support.

“The Royal Highland Show provides an excellent showcase of the part rural business plays in Scotland’s economic output. However, this showcase should not last for just four days of each year. Farms and estates need to show their positive approach to creating growth for Scotland and that needs to move forward now rather than waiting for Brexit.”

ENDS

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NOTES TO EDITORS

About Helping It Happen

The [Helping it Happen](http://www.helpingithappen.co.uk) campaign aims to highlight how landowners and rural businesses across Scotland play a key role in enabling and supporting success in rural areas. This campaign provides case studies covering a diverse range of sectors, including examples such as providing affordable rural housing, the development of renewable energy schemes and partnerships with local schools to deliver rural skills qualifications. For more information, visit www.helpingithappen.co.uk.

About Scottish Land & Estates

Scottish Land & Estates is a membership organisation for landowners, rural businesses and rural professionals. Scottish Land & Estates promotes the wide range of benefits land-based businesses provide: tourist attractions, leisure facilities and landscapes enjoyed by the public, as well as, housing, employment, tourism & enterprise and farming opportunities. For more information, visit www.scottishlandandestates.co.uk