New Release

7/8/24

*For immediate use*

**Evidence a key enabler for environmental and economic agriculture resilience**

“One of Scotland’s great assets is its red meat industry, which has a great story to tell,” says John Gilliland.

Each month Quality Meat Scotland (QMS) releases an informative and fascinating podcast for industry, with red meat experts inside and outside of the organisation exploring what is happening with market trends, industry development projects, and the wider work of QMS to make Scotland *the* choice for premium red meat.

In this month’s podcast, host Jane Craigie spoke with John Gilliland OBE, a farmer from Northern Ireland (NI) who is also a strategic advisor, practitioner and innovator in Climate Smart Farming, and is involved with Land Management and Policy Development. John has spent the last decade understanding the metrics behind carbon and agriculture, including what’s on his own farm, and working with QMS, the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board (AHDB) and the EU’s Soil Mission Board.

John is now working with AHDB and QMS on the recently launched £2.5 million Environment Baselining project – with 170 beef and sheep farmers - to find ways for the British red meat industry to realise the potential for carbon, wider sustainability and greenhouse gas emissions reduction.

John was also guest speaker at this year’s QMS Highland Show Business Breakfast where he cited the United Nations’ (UN) goal of delivering net zero human hunger amidst rising global temperatures, and a fair, just transition for the farming and food industry.

In series 11, episode nine of the QMS podcast, John explains that: “60% of what Scotland produces is exported, making the country a net exporter of food and meaning that as an industry we must look at the UN agenda through a global lens. Our weather is becoming more extreme, yet the UK is expected to fare better than other countries, giving agriculture the opportunity to grow food from an animal source to support a balanced human diet, where other nations may struggle to do so.”

Knowing this is helpful, he says, “however measuring environmental change is essential to validate the journey of carbon reduction, as well as investment by government, in agriculture and the environment.”

John’s journey down this path started in earnest in 2014, when he was invited to run a research farm by livestock nutrition company Devenish. John studied ruminants within the landscape by examining soil, trees, hedges, water quality, and biodiversity. He later discovered the effects of behavioural and management changes on the carbon levels of trees, hedges and soil, through the project ARCZero, which John leads, and focuses on producing accurate, individual, whole farm carbon balance sheets, and finding ways to accelerate the move towards net carbon zero farming.

This work led to a multi stakeholder group tasked by the NI government in 2014 with creating a Sustainable Land Management Strategy. A culminating report was published in 2016 and contained recommendations, which included building a baseline of fields across NI at two-hectare intervals, and a database on soil, water, biodiversity and land use to empower farmers to deliver change. It is this work that has fed into the QMS/AHDB Baselining Project.

In the podcast John says: “If you give farmers good information about their farm, they make good use of it, make constructive changes to reduce environmental footprint and find better economic resilience.”

The scheme was rolled out as the NI Soil Nutrient Health Scheme SNHS), with the objective of testing the vast majority of the 650,000 fields used for farming in NI, to help farmers manage their nutrient applications, and is currently half-way through completion. 92% of farmers who are eligible have taken up the scheme. John explains that talking with farmers, not at them, and respecting them as individuals and individual businesses, is key.

John discusses with Jane why it is important to baseline farms and to make decisions that are evidenced and don’t create perverse outcomes, saying: “Baselining, changing behaviours and baselining again is important; we need to illustrate the value of our farms to public good.”

He adds: “Integrity is a public good, for both food production and environmental and human health. Delivering a public: private partnership with integrity will help our society and agricultural businesses. As an industry, we need to understand what Treasury needs from this, they have the final say. What is the economic impact of them investing in the agriculture and environmental sectors.”

John commended the important work being achieved synergistically by AHDB and QMS, who spend levy payers’ money correctly and give leadership.In Scotland, 22 farms from nearly 100 applicants will be involved, with an announcement on who has been selected due this autumn.

To hear the full interview, check out the podcast [here](https://qmscotland.co.uk/news-media/qms-podcast).

ENDS

Words count 784

**Notes to editors:**

QMS is the public body responsible for promoting the Scotch Beef and Scotch Lamb brands in the UK and PGI labelled Scotch Beef and Scotch Lamb branded products abroad, and for promoting Scottish pork products under the Specially Selected Pork logo.

Please note that the use of the word Scotch in the Scotch Beef and Scotch Lamb brands is correct and should not be substituted for an alternative such as Scots or Scottish. The history of the use of the word Scotch in this way, traces back to the 18th century.

QMS also helps the Scottish red meat sector improve its sustainability, efficiency and profitability and maximise its contribution to Scotland's economy.

The quality assurance schemes run by QMS cover more than 90% of livestock farmed for red meat in Scotland. They offer consumers in the UK and overseas the legal guarantee that the meat they buy has come from animals that have spent their whole lives being raised to some of the world’s strictest welfare standards.

Scotland’s beef, lamb and pork producers make an important contribution to the country’s economic, social and environmental sustainability, contributing over £2 billion to the annual GDP of Scotland and supporting around 50,000 jobs (many in fragile rural areas) in the farming, agricultural supply and processing sectors.

For more information visit [www.qmscotland.co.uk](http://www.qmscotland.co.uk) or follow QMS on Facebook or Twitter.