

**PRESS RELEASE**

13th November 2024

*For immediate use*

**First Minister attends AgriScot for the first time as thousands gather for Scotland’s largest indoor winter farming event**

Scotland’s First Minister, John Swinney MSP, attended AgriScot for the first time today (13th November) at the Royal Highland Centre, Ingliston, underscoring the event’s importance as the premier winter gathering for Scotland’s agricultural community. Addressing a packed audience of farmers, agribusiness professionals, and rural stakeholders, the First Minister centred on the crucial issues facing the sector, reinforcing the Scottish Government’s support for Scotland’s farming future.

During a highly anticipated Q&A session hosted by NFU Scotland, chaired by AgriScot Chair Robert Neill and attended by Jim Fairlie MSP, Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity and Martin Kennedy, President of NFU Scotland, Swinney addressed recent changes to inheritance tax rules, sharing his concern over the “chilling effect” these changes will have on family farms. He urged the UK Government to conduct detailed impact assessments on these reforms and called for a tax framework that enables sustainable succession planning. Reaffirming the Scottish Government’s support, he made a “cast iron commitment” to restore £46 million to the agricultural budget, emphasising government action amid growing economic and environmental challenges.

AgriScot Chair Robert Neill welcomed this commitment, commenting, “With the current uncertainties in agriculture, it was fantastic to see such a strong turnout, and we were honoured to host the First Minister. I’m thrilled that £46 million is set to return to agriculture – now let’s get that funding directly and quickly into the hands of working farmers, with minimal red tape. When these funds reach farmers, it will bolster Scotland’s agricultural future and strengthen communities across the nation. Every pound invested by the government means an additional £7.40 reinvested by farmers into Scotland’s rural economy, enhancing resilience and growth. Together, we’re building a prosperous and sustainable Scotland that we can all take pride in.”

Reflecting on the day’s success, Robert added, “AgriScot brings people from all areas of agriculture together to connect, share insights, and experience firsthand the latest technology, solutions, and advice. From expert-led seminars to cutting-edge product showcases, AgriScot remains essential for farmers looking to stay ahead in a fast-evolving industry.”

AgriScot showcased a packed and updated programme for 2024, beginning with a breakfast session from wellbeing initiative Farmstrong Scotland. Visitors connected before the day began, hearing personal insights from John Kerr and Nicola Wordie on navigating the highs and lows of farming life.

This year, attendees witnessed new innovations, including two live demonstrations of the cutting-edge Te Pari sheep handling system, led by The Sheep Game’s Cammy Wilson and Nicola Wordie, respectively. Also in the showring, an interactive beef demonstration focused on the practicalities of calving at two years to reduce emissions.

Competitions celebrating agricultural excellence drew significant interest, with the Farm of the Year winners proudly receiving their AgriScot plaques following the recent Scottish Agriculture Awards. In the dairy cattle classes, Smith & Sons, I.A & Boclair Holsteins, claimed top honours with the SuperHeifer awarded to their Holstein Heifer, Boclair Lambda Hope. The SuperCow award was presented to Evening Holsteins for their remarkable Holstein cow, Evening Sidekick Jennifer. The Best Stall presentation, sponsored by Fullwoodhead Dairy Supplies was made to The Wilson Family, The Hailstone, Thunder and Lightning Prefixes.

The prestigious Product Innovation Award was claimed by SoilEssentials for its SKAi spot spray system, which uses artificial intelligence to target weeds selectively, cutting herbicide use by up to 95% for both economic and environmental benefit. The smaXtec Digital Assistant was highly commended for its proactive approach to herd health, utilising AI to detect early signs of illness.

The silage competition, with live judging across four categories, was a popular attraction, while young talent took the spotlight in the Business Skills Award. This year’s winner, Bruce Adkin, a third-year Agriculture BSc (Hons) student at SRUC Barony Campus, impressed judges with his business acumen and vision for diversified agribusiness. Finalists Senga Barron and Max Bryson also demonstrated excellent capabilities in resilience-building through income diversity.

AgriScot’s seminar programme offered essential insights and practical knowledge into future-facing topics. Alongside the NFUS Debate and Q&A, sessions covered alternative finance options (Finance for Farms); managing water scarcity (James Hutton Institute); the feasibility of growing maize in Scotland (Agrii), livestock health, welfare and disease updates (Moredun), net zero baselining (QMS); electrical infrastructure upgrades and protecting your land and business (D&R), and a question time event with the Scottish Dairy Hub and Kite Consulting.

This year’s AgriScot drew over 10,000 visitors and sold out with 240 trade stands, solidifying its place as the largest indoor event of its kind in Scotland. From technology demonstrations to policy discussions, AgriScot 2024 captured Scotland’s dedication to advancing its agricultural sector through innovation and collaboration.

As the day concluded, Robert Neill reflected on his tenure as Chair after seven years, stating, “AgriScot has truly become the place for farmers and agribusiness professionals to exchange ideas, discover new tools, and shape the future of Scottish agriculture. I am immensely proud of this journey and look forward to seeing the event continue to grow and prosper.”

**-ENDS-**

**Notes to Editors:**

AgriScot is the UK's leading farm business event welcoming over 10,000 visitors. It's all under cover and hosts one of the largest indoor winter machinery displays, 240 trade stands, seminars, demonstrations, showring competitions and a spectrum of awards. It will take place on 13th November 2024 at the Royal Highland Centre, Ingliston, Scotland.

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