

News Release  
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#### LAND REFORM REPORT WELCOMED BY STFA

The Scottish Tenant Farmers Association has welcomed the final report of the Land reform Review Group published today as a phoenix rising from the ashes. In contrast to the interim report the Review Group has produced a comprehensive, wide ranging and powerful report on the future of landownership and management in Scotland making sensible and well considered recommendations to diversify land ownership and strengthen rural communities.

Commenting on the report STFA Chairman Christopher Nicholson said; “This is a long report which will take some time to digest but from an initial reading it very much reflects STFA’s thinking over the last few years and will undoubtedly be welcomed by tenant farmers. Above all the report establishes the link between land and tenancy reform and provides some clear guidance to the Agricultural Holdings Legislation Group.

“STFA is especially pleased that the Review Group have recognised the contribution made by tenant farmers in rural communities and the importance of the ‘inter-generational continuity they represent’; a contribution that is rarely acknowledged by policy makers. The Review Group has also recognised the difficult situation many tenants find themselves in, the bleak future they face and the need for radical reform to the tenancy system. Tenancy reform is undoubtedly the remit of the AHLRG but it is helpful that the LRRG report has reinforced that need and placed it in the context of land reform.

“The report also comments on the benefits that ownership gives to tenants who freed from the constraints of a tenancy have greater incentive to invest in and develop their businesses.

“The Review Group’s recommendations on the existing tenants’ right to buy are common-sense, the requirement to register an interest in order to trigger a pre-emptive right to buy is unnecessary and has already deterred a number of tenants from registration and the requirement to re-register will account for many lapsed registrations. Tenant farmers widely support a conditional right to buy which STFA has already recommended to the AHLRG. We welcome the Review Group’s endorsement, and look forward to seeing how an “actual” right to buy can be applied in the public interest.

“The LRRG’s recommendations to improve the position of Small Landholders by allowing a statutory right to buy will bring a sigh of relief those tenants whose situations have been ignored by successive governments, especially on the Isle of Arran.

“The LRRG report will send out a strong message to policy makers and we hope that many of the recommendations will be implemented as soon as possible. The establishment of a Lands Commission will be key in monitoring and regulating landownership and management. STFA does, however, disagree with the proposal to impose non-domestic rates onto farmland. Although rating farmland could be seen as a useful regulatory tool as well as a means of raising tax the agricultural industry is currently in a state of flux with changes to the CAP regime and volatile markets and the imposition of further cost, especially on tenanted businesses would create added strain to already hard pressed farmers.”

*Notes – STFA will be making fuller statement once we have had time to consider the whole report*