

# 'Minority' pursuing tenancy quest

BY JOE WATSON

Politicians were told yesterday by tenant farmers and landlords that the Scottish Government needs to bury its idea to give some tenants an absolute right to buy their farms.

The plea was made as NFU Scotland's north-east region brought tenants, the chief executives of two big estates, the owner of another and six MSPs together on a visit to Ian Wilson's 770-acre tenant farm at Fordie, Torphins, and then subsequent roundtable discussions at Lumphanan.

The politicians were told the let land market was now undoubtedly being held back by the government's plan to extend the existing pre-emptive right and on which an agricultural holdings review group set up by Rural Affairs Secretary Richard Lochhead to also tackle other tenancy issues will shortly be seeking views on.

That, said Dunecht Estates chief executive Stuart Young, Seafield and Strathspay Estates boss Sandy Lewis and Longside tenant farmer Alan Craig, was hitting the confidence of not just big landlords but farmers and other private landowners who could not

it out for the simple reason that their asset could potentially be taken away from them. The widespread fear is that the current discussions on giving 1991 Act secure tenants the absolute right is extended across all forms of tenancies.

Former NFU north-east region chairman Tom Johnston, a tenant at Cotton, Drumblade, questioned if tenants would be able to buy their holdings if the absolute right was granted. He said that in his own situation he could not afford it and that there would be countless others like him who would be fi-

**"The right to buy should be laid to the side"**

nancially better off paying a rent.

He added: "The important thing this time is that when the review is finished it comes forward with some positive things for the future. The right to buy should be laid to the side for the foreseeable future so that folk can get on with letting land."

Others questioned too



**BUILDING FOR FUTURE:** Tom Johnston, left, and Ian Wilson in the new cattle court that has been built at Fordie, Torphins. Photograph: Joe Watson

should be allowed to compulsorily purchase their farm.

The meeting also discussed the lack of opportunities for new entrants and the inability of them to progress bigger rent units.

Tory MSP Alex Johnstone said the impression he had was that there was little chance of new young entrants getting into the

landowners were working, but improvements could be made.

There was a call from

Deeside tenant Andy Robertson for landowners to be legally obliged to pay tenants for any improve-

ments they had made at waygo.

Professor Jeff Maxwell, who is sitting on Mr

Lochhead's review group, urged the sector to respond fully to its upcoming call for evidence.

He said it was clear from the discussions that all sides wanted a greater degree of freedom of contract. They needed to express those views as well as provide details on the necessary checks and balances required for such arrangements.

"In terms of the letting vehicle you have to be clear as to what extent you want freedom of contract," he added.

"I'd ask you all to think about this seriously so that we can also come up with something which allows new entrants to get a start."

MSP Dennis Robertson also said that if existing SLDTs and SDTs could be improved by tweaks then the sector should be sharing its ideas on that could be achieved with him and his colleagues.

## Fordie: Farmer fears he will lose £40,000 a year in subsidies

The group visited Fordie Farm at Torphins which is let to Ian Wilson on a 15-year limited duration tenancy (LDT).

He has a suckler herd of 180 cows and buys in Mule ewe lambs which he keeps for a year and sells as gimmers. He has recently also de-

ways of making up that loss. "That takes out about 40% of our income. Its quite serious," he told the MSPs. "I'm still thinking about

ness on to her, but the tenancy does not allow for succession.

His landlord has recently invested more than £200,000 in a new