

EVIDENCE to Land Reform Review Group

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Holding 82/515/0015

670 mixed acres owned 200 rented. Organic dairy (180 head) beef cereals woodland. Farming in partnership with sister. 3 full time employees. Chair Auchencairn Initiative, Caledonian Organics. Director Farm Stock Scotland, Scottish Organic Milk Producers (Under OMSCO)

1. Land needs to be made more widely available for purchase by individuals and community groups
2. Price need not be a barrier. I recently sold 85 acres to a group of people who are forming an alternative community and they were just delighted to have the opportunity to buy. I did not give it away although I admit it was probably discounted to some extent because we were interested in what they were doing.
3. Land ownership is key to empowerment. Doors open and funding becomes available. Also planning laws are more favourable. We need to encourage landowners to be prepared to sell to organisations other than farmers who simply want to expand. (no one is saying this route should be banned or anything) . There are a lot of people with radical and novel ideas for land use which can generate jobs and a high quality of life which goes way beyond conventional agricultural use.
4. It is a bad idea to impose state solutions. It is amazing how people of widely differing political standpoints can work together on a community forestry or land project without realising the radical nature of what they are involved with. My experience with failed local community (NFLS) attempts to buy land show that greatest opposition comes from local landowners who seem to perceive some kind of threat to the status quo, even if they have no particular interest in the land in question
5. We need to think more imaginatively about land use. As Andy Wightman points out the Scottish land ownership system is “very odd indeed” compared with continental Europe or Scandinavia (or even the USA?).
6. Tenancy law is a mess. We need to encourage partnerships between landowners and young people who want to work on the land without setting up centuries long securities of tenure OR giving inadequate security to tenants. The countryside round here has a number of run-down farms which need help or new blood to develop. Large estates seem to just let them run down and then take them on hand when the tenancy is given up. The other side of the coin is than tenant farmers sit on farms and have their sons/

daughters sit on farms even though in normal circumstances the sons or daughters don't really want to run the farm as a farm!

7. The old landed system (some of which was dismantled after WW2 with the Rent Restrictions Act which caused a lot of estates to be broken up) was never properly dismantled. This is politically difficult as Scottish Land and Estates are doing a very good job of modernising their image .
8. The whole subsidy system needs to be demolished! This would shake the whole system up, allow land to be reshuffled, probably lead to commodity prices rising to a level where classic farm businesses would be viable without subsidy as supermarkets etc would panic about a collapse of their supply base. This won't happen while we are part of the EU (France). Unfortunately I want to be part of the EU so hey ho!
9. As always, the value of a farmer's land is way beyond the level of profit he can generate. I wouldn't oppose a land value tax but from what I can gather, my business would have to find around £30000 for LVT from a profit of 100 – 150k (which is typical of an average well run dairy farm-fairly good but not enough to fund major capital investment)
10. Realise that in a crowded island where land is scarce all sorts of problems arise.
11. Needs to be an acknowledgement at least that if you own land you are in a very privileged and lucky position. This doesn't mean that the sky would fall in or Lenin would rise out of the sea and smite you down, but at least a debate could be had. Over borrowing against land value is big problem in agriculture. It suits the banks extremely well. It's all they've got at the minute.
12. There are huge positives to be had from shaking up the land ownership system without undermining hard working owner occupied farms who would like to expand their businesses.
13. If this is all contradictory I apologise.