

F5 Conference on Future Food, Fisheries, Farming and Forestry - Maisie McDavid

The conference brought together representatives from a variety of industries within the rural land-use sector. From the variety of voices and visions for the future, the conference demonstrated the major challenge of tackling climate change in this sector to be the surmounting pressure of land-use conflicts.

However, despite many different desires being voiced, most, if not all, of the speakers spoke to the theme of building resilience. In the wake of Climate Change, Brexit, the Ukraine-Russia war, and the cost-of-living crisis, a resilient land-use sector is essential. A resilient system will mitigate and adapt to climate change, maintain food security, bring benefits to rural communities, and enhance agricultural efficiency and production.

Many of the speakers including those from environmental organisations and agricultural industries highlighted the needed for integration, interconnectedness, and diversity. These attributes form the pillars of building resilience through exchange of information, implementing land-use solutions that generate cross-industry and cross-sector co-benefits, and diversify sources of economic growth. The speakers' views represent a changing narrative in environmental and agricultural policy, where the notion of Complex Adaptive Systems has gained popularity. For complex systems to be adaptive to crises, and thus resilient, diversifying the food and nature systems we rely upon is essential.

By working together, such as through making agriculture more environmentally efficient through livestock science, providing community benefits for forest restoration projects, and enhancing ecosystem and soil health, we can build a diverse, integrated resilient land-use system in Scotland. Going forward, researchers and experts spoke of the need to generate a shared vision, learning from other countries, and finding sustainable ways to build resilience.

However, a stark moment in the conference stood out. The Conference finished on the note that there is a large problem right now in the gap between 'aspiration and delivery'. Here I have painted a nice picture of how we would like the future of Scotland's landscapes and industries exist but there are barriers that must not be ignored. Upon speaking to some of the conference guests including farmers, crofters, and general citizens, they voiced concerns about their role in the decision-making processes. They felt a sense of disarray, lack of consistency and disjuncture in the land-use policies and strategies being implemented and did not feel that their participation or concerns were being listened to.

From the conference and these discussions, it can be derived that key to any land-use changes is empowering citizens within the decision-making process as well as delivering the technical aspects of the transition. Only in this recognition can a resilient system be established, and a just transition delivered.

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