

### **SRUC-E1-1 Novel insights on Scotland's rural and island economies (NISRIE)**

**PI: Steven Thomson ([steven.thomson@sruc.ac.uk](mailto:steven.thomson@sruc.ac.uk))**

The evidence reveals that the rural and island business base is different in terms of characteristics and needs from that of urban areas. Further, new economic opportunities are emerging for rural and island businesses in terms of green recovery and growing the natural economy. The success of rural and island economies relies on functional economic infrastructure, yet persistent issues regarding affordable housing, transport and digital connectivity continue to hinder economic development in some locations. Many knowledge gaps remain on rural and island economies so this NISRIE project aims to: (i) provide improved quantitative evidence on the rural and island business base in Scotland, including insights on their unique characteristics, challenges, and aspirations and issues and opportunities through digital use within business; (ii) develop operational context insights from priority rural and island businesses sectors (case studies); (iii) explore the particular characteristics of, and opportunities and challenges facing, community wealth building activities in rural and island contexts; (iv) assess infrastructural barriers to rural and island economic performance (including relating to housing and digital connectivity) and how these impact on the lived experiences of rural and island business owners and employees; (v) model how the evolution of agricultural support and UK free trade agreements may impact on rural and island economies; and, (vi) generate new and innovative understandings of, and recommendations to support, regional food economies in rural and island locations in future.

### **JHI-E1-1: Informing a socially and spatially just future for the Scottish rural economy: pinpointing opportunities, assets and support needs**

**PI: Jon Hopkins ([jonathan.hopkins@hutton.ac.uk](mailto:jonathan.hopkins@hutton.ac.uk))**

This project aims to use mixed methods to create an advanced and holistic understanding of the Scottish rural economy, and the diversity of inequalities and changes taking place in response to multiple crises and events. This research is situated in the context of the Scottish Government's aspiration to deliver a wellbeing economy and sustainable development, while addressing longer-term challenges of inequality and depopulation. The research team are applying mixed methods, including a) geographical analysis, identifying spatial diversity in rural Scotland by identifying the distribution of development assets; b) long-term community engagement within case studies, to observe and understand changes in rural economies and support groups in places to achieve their goals; and c) choice experiments to understanding attributes affecting decision making on key economic issues facing rural Scotland, including migration. Insights from these methods will be integrated into an advanced 'agent based' model, potentially enabling the impacts of events, shocks and scenarios (identified by communities, policymakers or other stakeholders) on rural Scotland.

### **SRUC-E2-2: Reimagined policy futures: Shaping sustainable, inclusive and just rural and island communities in Scotland**

**PI: Jane Atterton ([jane.atterton@sruc.ac.uk](mailto:jane.atterton@sruc.ac.uk))**

Scotland's rural and island communities have experienced a number of persistent challenges

over the last few decades which impact negatively on their sustainability and resilience. This project is undertaking in-depth research on three of those challenges - access to affordable housing, depopulation and out-migration (particularly amongst young people), and exclusion and marginalisation – through which it seeks to provide new insights on how these challenges might effectively be addressed, in light of changing policy, political, socio-economic and environmental trends.

The project combines innovative, large-scale citizen science through a Rural Exchange web portal to gather information, ideas and commentary, with quantitative analysis of secondary data, in-depth qualitative work with stakeholders and communities, comprehensive policy reviews, international evidence-gathering and horizon-scanning activities.

Bringing together evidence from multiple sources will ensure that the project generates future-focused learning and evidence-based recommendations for new and re-designed policy tools and interventions to ensure sustainable, inclusive and just futures for Scotland's rural and island communities.

**JHI-E2-1: Realising change: working with communities to inform a resilient recovery process in remote, rural and island (RR&I) communities**

**PI: Mags Currie ([margaret.currie@hutton.ac.uk](mailto:margaret.currie@hutton.ac.uk))**

This project aims to both understand and facilitate and assess change in remote, rural and island communities. It uses mixed methods to create an advanced and holistic understanding of the Scottish rural economy, and the diversity of inequalities and changes taking place in response to multiple crises and events. Ultimately it aims to help understand and drive forward ways in which key stakeholders and RR&I communities can work together to realise a process of resilient change, whilst ensuring that minority groups are considered and given precedence in the research process. The methodology has been designed to understand better how the everyday liveability of our RR&I communities is experienced by different people (e.g. young people, older people, minority groups and new/return migrants) in different places, and to facilitate impactful policy interventions where they are most needed, and which are sensitive to the particularities of place. This project takes forward core elements of Scottish Government policy as they relate to RR&I Scotland through a programme of novel, integrated and participatory research that facilitates positive change.

**SRUC-E3-1 Impacts of land-based financial support mechanisms on land values, landownership diversification and land use outcomes.**

**PI: Ian Merrell ([ian.merrell@sruc.ac.uk](mailto:ian.merrell@sruc.ac.uk))**

This project increases our understanding of the impacts of land-based funding mechanisms on land values, and related outcomes for landownership diversification and land use change. The project will incorporate regional case studies and qualitative (interviews with landowners and land agents), quantitative (landowner survey, land sales figures) and spatial analysis (ownership and land use data) methods. The research will provide recommendations for policy interventions and land-based funding models which are aligned with both land use and land reform policy. It is a joint project with SRUC-C3-1 which sits in the Human Impacts on the Environment theme (C) and is concerned with land use change.

### **JHI-E3-1: Scotland's Land Reform Futures**

**PI: Annie McKee ([annie.mckee@hutton.ac.uk](mailto:annie.mckee@hutton.ac.uk)); acting PI: Naomi Beingessner ([naomi.beingessner@hutton.ac.uk](mailto:naomi.beingessner@hutton.ac.uk)) (March 2024 – March 2025).**

This project aims to provide new knowledge to inform Scottish Government policy development regarding land reform, community land ownership and engagement in land use decision-making, as well as increasing understanding of the role of land ownership and land reform in achieving net zero emissions and reversing biodiversity decline in Scotland. This project seeks to build understanding of Scottish land reform processes and outcomes that can contribute to wider global land issues requiring urgent attention. The research team comprises researchers from the James Hutton Institute and Scotland's Rural College. The project aims to develop a transdisciplinary, deliberative, knowledge exchange process to determine land ownership and land use visions, as well as an action plan to inform the implementation of land reform policy objectives. It also seeks to build consensus and facilitate social learning between and within Scotland's landownership and land use sector, and to integrate knowledge types to support future land reform policy development. The project adheres to an open science approach, involving non-scientists throughout the research process, working closely with a stakeholder advisory group throughout the 'Scotland's Land Reform Futures' project.