# Climate policy proposals threaten Scotland’s farming heritage with dramatic livestock cuts



Farming is not merely a job; it embodies a way of life deeply intertwined with identity and culture, particularly in rural communities like Moray. For farmers, the land, livestock, and the traditions that come with the agricultural lifestyle are integral to their existence. This sentiment resonates across many Scottish farms, where the weather is as variable as the challenges faced by those in the industry. Recent discussions around climate policy have ignited fears about the future of farming in Scotland, particularly following a report from the Climate Change Committee. This report suggests staggering reductions in livestock numbers, including proposals to cull over two million sheep and slash cattle populations by more than a third by 2045, the target year for Scotland's net-zero emissions goal.

While the report initially caught headlines with its staggering figure of £750 million required annually to transition to net zero, buried beneath these alarming statistics is a more pressing concern for Scottish agriculture. The proposal to substantially reduce livestock numbers raises serious questions about sustainability and the future viability of farms. With cattle numbers already declining—down to about 1.7 million last year—further cuts could devastate the sector. Farmers are already grappling with narrow margins, and suggestions of culling vast numbers are seen as unattainable and misaligned with the realities of farming life. The repercussions of such policies extend beyond the farms themselves, threatening the very idea of traditional meals and cultural staples, such as the beloved Sunday roast.

The report's recommendation for significant reductions in red meat consumption mirrors broader trends in urban centres, with local governments such as Edinburgh's exploring avenues to curb fossil fuel promotion and steer society towards more sustainable practices. However, critics warn that these measures often overlook genuine engagement with those most affected. Minette Batters, the former president of the National Farmers' Union, has been vocal in challenging some of the narrative surrounding agriculture's role in climate change. She argues that while farmers must adapt, the sector is already making strides in reducing emissions—by 12% since 1990. This aligns with the perspective posited by advocates of meaningful reform who argue that instead of penalising farmers, the focus should be on fostering sustainable practices and improving food production.

The Climate Change Committee's recommendations do not merely pose risks to farmers but also have the potential to disrupt the hospitality industry, which is intricately linked to meat consumption. As restaurants and cafes contemplate the implications of decreased meat availability, they have expressed concern that these policy frameworks could lead to a diminished offer that would negatively impact their operations and, by extension, rural economies.

Dietary changes promoted as necessary for reducing emissions, such as the proposed 20% cut in meat and dairy consumption by 2030, must be considered carefully. While research indicates that habitual high consumers of red meat could make significant shifts without compromising their health, it remains crucial to underpin these discussions with balanced rhetoric that appreciates agricultural contributions to the economy and society. Bridging the gap between climate objectives and agricultural viability requires more nuanced policy that engages directly with the farming community.

In a landscape increasingly dominated by climate targets, recommendations that appear to dismiss the lived experiences of farmers evoke frustration. Farmers, who often feel like they are treated as scapegoats for broader environmental issues, find their voices sidelined when decisions are made. They argue that engaging in constructive dialogue rather than enforcing arbitrary targets is essential for developing pragmatic solutions that benefit both the planet and those who till the land. As Scotland heads towards its ambitious goals, it must ensure that farmers are not merely on the receiving end of policy decisions but are active participants in shaping a sustainable future that retains the core of Scotland’s agricultural identity.

Ultimately, the path to achieving net-zero will require concerted efforts that honour the indispensable role of farmers and the agriculture sector in contributing to both the economy and environmental sustainability. The challenge ahead lies not only in challenging the status quo but in fostering an inclusive framework that champions the voices of those who form the backbone of rural Scotland.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14744369/TIM-EAGLE-unrealistic-recommendations-spell-end-Sunday-roast.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[3]](https://www.ft.com/content/226c8657-6836-4aff-9d32-8e7886d8e6c9)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14744369/TIM-EAGLE-unrealistic-recommendations-spell-end-Sunday-roast.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[4]](https://www.reuters.com/sustainability/climate-energy/britain-needs-huge-switch-evs-heat-pumps-eat-less-meat-hit-net-zero-2025-02-26/), [[6]](https://www.thescottishfarmer.co.uk/news/23217931.climate-committee-demands-cuts-meat-dairy-consumption/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[2]](https://www.ft.com/content/29f3f663-b5e0-438e-883c-b5a6d3443478), [[5]](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/committee-on-climate-change-2023-progress-report-government-response/responding-to-the-climate-change-committees-ccc-2023-annual-progress-report-to-parliament)
* Paragraph 4 – [[3]](https://www.ft.com/content/226c8657-6836-4aff-9d32-8e7886d8e6c9), [[6]](https://www.thescottishfarmer.co.uk/news/23217931.climate-committee-demands-cuts-meat-dairy-consumption/), [[7]](https://www.ed.ac.uk/research-innovation/latest-research-news/lowered-red-meat-intake-would-hit-climate-goals)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14744369/TIM-EAGLE-unrealistic-recommendations-spell-end-Sunday-roast.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.ft.com/content/29f3f663-b5e0-438e-883c-b5a6d3443478> - Edinburgh Council has implemented a ban on advertisements for SUVs, cruise holidays, airlines, airports, fossil-fuel powered vehicles, and arms manufacturers in council-owned spaces. This initiative aims to curb fossil fuel promotion and align with climate objectives, reflecting a broader trend of UK cities taking similar actions. The council's net-zero target for 2030 underscores the urgency to reduce emissions to meet Scotland's 2045 net-zero goal. Despite potential revenue losses, the policy is viewed as essential for climate justice. Activists support the stance, suggesting that new, less harmful products can replace the banned advertisements.
3. <https://www.ft.com/content/226c8657-6836-4aff-9d32-8e7886d8e6c9> - Minette Batters, former president of the National Farmers' Union (NFU), discusses her journey from being underestimated as a chef and bride to leading and revitalizing her family's beef farm. She became the first female president of the NFU in 2018, championing farmers' issues through Brexit, Covid, and environmental challenges. Despite her progressive stance on climate change initially, Batters believes more focus should be on producing food, arguing current UK agricultural practices are necessary despite emitting significant greenhouse gases. She highlights issues within the farming sector, including inadequate seasonal worker quotas and the impact of Brexit on trade and labor. Batters criticizes unhealthy food tax proposals, advocating for better food education in schools. She emphasizes the importance of farming to the rural economy, despite it being a small part of the GDP. Challenges such as river pollution from farms and adapting to climate change remain contentious, with Batters urging for stable subsidies and support for farmers. She remains non-partisan, aiming to influence agricultural policy constructively.
4. <https://www.reuters.com/sustainability/climate-energy/britain-needs-huge-switch-evs-heat-pumps-eat-less-meat-hit-net-zero-2025-02-26/> - Britain must shift to electric vehicles, heat pumps, and reduce meat consumption to achieve its 2050 net-zero emissions goal, according to the Climate Change Committee (CCC). The CCC's seventh carbon budget outlines the challenges and recommends an 87% reduction in emissions by 2040 compared to 1990 levels. Despite a 53% drop in greenhouse gas emissions by 2023, significant actions are required in transportation, buildings, industry, and farming. The report suggests that 80% of cars should be electric by 2040, with most new car sales being electric from 2030. It also targets more than half of homes to use heat pumps, up from the current 1%. To meet these targets, renewable electricity must double. This transition could lead to household savings by reducing energy bills by 700 pounds by 2050. Additionally, meat consumption should reduce by 25% by 2040 and 35% by 2050. The government, which has adopted previous carbon budgets, will need to address these recommendations to meet its legally binding climate targets.
5. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/committee-on-climate-change-2023-progress-report-government-response/responding-to-the-climate-change-committees-ccc-2023-annual-progress-report-to-parliament> - The UK government's response to the Climate Change Committee's 2023 Annual Progress Report outlines actions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Key recommendations include reforming agricultural subsidies to incentivize land managers to adopt measures reducing emissions while ensuring food security and biodiversity. The government also plans to support sustainable food production practices and high-quality British produce, maintaining consumer choice. Additionally, the response addresses the need for improved monitoring, reporting, and verification of schemes to assess effectiveness and outlines plans to increase private finance for climate initiatives.
6. <https://www.thescottishfarmer.co.uk/news/23217931.climate-committee-demands-cuts-meat-dairy-consumption/> - The UK Climate Change Committee has recommended a 20% reduction in meat and dairy consumption by 2030 to meet climate targets. The report suggests that this reduction is a strategy to decrease the number of grazing livestock, thereby freeing up land for tree planting and other carbon sequestration methods. Critics argue that this approach could negatively impact rural communities, biodiversity, and food security. The Scottish Government has been urged to consider these recommendations and their potential implications for the agricultural sector.
7. <https://www.ed.ac.uk/research-innovation/latest-research-news/lowered-red-meat-intake-would-hit-climate-goals> - Research from the University of Edinburgh indicates that Scotland could make significant progress towards its climate change targets by reducing meat consumption in line with existing dietary advice. If consumers with high red meat intake reduced their consumption to the recommended 70g or less per day, this would achieve a 16% reduction in total meat consumption. Further reductions to 60g or less per day would meet the Climate Change Committee’s recommended target of a 20% shift away from all meat by 2030. The study emphasizes the importance of supporting consumers to adopt sustainable dietary choices to address climate change.