# Scottish farmers push back against CCC proposals to slash livestock numbers by 2045



Farming embodies a deep-rooted way of life for many, particularly in rural Scotland, where agricultural practices shape not only livelihoods but also the identities of those who engage with the land. This connection to farming was highlighted recently by an MSP expressing concern about recommendations from the Climate Change Committee (CCC), which may disrupt the traditional agricultural landscape in pursuit of ambitious climate targets.

The CCC's report suggested a significant reduction in Scotland's livestock numbers, proposing a decrease of more than one-third in both cattle and sheep populations by 2045—the target year for achieving net-zero carbon emissions. Cattle numbers, which already dwindled to approximately 1.7 million in 2022, could face further cuts amounting to 550,000, while sheep farmers could be compelled to cull over two million sheep—a staggering figure that raises alarms not only for animal welfare but for the very future of farming itself.

Beyond the immediate impact on livestock, these recommendations signal potential economic ramifications for Scotland's agricultural sector and its broader food supply chains. Industry bodies have vehemently opposed such drastic measures, arguing that these targets are not only unrealistic but could also have dire consequences for rural communities dependent on farming. A diminished livestock industry fundamentally threatens food security across the UK, as echoed by various stakeholders who insist on a more nuanced approach to achieving climate goals without jeopardising the livelihoods of farmers.

The reduction of red meat consumption by a third, aligned with the CCC's recommendations, further exacerbates these concerns. A significant portion of Scotland's economic activity is intertwined with the red meat sector, where carvery dinners and traditional Sunday roasts remain integral to the cultural fabric. The proposed changes have been met with disbelief and apprehension as they could lead to a stark shift in consumer habits, threatening the hospitality sector that thrives on these culinary staples.

Research indicates that while reducing meat consumption could play a role in climate mitigation—potentially achieving a 16% reduction in total meat consumption if high consumers reduce their intake—such proposals must be approached with caution. Simplistic calls for blanket reductions fail to acknowledge the complexity of dietary needs and the potential for nutrient deficiencies within vulnerable populations, as noted by Food Standards Scotland. This points to the necessity for tailored dietary guidance rather than sweeping mandates.

The Scottish Government, while partially receptive to the CCC's dietary recommendations, advocates for a balanced approach in encouraging shifts towards healthier eating patterns. By promoting existing guidelines, the government underscores the importance of aligning health with environmental responsibilities without decimating the agricultural sector.

As the discourse surrounding climate change intensifies, farmers find themselves at the centre, navigating pressures from climate advocates while seeking recognition for their efforts to lower emissions—evidence shows that agricultural emissions in Scotland have dropped by 12% since 1990. This underscores the need for realistic, collaborative solutions that empower farmers rather than vilifying them as easy targets.

In this dialogue on climate and agriculture, it is imperative that policymakers strive for an inclusive discourse, valuing the voices of farmers who are increasingly pushing back against top-down recommendations that fail to appreciate the reality of agricultural life. A balanced approach is essential to safeguard both the environment and Scotland’s rich agricultural heritage—because in fighting climate change, all stakeholders must be heard and respected.

## 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), [[2]](https://www.thescottishfarmer.co.uk/news/23639927.scottish-beef-industry-takes-climate-change-committee/)
* 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), [[7]](https://www.fwi.co.uk/news/environment/farmers-reject-cccs-call-for-livestock-reduction-targets)
* Paragraph 3 – [[2]](https://www.thescottishfarmer.co.uk/news/23639927.scottish-beef-industry-takes-climate-change-committee/), [[3]](https://www.ed.ac.uk/research-innovation/latest-research-news/lowered-red-meat-intake-would-hit-climate-goals), [[5]](https://www.gov.scot/publications/scotlands-response-climate-change-committees-ccc-annual-progress-report-2022-recommendations/pages/2/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[4]](https://www.foodstandards.gov.scot/news-and-alerts/new-research-shows-existing-dietary-advice-can-help-us-meet-climate-change-mitigation-goals), [[6]](https://meatmanagement.com/news/blanket-reduction-in-meat-could-cause-nutrient-deficiencies-fss/71172.article)
* Paragraph 5 – [[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), [[5]](https://www.gov.scot/publications/scotlands-response-climate-change-committees-ccc-annual-progress-report-2022-recommendations/pages/2/), [[6]](https://meatmanagement.com/news/blanket-reduction-in-meat-could-cause-nutrient-deficiencies-fss/71172.article)
* Paragraph 6 – [[2]](https://www.thescottishfarmer.co.uk/news/23639927.scottish-beef-industry-takes-climate-change-committee/), [[7]](https://www.fwi.co.uk/news/environment/farmers-reject-cccs-call-for-livestock-reduction-targets)

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.thescottishfarmer.co.uk/news/23639927.scottish-beef-industry-takes-climate-change-committee/> - The Scottish beef industry has strongly opposed the Climate Change Committee's (CCC) recommendations to significantly reduce meat consumption and livestock numbers. Industry bodies argue that such measures are unjustified and could harm the red meat supply chain in Scotland, leading to economic devastation and the loss of rural communities. They emphasize the sector's critical role in UK food security and advocate for a net-zero roadmap that doesn't involve drastic reductions in herd and flock sizes.
3. <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. If high consumers of red and processed meat reduced their intake to 70g or less per day, it would achieve a 16% reduction in total meat consumption. Further reductions to 60g per day would meet the Climate Change Committee's recommended target of a 20% shift away from all meat by 2030.
4. <https://www.foodstandards.gov.scot/news-and-alerts/new-research-shows-existing-dietary-advice-can-help-us-meet-climate-change-mitigation-goals> - Food Standards Scotland, in collaboration with the University of Edinburgh, has conducted research revealing that Scotland could make significant progress towards the Climate Change Committee's targets for reduction in meat consumption by following existing dietary advice. The study found that encouraging high consumers of red and processed meat to limit their intake to 70g per day could achieve a 16% reduction in total meat consumption, aligning with the CCC's recommendations.
5. <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scotlands-response-climate-change-committees-ccc-annual-progress-report-2022-recommendations/pages/2/> - The Scottish Government's response to the Climate Change Committee's annual progress report 2022 includes a partially accepted recommendation to encourage a 20% shift away from all meat by 2030, rising to 35% by 2050, and a 20% shift from dairy products by 2030. The government supports consumers in moving towards a healthy balanced diet as depicted by the Eatwell Guide, which is assessed to provide a 32% lower environmental footprint.
6. <https://meatmanagement.com/news/blanket-reduction-in-meat-could-cause-nutrient-deficiencies-fss/71172.article> - Food Standards Scotland (FSS) has cautioned that a blanket reduction in meat consumption could lead to nutrient deficiencies. FSS senior public health nutritionist Dr. Fiona Comrie stated that while reducing meat and dairy intake could benefit climate change mitigation and human health, the reality is complex. Given the poor diet of the Scottish population, particularly in some sub-groups, an across-the-board reduction in meat and dairy consumption cannot be recommended as it may worsen micronutrient intakes among those with already low intakes.
7. <https://www.fwi.co.uk/news/environment/farmers-reject-cccs-call-for-livestock-reduction-targets> - Farmers have strongly opposed the Climate Change Committee's (CCC) proposal to cut livestock numbers by 27% and reduce meat and dairy consumption. They warn that the plan overlooks agriculture's vital role in carbon management. The CCC's seventh carbon budget outlines the agricultural sector's role in emissions reduction, calling for a 27% decrease in cattle and sheep numbers, a 25% reduction in meat consumption, and a 20% cut in dairy consumption by 2040.