RDOC/2020/0078

Scottish Rural Development Programme 2014 - 2020 Information and Publicity Strategy

Annual Strategic Communications Plan 2020/21

The European Agricultural Fund
for Rural Development:
Europe investing in rural areas

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Introduction

1. This Scottish Rural Development Programme (SRDP) Annual Strategic Communications Plan for 2020/21 is part of the SRDP 2014-2020 Information and Publicity Strategy. The Strategy sets out the key messages, target audience, budget, communication aims and methods. This document outlines the key strategic communication objectives from 1 April 2020 until 31 March 2021, and sets them in the context of the five SRDP priorities.

2. The Rural Development Regulation requires the Rural Development Operational Committee (RDOC) to be informed of:
   - Progress in the implementation of the Strategy and any analysis of results – Annex A summarises communications activity over 2019/20 including quantitative data of some of the monitoring measurements from the Strategy.
   - Any substantive changes to the strategy.
   - Any planned information and publicity to be carried out in the following year.

Key communication objectives for 2020/21

3. The key communication objectives are listed below and reflect the overarching aims of the SRDP Information and Communications Strategy:

   - The overarching objective of SRDP communications in 2020-2021 is to demonstrate the value of SRDP schemes and initiatives to policy makers and the wider public as they visualise a post-Brexit landscape and for messaging to reflect progress made as the current Programme moves towards its end.
   - To sign post and communicate to beneficiaries, stakeholders and the wider public information on:
     i. The practicalities of the end of the SRDP 2014-2020 programme
     ii. The future rural support programmes during 2021-2024
     iii. COVID-19 response and recovery
     iv. Brexit implications including the transition period and any future economic partnership
   - SRN have developed a communications plan to partake in the themed 'Year of Coasts and Waters 2020' (#YCW2020). They have issued messaging promoting the campaign on our social media channels, encouraging stakeholders to get involved and have identified opportunities for collecting and promoting SRDP case studies through the campaign.
   - In response to workshops held at the SRA conference & AGM, SRN are currently researching various different communications tools to support messaging to a wider and more diverse audience, e.g. podcasts, posters etc.
   - In light of the recent situation surrounding the COVID-19 outbreak the SRN has shifted focus to support the government's response and support to rural communities and the economy. This has included creating a new 'COVID-19 Information Hub' on the SRN website which will be monitored and updated daily with the latest official guidance, helpful resources, funding support and news relevant to Scotland's rural communities. The Hub and its

content has been publicised across our social media channels and will continue to do so as new information and guidance becomes available.

- Continuing to operate through contingency plans during the COVID-19 period. This includes promotion of webinars, greater online material and virtual support from consultants, advisors and applicants.
- Continue to improve quality of websites and capitalise on the increase volume of visits to these sites, such as FAS, which has seen over 70k of 'hits' in the last 6 months
- To continue to inform applicants and stakeholders of scheme dates for applications, approvals and payments
- To manage expectations about the support available, including targeting and budget limitations
- To encourage high quality applications through discussions with potential applicants prior to submission as well as rejection feedback, guidance updates and promotion of good practice, and to effectively communicate the latest information about the closure and wind down of schemes.
- To communicate any changes to the SRDP, including technical and budget changes expected through Programme modifications.
- To engage with key stakeholders, including through the RDOC and European Network for Rural Development.
- To distribute findings from the ongoing evaluation of the SRDP evaluation project. A number of evaluations are in progress, with numerous completed and published evaluations expected over the course of the year (including evaluations of the Scottish Rural Network, the Farm Advisory Service One to Many service, the New Entrants/Young Farmers support grant schemes, and the Knowledge Transfer and Innovation Fund).

SRDP Priority 1 - Enhancing the rural economy

All SRDP support helps deliver the overarching objective of enhancing the rural economy to help deliver sustainable economic growth.

The Food Processing, Marketing and Co-operation (FPMC) scheme provides direct investment into food and drink processing businesses; the Forestry Grant Scheme (FGS) provides support for the forestry sector and LEADER supports rural businesses across a range of sectors.

Beyond this, a number of schemes directly support farm and forestry businesses through income support under the Less Favoured Area Support Scheme (LFASS) and business development for new entrants, crofters and small farms. The Knowledge Transfer and Innovation Fund (KTIF), the Farm Advisory Service (FAS) and the Rural Innovation Support Service (RISS) also help support farm businesses by embracing innovative techniques and sharing best practice through the formation of operational groups.

The key communications actions to support delivery of this priority are:

- Publicising scheme opening and closing dates.
- Keeping stakeholders fully up to date with the progress and implications of Brexit.
- Producing a range of materials focusing now on the evaluation of the different schemes and sharing this information to inform future support. For example publication of FPMC evaluation www.gov.scot/publications/evaluation-food-processing-marketing-co-operation-fund-2014-2020/
- Continue to promote the diverse range of SRDP funded projects aimed at enhancing the rural economy, including LEADER and RISS projects.
- Ensuing stakeholders are aware of the availability of future funding, including any guarantees provided by the UK Government.
- Working with industry and the Advisory Group on Economic Recovery to support and communicate Scotland's economic recovery once the health emergency created by coronavirus has subsided.
- Engaging with stakeholders on the continuation of rural support both in the immediate "Stability and Simplicity" period between 2021-2024 and in the development of longer term future farming and food production policy from 2024 onwards, as informed by the Farming and Food Production Future Policy Group.

SRDP Priority 2 - Supporting agricultural and forestry businesses

The key direct support that addresses this priority is delivered through the Crofting Agricultural Grant Scheme (CAGS); Small Farm Grant Scheme (SFGS); the Forestry Grant Scheme (FGS); and Less Favoured Area Support Scheme (LFASS). The Knowledge Transfer and Innovation Fund (KTIF) and the Farm Advisory Service (FAS) also provide innovative techniques, key training and education support to agriculture businesses.

Crofting plays a vital role in maintaining the population in rural and remote rural areas, including the retention of young people and families. CAGS is designed to aid and develop agricultural production on crofting businesses, thereby sustaining the economic basis of crofting, and helping retain people in rural communities. Funding supports crofters in carrying out individual and collective investments that improve efficiency and reduce production costs.

The Forestry Grant Scheme will continue to be open for applications during 2020/21 for a range of forestry activities, with the main focus on woodland creation and delivering Scottish Governments Tree planting target of 12,000 hectares in 2020. As forestry projects often have long lead in times stakeholders are seeking continuity of support and would like to know more about plans for the 2021-24 period.

The Rural Innovation Support Service (RISS), will continue to support farmers, foresters and crofters to problem solve and innovate through connecting them with facilitators from other sectors to form operational group.
Planned activity in the light of COVID-19:
  ➢ RISS have asked facilitators to move group meetings online and offered support to them and group members to do so
  ➢ RISS will run a climate change workshop – Climate-proof your Farm – on May 20 as an interactive webinar, to generate new RISS groups around climate change mitigation
  ➢ The RISS parliamentary showcase event – Farmer-led Innovation – The Scottish Story – is postponed until October 27

The Food Processing, Marketing and Cooperation scheme (FPMC) will support agricultural businesses through providing an outlet for primary produce and improving supply chain efficiency.

The key communications actions to support delivery of this priority are:

- Publicising scheme opening and closing dates through websites and social media, including via ARE Communications and the SRN.
- Providing regular updates on plans and proposals for each of the schemes for the 2021-24 Stability and Simplicity period. Ensuring farming and forestry receive the support and certainty they require in recognition of the long term planning they undertake and that their outcomes are measured and delivered across the length of the programme period

- Communications about FAS and RISS including how they work, who can apply and the associated benefits through a programme of regular stakeholder events, presentations at stakeholder events, digital promotion through website activity, direct mail newsletters and production of physical and digital communications materials. Promotion of outputs from training, mentoring and operational groups, including progress throughout the process.
- Ensuring stakeholders are aware of the position and options for LFASS going forward.
- Engaging with an agricultural and forestry audience through ARE Communications and the Scottish Forestry's Customer Representatives Group on the latest information regarding Brexit and the implications on future funding.
- Producing a range of materials that demonstrate the contribution SRDP has made to agriculture and forestry over the past programme, including case studies and infographics.
- Signposting to relevant funding and support available in light of COVID-19 and Brexit to agriculture and forestry stakeholders through ARE communications and the SRN.

SRDP Priority 3 - Protecting and improving the natural environment

The key direct support that addresses this priority is support for the environment through Agri-environment Climate Scheme (AECS); Improving Public Access (IPA), and agroforestry under the Forestry Grant Scheme (FGS). The environment will also be one of the priorities for the Knowledge Transfer and Innovation Fund (KTIF) and the Farm Advisory Service (FAS).

The key communications actions to support delivery of this priority are:

- Publicising scheme opening and closing dates through various media outlets, including via the SRN and delivery partners.
- Communicating the approach to AECS contract extensions for those impacted.
- Producing a range of case studies and communications materials that convey how the SRDP has enhanced and protected the natural environment in Scotland, ensuring an even spread of scheme outputs and impacts under their specific remits.
- Communications about FAS and RISS including how they work, who can apply and the associated benefits through a programme of regular stakeholder events, presentations at stakeholder events, digital promotion through website activity, direct mail newsletters and production of physical and digital communications materials. Promotion of outputs from training, mentoring and operational groups, including progress throughout the process.
- Engaging with an environmental audience about the implications of Brexit on the future of funding for the natural environment.
- Ensuring the environmental management delivered during the 2014-2020 period is recognised, continued and further enhanced during the next programme period.
- On social media, ARE comms are rolling out linked videos and infographics during monthly themed weeks e.g. soil sampling, diet (animal feed), animal welfare etc. Due to lockdown this has been paused.

SRDP Priority 4 - Addressing the impact of climate change

This priority is addressed through support for woodland creation under the Forestry Grant Scheme (FGS) and, more broadly for environmental management through the Agri-Environment Climate Scheme (AECS). In addition the Beef Efficiency Scheme (BES) aims to deliver economic and environmental improvements and improve efficiency. The environment is one of the priorities of the Knowledge Transfer and Innovation Fund (KTIF) and the Farm Advisory Service (FAS), including the provision of farm carbon audits.

The key communications actions to support delivery of this priority are:

- Publicising scheme opening and closing dates through a comprehensive communications programme that includes the SRN and delivery partners.
- In conjunction with stakeholders, provide on-going information about the requirements of the Beef Efficiency Scheme (BES) alongside clear guidance for staff, applicants, agents and case study promotion.
- Providing regular updates on plans and proposals for each of the schemes for the 2021-24 Stability and Simplicity period. This is needed particularly to sustain confidence around future support for woodland creation and maintain the current high levels of woodland creation activity needed to meet climate change plan targets.
- Under the FGS, farm and woodland events will take place along with the development of marketing material.
- Communications about how the FAS works to address climate change, particularly through carbon audits.
- Promoting the links between the work being done under the SRDP for this priority, and the wider work on agriculture and climate change under the Climate Change Plan.
- Ensuring that the positive impact of SRDP spend on projects that addressed climate change is reflected in communications materials.
- For the Beef Efficiency Scheme an overarching report of the scheme will be produced and made publically available later in the year.
- Following the Scottish Government declaration of a climate emergency ensuring agriculture is assisted to play its part in contributing towards the delivery of Scotland's climate ambitions and environmental sustainability during the 2021-2024 period, as support is moved from the current CAP regime to a future support system post-2024.
- The Agricultural Transformation Programme (out with CAP) will assist in this transition
- ARE comms have in place a webpage for the [Young Farmer Climate Champions](#), with a YouTube playlist for each of the champions ([Bigton Farm](#), [Mossgiel Farm,](#) [Lynbreck Croft](#)). Each playlist has short videos with tips from the champions on the changes they have made with benefits to environment and business.

SRDP Priority 5 - Supporting rural communities

The key direct support that addresses this priority and the programme's contribution to the social fabric of rural Scotland is LEADER with further support from Improving Public Access.

The key communications actions to support delivery of this priority are:

- Continued promotion of the opportunities available under LEADER through individual Local Action Groups (LAGs) including events, workshops, local awareness raising, targeted communication support and coordination from the SRN.
- Focus on gathering evidence and insights that demonstrate the value of the LEADER approach and its positive impact on the rural economy and communicating these to the public, decision makers and stakeholders.
- Producing communications materials and delivering events through LAGS and the SRN that gain buy in from policy makers to ensure that community led local development is retained post Brexit.
- Improving Public Access has not opened in 2019 as the original nominal programme budget has been exceeded. Example of a recent news release celebrating IPA www.nature.scot/100-miles-new-paths-celebrated-across-scotland. An example of a recent news release BBC Radio Scotland interview was broadcast (Out of Doors programme) on 15 February 2020 www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m000ffdr, highlighting the successes of the scheme and the benefits to a contract holder in Aberdeenshire.
- Forestry Grant Scheme support for improving public access in woodlands in an around towns is still open for applications. Many projects have now been delivered and the outputs from the scheme can now be promoted.
- Ensure the latest information on Brexit and the future of LEADER is communicated through LAGS, the SRN, ARE Comms and other stakeholder channels.
- Ensure that rural communities have access to information related to COVID-19 support and funding via the SRN COVID-19 information Hub.
- Continue support for the rural economy and communities through agricultural support mechanisms and share details of the proposed UK wide shared prosperity fund and what it means for support during the 2021-2024 period.

Annex A - Summary of communications activity in 2019/20

1. The Scottish Government ARE (Agriculture and Rural Economy) communications team has supported and informed colleagues and stakeholders about SRDP schemes through communications advice and the delivery of high quality communications products. Over 2019/20 ARE Comms main messaging has included:

   ➢ Publicised the AECS 2019 window being extended on Rural Matters social media channels, as well as issuing staff and agent updates. Released 48 stakeholder updates relating to SRDP schemes.
   ➢ Notification of £34 million being committed to environmentally friendly farming practices
   ➢ Decision to inform no application round for 2020
   ➢ One year extension for AECS contracts that expire in 2020
   ➢ Notification on the collaborative projects deadline
   ➢ Variations to AECS contracts
   ➢ Published payment timetables
   ➢ Ensured clear communications relating to BES requirements

2. In the period April 2019 – April 2020 the Rural Innovation Support Service (RISS) main communications activity includes:

   ➢ Attracted 2,369 more visits to the RISS website (cumulative 4794)
   ➢ Produced two print booklets presenting the work of all RISS groups to date, the first one was distributed at the Royal Highland Show in June 2019
   ➢ Streamlined the RISS website, adding a searchable page for RISS groups and a Meet the Facilitator section
   ➢ Produced 13 group stories as case studies
   ➢ Co-sponsored a farming press trip to Harris and Lewis with SAC Consulting to present the Polyproduce group and RISS more generally
   ➢ Jointly organised (with Scottish Government) Rural Affairs Minister Mairi Gougeon's visit to the Fast Breeders RISS group to announce KTIF funding
   ➢ Generated 98 articles in farming press and websites (cumulative 124)
   ➢ Produced an FAQs document for new facilitators
   ➢ Started a monthly farmer-led innovation e-newsletter
   ➢ Used and promoted the #farmerled hashtag on social media
   ➢ Continued to liaise with comms teams of partner organisations eg. getting a RISS presence at the SAOS annual conference

3. The Scottish Rural Network (SRN) continued to operate at full capacity through 2019/20 with a reduced number of staff, expanding its website membership, newsletter subscribers and social media followers, producing new SRDP case studies and promotional content and linking in with SRDP stakeholders on events and policy work. Over 2019/20 SRN:

- ➢ Increased their audience across all channels (newsletter subscribers, website views, social media followers, video views and event attendees), continuing to distribute the latest news on SRDP funding opportunities, application windows, updates on Brexit, local events and opinions pieces.
- ➢ Issued a stakeholder survey and commissioned external website usability testing towards the beginning of the financial year, the results of which were used to inform the SRN annual communications plan for 2019/2020.
- ➢ Produced and promoted 19 new SRDP case studies, including 6 films produced in-house. There are currently a further 13 case studies in edit to be published post COVID-19.
- ➢ Produced an [SRDP brochure](#) with a summary of schemes and case studies to be handed out at the Royal Highland Show and other events
- ➢ Produced and publicised an '[AIR Citizen Summary](#)' Infographic based on the Annual Implementation Report for 2018.
- ➢ Produced SRN Quarterly Communications Reviews summarising main communications activity for 2019/2020. The first 3 quarterly reviews are available below:
  - [Quarterly Communications Review: April – June 2019](#)
  - [Quarterly Communications Review: July – September 2019](#)
  - [Quarterly Communications Review: October – December 2019](#)
- ➢ Linked in with European colleagues at events such as the NetworX conference and Rural Inspiration Awards held in Brussels, where they supported ENRD colleagues in the delivery of the event and supported the two Scottish LEADER funded projects who were among the 25 finalists for the Rural Inspiration Awards.
- ➢ Worked with Rural Economy and other policy colleagues and stakeholders to deliver the Rural Enterprise Futures Event in September 2019, which brought a wide-ranging invited audience from public, private and third sectors together to discuss the contribution rural enterprise makes to the Scottish economy. The SRN produced an [event highlights video](#) in-house to publicise the outcomes of the event.
- ➢ Hosted a delegation visit of FLAG staff from Sweden, arranging visits to FLAG funded projects across Scotland and exploring opportunities for partnership working. Produced a [video summary](#) of the trip in-house.
- ➢ Delivered and co-hosted the Smart Digital Villages' event held for the EU Smart Villages Network and the LEADER Smart Digital Villages project. SRN produced an event highlights video [available here](#).
- ➢ Worked with Scottish Rural Action to deliver their Annual SRA Conference & AGM in New Lanark. Event highlights video currently in production.
- ➢ Supported and delivered a 'Re-population workshop' with Rural Economy & Islands Team colleagues with rural stakeholders.
- ➢ We promoted various public consultations to a rural audience in support of wider SG policy objectives such as Housing to 2040, National Planning Framework 4, the National Islands Plan, replacement of European Structural Investment Funds, the Proposed Remote Rural Communities Bill and more.
- ➢ Continued to build on our youth engagement through 2018's Rural Youth August campaign in partnership with the Rural Youth Project, as well as through the promotion of various campaigns and consultations aimed at young people. Shared core government messaging and official lines surrounding EU

exit, as well as signposting to various resources and events/workshops hosted by external rural stakeholders.

4. Farm Advisory Service:
   ➢ Ricardo have worked to develop further their promotional plan for the one-to-one programme, to ensure that they are promoting the programme through all available channels, working with the press by issuing press articles; social media – providing a schedule of tweets and Facebook feeds, direct mail to new entrants and promotion via advisers – encouraging this via an adviser newsletter and promoting referrals via stakeholders through attending stakeholder meetings, seeking speaker opportunities and issuing a stakeholder pack.
   ➢ SAC Consulting continues to strengthen the Farm Advisory Service one-to-many brand identity by developing the multi-channel digital communications approach and delivering high-quality video, podcasts, publications and online tools. Print media is also a strong component in driving traffic to digital and includes advertorials, press releases and advice articles. Farm Advisory Service events have a similar multi-channel approach using both print and digital media with paid social media advertising being particularly effective with promotion to remote communities. All the communications and marketing work has been underpinned by the Farm Advisory Service website which has developed considerably as a 'one stop shop' for advice, and sign-posting, to farmers and crofters to help the to make the choices that will improve the profitability and sustainability of their businesses.

5. Beef Efficiency Scheme

   ➢ 2019 saw participants updating their carbon audits, 723 were undertaken with the help of advisors through the Farm Advisory Services with the remaining 669 participants updating their Audits without any assistance.
   ➢ Participants received their first individual reports from the scheme on the data that they recorded which was benchmarked against others in the scheme.
   ➢ The advisory services delivered 36 events across Scotland between October and December 2019. They covered two subject areas: technical performance that leads to improved herd fertility and Financial and management benefits of improving herd fertility.

SRDP Communications 2019/20 – quantitative data

The table below gives a summary of the quantitative data where it is available, against the monitoring measurements laid out in the Information and Publicity Strategy.

Method of measurement	Progress
Number of applications submitted (since 2015)	21,022
Number of applications approved (since 2015)	15,965
Website page views (1 April 2019 - 31 March 2020)	Rural Payments and Services SRDP scheme pages – 348,224 page views Most visited pages: Agri-Environment Climate Scheme (160,355 views) and Forestry (136,376) Scottish Rural Network website – 133,179 page views Farm Advisory Service website is improving in quality and attracting increasing 'hits' (>70K within the last 6 months).
Monthly Rural Issues newsletter circulation	Circulated monthly to 17,100 subscribers and includes relevant information on the SRDP (amongst other issues)
Social media activity (1 April 2019 - 31 March 2020)	**Rural Matters (ARE comms)** Twitter 3,288 followers Facebook 7,848 followers **Scottish Rural Network** Twitter 6,521 followers Facebook 2,655 followers Instagram 792 followers
Monthly LEADER newsletter (1 April 2019 - 31 March 2020)	11 editions of the LEADER newsletter were issued in 2019/20 to LEADER Local Action Group staff - 263 Subscribers as of March 2020.
Weekly SRN newsletter (1 April 2019 - 31 March 2020)	52 newsletters were issued in 2019/20. Number of subscribers as at March 2018 was 1,680
SRDP project case studies (1 April 2019 – 31 March 2020 – ARE Comms and SRN)	19

LEADER Expression of Interest (EoI) forms	4,038 – the scheme closed to new projects in December 2019 and as such the EoI was taken down from the website.
SRN events	2
Qualitative stakeholder consultation via RDOC, CAP Stakeholder Group, bilaterals (1 April 2019 - 31 March 2020)	Qualitative stakeholder consultation via RDOC and the Agriculture and Rural Development Stakeholder Group. SRDP-wide updates have been provided at five formal stakeholder meetings throughout the year, along with stakeholder bilaterals and informal meetings.
Farm Advisory Service 2019/20	Events held – 251 Publications – 292 Videos – 54 Podcasts – 11 Integrated land management plans underway – 111 awarded Specialist advice instances – 218 awarded Carbon audits – 861 awarded Mentoring – 19 awarded
Rural Innovation Support Service (RISS) 2019/20	Number of Operational Groups formed with help from the RISS: 41 38 of which specifically address SG priorities for innovation in the agricultural, forestry and food and drink sector.
Knowledge Transfer and Innovation Fund (KTIF) 2019/20	Training events delivered – 240 Number of Participants – 5,255 25 operation groups awarded funding. Made up of 435 farmers/small holders, advisors, researchers and NGOs.
Beef Efficiency Scheme	36 events across Scotland

Annex B - SRDP scheme priorities matrix

The table below highlights the main priorities delivered by each scheme, although it is acknowledged that support provides secondary benefits to most of the priorities.

	Enhancing the rural economy	Supporting agricultural and forestry businesses	Protecting and improving the natural environment	Addressing the impact of climate change	Supporting rural communities
Small farms	X	X	X	X	X
Crofting	X	X	X	X	X
FPMC	X	X	X	X	X
LFASS	X	X	X		X
AECS		X	X	X	
Forestry	X	X	X	X	X
Broadband	X	X		X	X
LEADER	X	X	X	X	X
KTIF	X	X	X	X	X
BES		X		X	
SRN	X	X	X	X	X
Rural Innovation Support Service	X	X			X
Farm Advisory Service	X	X	X	X	X