

**United call on farmers to play it safe at marts as Autumn sales get underway**

Farmers are being urged to strictly observe public health physical distancing guidelines as the Autumn sales in Scotland’s livestock marts get underway. The Institute of Auctioneers and Appraisers (IAAS), NFU Scotland (NFUS), and the Scottish Government have joined forces to call on livestock vendors and buyers to take the guidance very seriously to avoid disruption - and potential mart closures - at this crucial time of trading of pedigree and store animals.

The ramp up in seasonal store and breeding sales combined with new clusters of confirmed cases of Coronavirus in the UK has prompted this call to action. Donald Young, the new President of IAAS and Group Director of United Auctions, said:

“We have worked hard as an industry to ensure Scotland’s livestock marts have remained open throughout lockdown and we want to ensure the trade fully continues for all of our vendors and buyers. We can’t afford to have an outbreak traced back to a mart because the knock-on effect may be to temporarily close, which would have severe implications for the whole industry.

“We are asking everyone coming to marts to play it safe. We appreciate it’s hard given that it is usually a time for seeing friends and shaking hands, but we would ask you to please wear your masks if you can, keep your two-metre distance and only attend if you really need to. These are essential short-term measures for long term gain for all involved.”

Marts have responded to the Scottish Government’s two-metre physical distancing regulation by staggering places at ringside, livestreaming sales to different rings within the mart, spreading sales over two days and restricting access to penning areas. Also helping has been the switch to much of the paperwork being done digitally.

Livestock trading is currently buoyant with both lamb and beef prices higher than last year, attributed to a strong retail trade reflecting people cooking more at home, the lamb demand triggered by the Muslim festival of Qurbani in July and the restaurant sector re-opening.

NFUS President Andrew McCornick said it is imperative to keep the vital service provided by the marts operational:

“It is the most important time of year for cattle and sheep sales, and for some, particularly in the Highlands or the West, it will be the only sale they will attend. There is a lot of extra work going on behind the scenes to make sure the marts can operate. We mustn’t jeopardise this trade with complacency. Marts provide vital price transparency and should they be forced to close, everyone involved in the livestock trade would suffer. We would like to thank everyone for your efforts so far and please stay vigilant.”

The NFUS has recently shared a blog from a GP on when you are most at risk of contracting the airborne disease as well as a first-hand experience of a farmer who contracted Covid-19 and the impact it has had.

In line with public health regulations from the Scottish Government, IAAS has been working closely with their team to create a framework for individual auction marts to operate within. Each mart has its own regulations, depending on their own operational circumstances, however, common to all is the recommendation to wear face masks and maintain a two-metre distance with other householders.

Rural Economy Secretary Fergus Ewing said:

“Throughout the pandemic farmers across the country have continued the production of food and the operation of businesses which support that. I would like to thank every farmer, their families, the workers and all the businesses in the agricultural supply chain for helping Scotland to get through this.

“The Scottish Government has worked closely with IAAS and NFU Scotland on physical distancing guidelines to ensure Scotland’s livestock marts can remain open. As we approach the Autumn sales I urge everyone to familiarise themselves with these guidelines.

“We know coronavirus continues to pose real risks. Maintaining progress means we all need to abide by public health guidance, which matters now more than ever.”

For g[uidelines](https://iaas.co.uk/iaas-updates-auction-market-guidelines/) on how sales will be operating please see the IAAS website (iaas.co.uk) or contact your mart.

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**Notes to Editor**

**About IAAS**

* The Institute of Auctioneers and Appraisers in Scotland (IAAS) is the representative body for livestock markets, valuers and auctioneers across Scotland. We fight for the interests of those markets and the central role they play in the working of the rural and agricultural economy. www.iaas.co.uk
* [Guidelines](https://iaas.co.uk/iaas-updates-auction-market-guidelines/) for the sales can be found at www.iaas.co.uk
* With the hugely important autumn sales now started, NFU Scotland is warning against Covid-19 complacency. Please read a member’s experience of the disease and how it affected his family at: <https://www.nfus.org.uk/news/blog/warning-on-covid-complacency--a-farmers-blog--4-august-2020> Read its ‘Staying Safe at the Sales’ blog from GP John Locke at: <https://www.nfus.org.uk/news/blog/staying-safe-at-the-sales--a-gps-blog--29-july-2020>