**TRAIN TO GROW SAY SCOTTISH MACHINERY RINGS**

**PRESS RELEASE**

**For Immediate Use**

The Scottish Machinery Rings Association (SMRA) is continuing to play a pivotal role in youth development within the land-based and agricultural industry, with the challenges for 2021 focused on skills development and career opportunities for new entrants and career changers.

All nine of the Machinery Rings, which span across Scotland, are extremely proud to be able to offer diverse training courses in various sectors, following the Covid-19 hiatus last year. In 2019, all nine rings had a combined turnover in excess of £95 million and delivered training courses to 12,747 trainees throughout the UK; training delivery is something that SMRA is looking to enhance in 2021.

The SMRA’s network of professional instructors, assessors and providers have expertise in delivering a range of legislative and practical short courses such as Health & Safety, First-aid and Forklift operation, Pesticides, Chainsaw, ATV’s and Driver CPC. Short course training provision varies by machinery ring but in some cases the training portfolio exceeds 100 certified short courses along with a selection of online training courses.

Peter Wood, Training Manager for Ringlink Services explains: “Training activity stopped for four months last year, before resuming in July 2020. Since then, demand has increased for training courses and by working co-operatively with experienced training providers and instructors we adopted safe working practices in accordance with Covid-19 government guidelines.”

Past first-aid trainee Ian McHattie said: “The way in which the course was presented was very good and was definitely one of the best delivered courses, in terms of knowledge sharing, that I have been on. The relaxed but thorough nature of the training offered a chance to learn new techniques, whilst refreshing previous ones.”

Andrew Moir, Vice Chairman of SMRA commented: “The last 12 months have been extraordinary times but we remain optimistic for the future. Following recent Scottish Government announcements to support economic recovery, with a key focus on skills development for young people, displaced workers and career changers, the Scottish machinery rings can assist with these new initiatives. Supporting various industry sectors such as construction, haulage, forestry, agriculture, horticulture, estates and public authorities means the SMRA is well placed to provide training to a wide range of businesses and indeed to those individuals considering a career change or simply looking to enhance their skill set for the future.”

In 2019, the Land-Based Pre-Apprenticeship Pilot Programme (LBPAPP) was launched nationally, involving three Machinery Rings (Ringlink Scotland, Tarff Valley Services and Borders Machinery Ring), covering the South West, North East of Scotland and South East Scotland.

Recruitment for the 2021 Land-based Pre-apprenticeship is underway, with a target of recruiting up to 60 pre-apprentices throughout Scotland. Last year the programme supported 45 pre-apprentices and whilst it was challenging to deliver the programme during Covid-19, the format was varied to ensure safe delivery in accordance with Covid-19 government guidance.

Michael Bayne, Manager of Borders Machinery Ring adds: “The format of the Land-Based Pre-Apprenticeship is designed to support new entrants into the rural sector, to-date over 50% of participants are from non–agricultural backgrounds and it provides an ideal pathway of progression onto Modern Apprenticeships or college on completion.”

The programme is delivered in two stages, firstly including an induction to various agricultural and land-based practices involving tuition on tractor driving, rough terrain telescopic forklift, first-aid, manual handling, health and safety risk assessments and undertaking the Certificate of Work Readiness qualification (SCQF4).

The second stage involves six months full-time employment on a rural mentor business which allows the pre-apprentice to develop their skills, gain vital work experience and expand their knowledge.

Holly Kennedy, a past pre-apprentice sums up the experience by saying: “It’s the best way to get into the industry, don’t hesitate - just do it!”

Tracey McEwan who oversees the Land-based Pre-Apprenticeship for Tarff Services says: “While the Covid-19 pandemic continues to have a major impact on jobs with escalating redundancies across most sectors, the Scottish Machinery Rings Association is well positioned to provide skills development and training opportunities for young people at a time where they are predicted to be the hardest hit”

**To find out more about the various training course provided by your local Scottish Machinery Ring visit** [**www.scottishmachineryrings.co.uk**](http://www.scottishmachineryrings.co.uk)**.**

**If you are interested in mentoring a young person on the Land-Based Pre-apprenticeship, please contact: Ringlink Scotland, Borders Machinery Ring or Tarff Valley Ltd.**

The Scottish Government's ‘Women in Agriculture Practical Training Fund’ is one initiative that the machinery rings are able to support. This fund assists women in agriculture to have opportunities to develop their skills and talents. Funding for 100% of training costs is available, up to the value of £500. Women residing? in Scotland who are either already working in agriculture or studying it full-time or part-time, or who are keen to start work in this area and who are able to demonstrate how a training course will support the growth of their business or employment options, are eligible to apply. Full details are available at: <https://www.scotland.lantra.co.uk>

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