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*For immediate use*

**Food security is our moral obligation, says QMS Chair**

Quality Meat Scotland (QMS) Chair, Kate Rowell and Chief Executive, Sarah Millar, spoke at its industry breakfast briefing at the 2022 Royal Highland Show highlighting the significant role of the red meat sector in food security.

“Both the pandemic and especially the more recent events in Ukraine have shone the spotlight firmly on food security and the benefits of producing as much of our own food as possible,” said Ms Rowell. “With talk of global food shortages and international supply chain disruption ever more frequent, it’s surely our moral obligation to grow and rear as much of our own food right here in Scotland.”

Ms Millar praised the recommendations announced earlier this morning by the Food Security Taskforce, co-chaired by Cabinet Secretary, Mairi Gougeon and Chief Executive of Food & Drink Scotland, James Withers. She said:

“We are incredibly lucky in Scotland: we have the climate that, even factoring in global warming, is able to sustain food production. Not many other countries in the world are able to say that. Our combination of rainfall and natural grassland resource means that red meat protein production is ideally suited to Scotland. And our production methods, utilising mixed farming systems mean we can do this in a way that sustains habitats and biodiversity – working with and for nature to produce healthy food. And the more we do that in Scotland, the less calories we are reliant on from the rest of the world – this is responsible global citizenship.”

The key recommendation, she said, is for Scottish Government to create a dedicated Food Security Unit within the civil service:

“This would help to ensure that whilst we are at this critical juncture of policy formulation, that our ability to produce food is protected, as it should be.”

Ms Rowell also announced that QMS has committed to commissioning an independent impact analysis of its activities which will give producers evidence of the return on investment of their levy money.

“Further details of this will follow but it is to be delivered before the end of this financial year,” she explained. “That report will then guide and inform our future strategy and will be an ongoing evaluation of the work undertaken by the organisation. We need to provide value for money in everything we do, and we also need to demonstrate that to levy payers and the wider red meat sector.”

Despite the challenges of the global food supply, labour and the pandemic, Ms Rowell said that the sector is still working hard to improve its environmental sustainability that also plays a significant role in long-term productivity and food security. QMS is leading the net zero pathway project to develop and implement a road map for the red meat supply chain to meet its greenhouse gas emission reduction targets of 75% by 2030, and net zero by 2045.

This is supported by collaborative work with the Global Meat Alliance, which brings global insights to help accelerate the road to net zero, and, closer to home, the Red Meat Resilience Group, which will integrate skills development, nature restoration work and co-solutions to support the whole supply chain meet targets and sustainable production.

Other key work continues with QMS working with processors to follow up on strong leads from the export shows attended in the Spring, identifying areas around the world with the most potential for sales in the future. QMS is also supporting The Scotch Butchers Club, which has doubled in membership over the last year, in particular to meet recruitment challenges with a ‘take a real look at butchery’ programme for the independent butchery and processing sectors.

Minister for Environment and Land Reform, Mairi McAllan, gave the keynote speech, in which she acknowledged and thanked the industry for the positive impact of the Scottish red meat sector on the economy, rural Scotland and delivering a climate- and nature- positive future.

**/ENDS**

**Notes to editors:**

QMS is the public body responsible for promoting the PGI labelled Scotch Beef and Scotch Lamb brands in the UK and abroad and also promoting Scottish pork products under the Specially Selected Pork logo.

Please note that the use of the word Scotch in the Scotch Beef PGI and Scotch Lamb PGI brands is correct and should not be substituted for an alternative such as Scots or Scottish. The history of the use of the word Scotch in this way, traces back to the 18th century.

QMS also helps the Scottish red meat sector improve its sustainability, efficiency and profitability and maximise its contribution to Scotland's economy.

The quality assurance schemes run by QMS cover more than 90% of livestock farmed for red meat in Scotland. They offer consumers in the UK and overseas the legal guarantee that the meat they buy has come from animals that have spent their whole lives being raised to some of the world’s strictest welfare standards.

Scotland’s beef, lamb and pork producers make an important contribution to the country’s economic, social and environmental sustainability, contributing over £2 billion to the annual GDP of Scotland and supporting around 50,000 jobs (many in fragile rural areas) in the farming, agricultural supply and processing sectors.

For more information visit www.qmscotland.co.uk or follow QMS on Facebook or Twitter.