

**Press Release**

For immediate release

**Conference Calling: List of speakers announced for international agricultural event coming to the UK this summer.**

Countries encompassing the alphabet - from Australia to Zambia - will be represented at the 30th Royal Agricultural Society of the Commonwealth (RASC) Conference.

The event, which is being hosted in Scotland, was founded in 1957 by the late Duke of Edinburgh Prince Phillip, who served as President for half a century before handing over the reins to his daughter **HRH, The Princess Royal.**

Speakers have just been announced and include - as would be expected - a truly international mix.

Among a number of speakers from the USA will be **Renee Alexander**, the CEO of the Minnesota State Fair, which is attended by a staggering two million visitors each year. President of the Agricultural & Commercial Society of Zambia, **Dr Bernard Moonga**, will be sharing his experiences. Familiar faces from the British rural scene, such as former National Farmers’ Union (NFU) **President Minette Batters**, will also be taking to the stage.

John Bennett, an Australian farmer and trustee of RASC, said the covid-forced cancellation of the last conference, in 2020, has resulted in a great deal of excitement about this year’s event, which will take place in Edinburgh between Tuesday 25th to Thursday 27th June 2024.

“I am very much looking forward to coming to Scotland for the 2024 conference,” he said.

“To anybody still wondering about buying a ticket, my simple message is to get yourself there.

“It doesn’t matter whereabouts in the world somebody comes from, if you are interested in agriculture or are part of an agricultural show society you will find plenty to talk about. It never ceases to amaze me how much we all have in common and I will be forever grateful for the network of people around the world that I can give a call to, or send an email, to ask for their help and advice. Working together has never been more important than at the moment with challenges such as climate change; it’s vital to be aware of scientific developments - to get the global picture.”

The Royal Highland and Agricultural Society of Scotland has been instrumental in securing the conference, which is traditionally held every two years and draws the bulk of its delegates from agricultural show societies across the world. A key element of the conference is its Next Generation sessions, with many delegates aged under 40 supported to attend with scholarship places.

Among those speaking to a special session of this younger audience will be fifth generation dairy farmer **Jim Shanks**, who has diversified to become Scotland's only commercial producer of tomatoes and **Claire Taylor**, who grew up on a small beef farm and went on to work as a writer for the BBC and the Scottish Farmer. She is currently doing a Nuffield Scholarship on “changing the tide on the anti-farming agenda.” 28-year-old **Ben McClymont** was recently appointed NFU Scotland Next Generation Chairman and will be speaking to the young delegates out on the farm - which has several diversifications - that he manages.

**Farmer Tom Martin** - founder of the hugely successful Farmer Time project - declared himself delighted to be asked to speak to the Next Generation delegates as he credits attending the conference with inspiring him to launch the initiative. Back in 2016 Cambridgeshire arable and regenerative farmer Tom attended the RASC Conference in Singapore; an experience he hailed as “highly life-changing”. The following year, in 2017, he launched 'Farmer Time' (formerly called FaceTime a Farmer) which pairs farmers with school classes.

Tom, who was supported financially by the East of England Agricultural Society to attend the conference, said: “I took so much from that conference. Without the jump start, leg up and inspiration of the RASC conference there would be no Farmer Time.”

This year’s landmark event will have the theme *Growing a Commonwealth* and gatherspeakers, sessions, and topics from across the Commonwealth at Edinburgh’s Gogarburn Conference Centre. A Gala Dinner will be hosted in the members’ pavilion of the Royal Highland Showground and for those who arrive in Scotland before the actual conference, there will be farm visits and guided tours, along with the chance to attend the Royal Highland Show.

Apart from the exchange of ideas on the secure and sustainable use of the world’s natural resources, the RASC’s mission is to promote the development of agriculture, forestry, aquaculture and the rural environment. In addition to improving farming standards and the rural economy, the conference aims to improve awareness among the public and consumers about agriculture and rural concerns. Another aim is to encourage and support farming and the rural economy’s message.

For further information including tickets and sponsorship opportunities, please visit <https://www.therasc.com/>

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**Notes to Editors:**

The 30th Royal Agricultural Society of the Commonwealth (RASC) Conference will take place in Edinburgh between Tuesday 25th to Thursday 27th June 2024.

The conference will be made up of four themed sessions, each one appropriately initialled to spell out RASC. In addition, there will be a session for CEO’s and Next Generation delegates, prior to the main conference commencing.

1. **RELEVANT**: Speakers to include **Anna Jones**, a rural affairs journalist, author, broadcaster and television producer who is a farmer’s daughter from the Welsh Borders. Also, **Dr Bernard H. Moonga**, the president of the Agricultural & Commercial Society of Zambia and **Renee Alexander**, CEO of the Minnesota State Fair, who while dedicated to showcasing and preserving the agricultural heritage of the fair believes it has a primary responsibility to connect urban visitors to the roots of their food source.
2. **ADAPTABLE: Allan Joyce**, managing director of global company Balmoral Tanks, will bring his insight into the qualities that make an organisation effective. **Jessica Underberg,** who heads up the Erie County Fair in New York - which attracts over one million visitors annually - will also be taking to the stage. Also taking to the floor will be respected farmer, researcher and policy expert Professor **John Gilliland**, whose own farm in Northern Ireland has been independently verified as “beyond” Net Zero, and **Professor Ken Sloan**, vice-chancellor and CEO of Harper Adams University. **Sarah-Jane Laing**, chief executive of Scottish Land & Estates (SLE), who sits on various groups such as the Scottish Government's Women in Agriculture Taskforce and the Tenant Farming Advisory, will also be speaking, along with Balmoral Tank’s **Simon Scott**, an expert in business development who has travelled to over 60 countries during his career.
3. **SUSTAINABLE:** Speaker **Freya von Czettritz** is CEO of the German farmer co-operative DLG Holding and helped shape AGRITECHNICA into today’s premier global agricultural trade fair. Taking to the stage from Australia will be **Jason Strong** who has more than 30 years’ red meat and livestock experience, a former Managing Director of Meat & Livestock Australia Ltd. As former President of the National Farmers’ Union **Minette Batters** is well-known, but she is also a tenant farmer, who has diversified her mixed farm with various enterprises from winter grazing for polo ponies to hosting weddings. Also speaking is **Patrick Holden**, founder and CEO of the Sustainable Food Trust, whose mission is to work internationally to accelerate the transition towards more sustainable food and farming systems and **Professor Jude Capper**, the ABP Chair of sustainable beef and sheep production at Harper Adams University and an independent Livestock Sustainability Consultant. **Ian Laister is the Managing Director of Bakkafrost Scotland, who believes being committed to the** environmental, cultural and economic sustainability of rural Scotland is integral to the salmon producer’s success. Completing the line-up is **Sarah Millar**, Chief Executive of Quality Meat Scotland. After leaving school at 16, she worked in her family farm’s butchery business, instilling her passion for promoting the relationship between food and farming.
4. **CONNECTED**: Speaker **Marla Calico** is the President and CEO of the International Association of Fairs and Expositions - headquartered in Missouri USA - representing 1,000 members made up of agricultural fairs, exhibitions and shows from around the globe. **Peter Nation** is the CEO of the NZ National Fieldays Society, a not-for-profit organisation committed to supporting the advancement of agriculture in New Zealand. **Su Kahumbu** completes the line-up. She creates mobile phone apps, such as the award-winning iCow, to help farmers in Africa, where she is based. Her solutions target improved climate resilient production methods that deliver on sustainable human, animal, crop and ecosystem health.