

Scotland's Rural College (SRUC) is on a journey to become Scotland's enterprise university at the heart of our sustainable natural economy. Our mission is to create and mobilise knowledge and talent – partnering locally and globally to benefit Scotland's natural economy.

Harnessing the power of SRUC's world-class and sector-leading research, learning and teaching, skills and training, SAC Consulting provides on-the-ground advice and expertise to all kinds of agricultural, food and land-based businesses, from the smallest crofter to big multinationals. Our national network of consultants provide independent solutions, advice, and services, tailored to individual needs, and delivered locally. We are well established in the communities we live and work in throughout Scotland, with trusted teams giving a depth of understanding to local issues, social needs and opportunities.

With a broad knowledge of all kinds of farming and crofting enterprises, and strong connections across the wider industry, we offer guidance on elements such as current and potential developments to agricultural policy, improving efficiency and sustainability, and advising on how best to meet the evolving needs of the agricultural landscape as we look to the future.

We deliver a range of knowledge exchange programmes, the largest of which is Scotland's national Farm Advisory Service (FAS). Formerly an EU Rural Development Programme activity, and now funded by The Scottish Government, the FAS provides information and resources to increase the profitability and sustainability of farms, through grant support, events, publications, videos and podcasts.

The three examples below are just a few highlights of how we apply this approach across the full breadth of Scottish Agriculture.

Research in Action



SRUC have been operating crop trials and services involving cereals, oilseed rape, grassland and potatoes for decades. Currently, 9000 plots of trials are conducted in three different locations across the main arable areas of Scotland. We have over 40 separate commercial projects, investigating areas such as disease control, product application methods, and combating resistance. Additionally, we have a large proportion of trials devoted to bio-control options, as well as biomass crop demonstration sites and variety trials. Our crop trials provide data for the national recommended list of crop varieties.

Results of crop research is disseminated widely including to students studying a range of courses at SRUC, and to industry through Knowledge Exchange activity and the commercial consultancy services provided by SAC Consulting to farmers and growers.

Our trials sites are used annually for Knowledge Exchange events for both the commercial and research sectors. For example, we carry out blight potato trials on our specialist site in South West Scotland, with over 500 plots supporting 50 projects each year providing data for commercial and research purposes – including the EuroBLight fungicide efficiency rating for growers.

Farmer-Led Knowledge Transfer

One of the methodologies we have employed in the Farm Advisory Service programme is a new peer-to-peer learning system known as FAS Connect. We recognise that for advice to result in positive action it is necessary to provide more than just technical knowledge – it is also essential that farmers have the confidence in their own decision making ability and judgement.

FAS Connect has been designed to achieve this: it brings farmers together to learn through shared experience, and gain the confidence to make change in their business. Each group's activity is driven by farmers working closely with a specialist dedicated local facilitator. These small learning groups are able to tailor the content to best meet the group members' needs, increasing the effectiveness of the learning and the likelihood of positive action being the result.

We launched in 2022/23 and have already established 40 groups covering a range of topics decided by the members, and no two groups are identical. Each group comprises 12-15 farmers and they are formed with the aim of bringing together like-minded people, meeting multiple times per year, and building trust between group members.

“The members of the group are really supportive of each other and it's great to have a group all with similar enterprises to bounce ideas from. It's good to get out and see what other people are doing and hear from different people within the industry to pick up new ideas that can be applied on your own farm.”
- FAS Connect member



Net Zero Farming



For Scottish farming to meet their climate change obligations buy-in from across the industry is required, and this means addressing climate change at the farm, local and community levels. The island of Arran is a microcosm of the country as a whole, sometimes referred to as "Scotland in miniature" with a diverse range of different farms and land-use types.

With support from SAC Consulting through the Farm Advisory Service, local farmers formed a group with the goal of unlocking the agricultural potential of the island, while also driving down its collective carbon footprint.

Since its launch, the Net Zero Arran group (now operating as part of the FAS Connect peer-to-peer programme) has seen exponential growth. Each member of the group undertakes a carbon audit annually, and that data is collated and averaged. We then identify common issues and bring in specialist speakers to give advice and coordinate a group response. By the end of this year, the group will have completed 88 audits, held 12 formal meetings, and had countless member conversations. One of the members of the group has recently been nominated for the Scottish Land and Estates 'Helping It Happen' award, in recognition of their landscape-scale project to promote high nature value farming and climate adaptation.

Whilst this is a project delivered as part of the Farm Advisory Service, members are also supported with events and resources from sister programme Farming for a Better Climate.