

Scottish Grants are still available

There must be some happy Scottish farmers out there now who have been accepted into very rewarding Rural Development Contracts, but there will also be those already disgruntled with the whole SRDP exercise. One client with an application assessed in the February meeting, had half his Stewardship-type application being accepted and half rejected. We had all hoped this kind of carry-on would have been consigned to history.

Looking forward, the messages coming from Edinburgh are mixed. A recently completed review of the scheme may result in the application process becoming less long-winded and more accessible to those without the technology currently required to complete the applications (e.g. by availability of computers at SGRPID offices). On the other hand, a large allocation of grants in February has meant some of the budgets, particularly the Stewardship one, are already under strain, with 'limited headroom' left for the remaining years. This means stewardship schemes need to be well thought out in order to maximize point scoring potential. This is not the same as 'doing a little bit of everything' to score the points, as with the old Rural Stewardship Scheme but, unfortunately, it does not necessarily equate to putting together a scheme that is everything the farm's wildlife could hope for, although this will be a big step in the right direction. It could be that an extra £15 million towards the LFASS and LFASS successor schemes over the next two years announced in June by Mr Lochhead will help the agri-environment budget as these payments are included in it.

Capital projects (investments in the core business and diversification projects) still have 'ample headroom' with only the 2009 budget under any strain, and even this has been alleviated by Mr Lochhead's announcement in May that an extra £10 million would be available. The right project is still attracting 40% and 50% grants, although flexible grant awards may be re-introduced soon. Again, a project will be judged on fourteen point scoring criteria, some of which do require considerable thought, and even some experience, to come up with a successful answer. One important factor to bear in mind with these projects is SGRPID have shown they are not afraid to award big grants; there is no grant ceiling for either a capital or a stewardship project.

Overall, following the February results, there is still 75% of the original pot of money available for new applications to be dished out but Scottish Government's website also states, 'In the light of the UK budget outcome, there is no guarantee that the resources available for commitment under the SRDP will remain at currently anticipated levels.' There has been no downward movement as yet though.

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Edwin Thompson offices located in Galashiels, Berwick-upon-Tweed and Carlisle cover the Scottish Borders, the Lothians and Northumberland. Our Environmental Department staff have considerable experience and expertise in all grant schemes, including development and diversification, stewardship and forestry. We look forward to helping all farmers and other rural businesses and communities with advice and assistance as required.