

# Scottish Government consultation: Draft Strategy for Environment, Natural Resources and Agriculture Research 2022-2027

Submitted through the online consultation form on behalf of Plunkett Foundation by Georgina Edwards, Information Hub Manager, on 11<sup>th</sup> December 2020.

## About you

### 1. What is your name?

#### Name

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### 2. What is your email address?

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### 3. Are you responding as an individual or an organisation?

(Required)

Individual

**Organisation**

### 4. What is your organisation?

If responding on behalf of an organisation, please enter the organisation's name here.

Plunkett Foundation

### 5. The Scottish Government would like your permission to publish your consultation response. Please indicate your publishing preference:

(Required)

**Publish response with name**

Publish response only (without name)

Do not publish response

#### Information for organisations only:

The option 'Publish response only (without name)' refers only to your name, not your organisation's name. If this option is selected, the organisation name will still be published.

If you choose the option 'Do not publish response', your organisation name may still be listed as having responded to the consultation in, for example, the analysis report.

**6. We will share your response internally with other Scottish Government policy teams who may be addressing the issues you discuss. They may wish to contact you again in the future, but we require your permission to do so. Are you content for Scottish Government to contact you again in relation to this consultation exercise?**

(Required)

Yes

No

**7. I confirm that I have read the privacy policy and consent to the data I provide being used as set out in the policy.**

Privacy Policy

(Required)

- I consent

### **Responses to questions on the overall research strategy**

**1. Are the objectives and priorities set out in the strategy sufficiently clear?**

Completely

Moderately

Not at all

**If not, what changes would you propose?**

The strategy identifies some key issues that we support as priorities. However, we feel that health and social care is a big gap. Moreover, more effort could be made to recognise that some solutions (such as community ownership, proposed for land management in E3) can actually have wide-ranging impacts in more than one theme of research. A more joined up approach is possible. (See our response to question 2 below and to "Rural Futures")

**2. The Research Strategy outlines 5 Research Themes. Is this an appropriate way of structuring our work?**

Yes

No

**If not, what alternatives should be considered?**

The themes do identify some important key areas. We are pleased that the rural perspective is also given significant attention. However, all four other themes related strongly to "Rural Futures" - food

supply and security; the health of the environment and animals; land management etc. are all issues that we should see in "Rural Futures".

As a charity that has supported almost 700 rural community businesses across the UK, Plunkett Foundation has seen how the community ownership model can be applied in a variety of ways to tackle issues within all five of these research areas: such as community-owned solar farms; shared community transport; the re-localisation of supply chains and support for the local economy through the work of community shops; conservation, education and wellbeing initiatives in community woodlands; access to healthy, locally grown food and food education in community farms; employment, training, and volunteering opportunities for all ages in community pubs, cafes and shops. We noticed that community ownership is mentioned in "Rural Futures" in the context of land ownership and management, but we feel that this model could have far reaching consequences across all five themes, and therefore deserves inclusion and attention in each.

**3. Do you think the Research Strategy will enable us to get the best research and scientific evidence from the best providers?**

Yes

**No**

**Please explain your answer**

The research strategy seems to be heading in a 'top-down' direction - it is unclear how communities will be directly or actively involved in research. (See our response to "Rural Futures" for more details)

**4. Are the proposals for maximising impact appropriate?**

Yes

**No**

**Please explain your answer**

We welcome the fact that research will be made openly available. However, we must emphasise the importance of the research being of immediate, practical use to communities and community businesses. Free and open publication does not ensure impact on the ground.

**Response to questions about "Rural Futures"**

**1. Do you support this research priority?**

**Yes**

No

## **2. Do you have any further comments or suggestions?**

- Firstly, we welcome the attention paid to the specific challenges faced by rural communities, the development of rural-specific social data indicators, and the inclusion of community ownership as a focus for research. However, we feel the research strategy needs to be improved in several ways.
- Community ownership is mentioned in Rural Futures, but could be an effective model to a range of other issues raised in the other research themes. For example, community transport could feed in to research on "Human Impacts on the Environment". Community ownership of green energy generation could ensure accountability for its impact on the local biodiversity, linking to "Plant and animal health". Community owned woodlands/land would not only ensure the management and conservation of the environment and natural resources, but can also provide opportunities for training and promoting general wellbeing of local communities - this human impact links us back to "Rural Futures". (Examples of such projects can be drawn from Plunkett's Making Local Woods Work programme.) With regards "Sustainable food system and supply", Plunkett has seen rural community shops let down by national wholesalers during the pandemic. In response, these shops widened their range of local suppliers, ensuring food security for local people and supporting the local economy - linking back to "Rural Futures". Researching ways of promoting and supporting community ownership could provide a joined-up solution to other issues in the other four research themes. Community ownership research should not be limited to one theme.
- It's unclear how communities themselves fit within the research methodology. Practical involvement of communities and community businesses/social enterprises should be encouraged – not a 'top-down' approach. Rural communities are consistently 'reported on' rather than having a voice in the research. Communities should have the opportunity to shape research. Active engagement should be undertaken through the research, and not just through surveys. (This point is particularly relevant for E1 and E2, when researching minority groups in rural communities.)
- The Wellbeing Economy model needs to have greater presence in this strategy. Community-owned businesses could be a driver for a wellbeing-focussed economic recovery. Community business and the Wellbeing Economy are a way of 'joining the dots' between the five thematic areas of research.
- Social care and healthcare need to feature in "Rural Futures" – these services have been more critically affected during COVID-19 in rural areas. Historically, they have presented major challenges for rural communities. At this time, it is even more critical that social care and healthcare receive the appropriate attention.

## **3. Would you like to comment on a specific Research Topic? (Please state which in your answer)**

- E1 and E2 - equality and minority groups in rural communities is an under-researched topic and could be relevant to all thematic research branches. However, as mentioned above, minority groups should be actively involved in shaping the research - not 'reported on' or merely surveyed.
- Under E3, the strategy suggests assessing the effectiveness of community ownership in order to implement it into policy. The "Goals" in E3 seem to suggest that these policies would apply community ownership to land management in order to improve biodiversity, etc.. However, the

effectiveness of community ownership has already been established in these areas. The Scottish government has already released recent reports evidencing the growth and success of community ownership in Scotland. Moreover, community land ownership is one of the largest areas of community ownership. The social and economic effectiveness of community ownership has also already been established by numerous organisations, including Plunkett, who work directly with community businesses on the ground. We would suggest getting in touch with such organisations, e.g. through the recently established Rural Social Enterprise Hub (set up by Inspiralba) before duplicating any existing research into the effectiveness of community ownership. Plunkett has recently published its own annual Better Business reports highlighting the social and economic impact of community business: <https://plunkett.co.uk/reports/>

- The research priority should therefore not be to assess the effectiveness of community ownership, but to proceed on existing evidence of its effectiveness to work with relevant organisations, stakeholders and community businesses to find ways to support the continued growth of the sector through funding and legislation, and to identify and overcome barriers to success.
- Furthermore, the research into community ownership needs to consider other applications of the model beyond land ownership. Community land ownership is already prominent in Scotland. However, other community-owned assets, such as shops, transport or energy are less well prevalent and more needs to be done to help them to set up and thrive. The versatility of the model needs to be acknowledged and acted upon.