

Summer 2025

SAOS Update

Annual Report Marks 120 Years for Agri Co-operation in Scotland

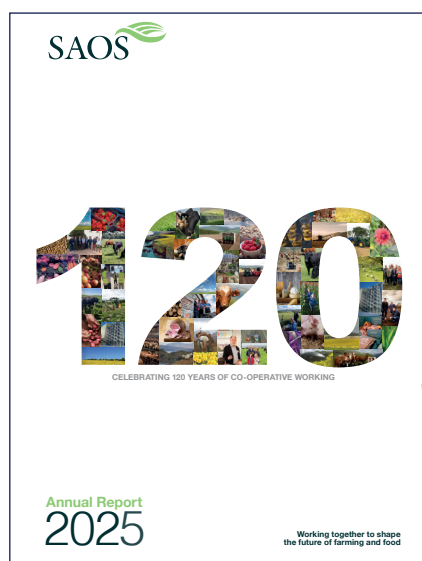
Having just published our Annual Report – 120 years since the first one – it seems only right to take a step back and reflect on just how far SAOS as an organisation, and now a wider group of businesses, has come in that time.

As we touch on in the Report, SAOS was originally established to help small farm holdings who were “at a disadvantage, even in British markets, by the superior organisation of their foreign competitors.” Times were hard and small farmers needed help to be better organised and secure more value from their produce to enable their survival.

The world is now a very different place, but that core role of SAOS hasn't changed so very much. Our farmers now have the benefit of good education and training, in addition to the lived, unique expertise of their land. And they now have at their disposal all manner of machinery, gadgets, technology and data to help with almost every task. But it's still really tough to survive, let alone make a good living. And we know that despite, and partly due to, all these bells and whistles and the information they provide, ‘the job’ has only got more complicated. A lack of clear guidance and direction, and way too many contrasting opinions around farming's future has left farmers at best confused and frustrated and, at worst, without much hope.

Our May SAOS Council meeting was hosted by our co-op member, Scottish Shellfish (SSMG) and involved a factory tour and a briefing from MD, Rob Mitchell, who gave us a potted history of the co-op's development. He

covered how more recently their marketing has tapped into the key elements sought after by their buyers - sustainability, health, community and convenience - to help promote their main offering of mussels. They have also expanded what they can offer their buyers to help give them an edge and become the ‘go to’ supplier that makes life easier for their customers.



Also fairly recently, Scottish Shellfish expanded their export business, developing new markets in different countries during their down seasons when their own mussels are unavailable, but Scottish mussels are plentiful and at their prime.

We found this strive for ‘what's next’ – constantly exploring how best to help members and customers - inspiring, and it's very much what we at SAOS are all about. Our Annual Report, and many of the articles in this newsletter, cover a host of topics, initiatives and projects that would bamboozle our forebearers, but SAOS's vision and expertise, coupled with the knowledge and

know-how to get the right people working together on a shared goal, is still key, and that's what makes us different. We know how to do get things done and, to quote two ex-SAOS stalwarts, “we are the honest brokers” in a “room full of snake oil and fairy dust merchants”.

While, for some, co-operation might seem ‘unbusiness-like’, that really couldn't be further from the truth. We know that co-operation makes great sense, in trying times in particular, when more heads are better than one to discuss a problem, and pooled resources provide investment in infrastructure, innovation and R&D, better risk management and access to paid experts for all manner of tasks to free up that invaluable commodity: time for other things.

Looking back at the first Annual Report, it states how the (Liberal) Government of the day was urged to give as much support as possible to SAOS, as co-operation was being celebrated as key to Scotland's agricultural future - and indeed generous support was given. Sadly, our government funding has not kept pace with inflation, but we have been applying the pivotal co-op value of self-help in the development of trading subsidiaries to generate returns to invest back into our core purpose. We, like the United Nations (see overleaf) have no doubt that co ops and co-operation are the solution for achievable, sustainable agricultural and rural development and that government support for increasing farmer co-operation is vital to fulfilling its own needs. We will keep fighting the good fight with an eye always on the horizon for “What's Next?”

Our Annual Report is now available online at: www.saos.coop/whats-new/annual-reports/

International Co-operatives Day - 5th July

As we've highlighted previously, 2025 is the International Year of Co-operatives, as designated by the United Nations, celebrating the vital role co-ops play in sustainable development around the world, with the theme: "Co-operatives Build a Better World."

We're helping raise awareness throughout the year focusing on the power and potential of co-operation and our co-op members and we've been working with some of our member co-ops to help celebrate and to share more information about the various ways they help their members. Our latest co-op member video features Tarff Valley and is available at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gr1XkPQAHD4&t=36s>

The fifth of July is the perfect time to shout about your co-op. Get involved! Help is available for promoting Co-ops Day at:

<https://trello.com/b/BbuhjOge/international-day-of-cooperatives-2025>



International Year of Cooperatives

Cooperatives Build a Better World



International Day of Cooperatives

5th July 2025

Building Confidence and Capability – SAOS Training Success for 2024/5

SAOS's winter training programme supported co-op staff and boards across Scotland in building essential skills to meet today's challenges with confidence. Here are just a few highlights:

We delivered a range of targeted, high impact training sessions with a strong demand resulting in several of our workshops selling out.

As more business processes move to the cloud, cyber security has become a shared concern across our co-ops. In response, we teamed up once again with Gary Enis from NS Design to deliver a half day webinar focused on website security, social media safety, password protection and every day digital risks. The session equipped participants with the knowledge to protect their organisations from digital threat.

One of our most popular workshops, Negotiation and Dispute Resolution, sold out quickly and saw 20 participants join Dr Tom Hutcheson for a one-day in person seminar exploring strategic approaches to negotiation,

conflict resolution techniques and practical tools for managing conversations. Attendees gained the confidence to navigate real world negotiation scenarios and build more constructive outcomes.

Our new communication workshop also sold out. The Art of Communication focused on how to create and implement a bespoke communications plan. Over three hours participants learned how to identify key objectives, engage members more effectively and meet their needs. The session was designed to help overcome common challenges and increase confidence in communication planning.

Feedback from attendees on our training has been overwhelmingly positive:

"Great workshop and one of the best

I've been on. Tom was an excellent speaker and kept the content interesting with a mix of scenarios and his own experiences."

"There were certainly points covered in this workshop that made me think and that I had not perhaps considered before. Well worth attending."

"Excellent workshop: great facilitation and the workshop leaders' contributions were perfect."

Looking Ahead to 2026

With such strong interest and clear impact, we're looking forward to developing the training programme for 2025/26. Expect some great topics and flexible delivery formats to support even more co-ops and rural enterprises.

Get Involved! To find out more or register interest in upcoming training, contact: allison.watson@saos.coop

Onwards and Upwards for Growing Tomorrow's Leaders



Our GTL graduation event in Spring highlighted the increasing number of professionals seeking structured leadership development from within Scotland's agri, food and drink, and land-based sectors.

These industries face an evolving set of challenges - from workforce shortages to economic uncertainty - placing greater emphasis on the need for leadership, skills development, and workforce resilience.

GTL offers a tailored opportunity to develop new ways of thinking to benefit participants looking to advance.

We deliberately limit intake to small numbers each year to maximise the benefit to participants and the GTL application window closes 18th July.

Find out more about developing your own or your staff's leadership potential at:

<https://saos.coop/events-and-training/growing-tomorrows-leaders/>

Cheerio and heartfelt thanks to Bob Yuill

Bob Yuill, former Deputy Chief Executive of SAOS, and ex Managing Director of ScotEID and Director of SmartRural Operations, stepped down from formal duties at the end of January. Our CEO Tim Bailey made a presentation to Bob at our conference dinner to mark his contribution to SAOS and Scottish agriculture as a whole.

Bob actually had two stints at SAOS, the first from 1990 - 1994, and he returned to us in 1998. As part of his presentation to Bob, Tim quizzed dinner guests with an 'Odd One Out' featuring Bob and other famous figures who had had a dream (But Bob had achieved his) before presenting Bob with a leather tool bag and some 'emergency supplies'.

It is no exaggeration to say that Bob's contribution to Scottish co-ops and agriculture has been immense. His family's farming roots are of dairy farmers at Biggar and tomato growers at Stonehouse in Lanarkshire, and Bob's own agricultural teeth were cut at Ellimoss dairy farm near Baillieston and, in Canada, managing sheep imported from Scotland. After college he set up and managed Financial Control Services Ltd, a co-op carrying out farm budgets throughout the North East of Scotland, before he took on the role of farm and estate manager at Invermarkie and Itlaw farms in Aberdeenshire.

During his 30 or so years with SAOS, Bob gained a Master's degree in Co-operative Management from St Mary's University in Halifax, Nova Scotia and developed deep



practical knowledge of co-operative management, governance and finance, providing a tremendous source of advice to co-ops - and to SAOS! He also developed and liaised with a network of contacts around the world on co-operative development and management and became widely regarded as an expert on farm co-ops within the UK.

'The Dream' to which Tim referred in his presentation though, was of benefit not just to co-ops, but to Scottish agriculture and well beyond. Bob was the driving force behind the creation of ScotEID following the catastrophic losses due to Foot and Mouth disease in 2001. The initial pilot stage of ScotEID involved the design of a system to record individual sheep movements as web-accessed data, using the information from electronic identifiers on sheep tags. The focus was on how to record this information at the 'speed of commerce' and at minimum cost across the supply chain, whilst providing a 'real-time',

accurate, trace system. This focus that has been maintained as ScotEID has evolved and expanded to become a multi-species, active data system, always ensuring that farmers maintain ownership of their data. Throughout, ScotEID has been managed by SAOS, working in partnership with the Animal Health and Welfare Division of Scottish Government and an industry working group. This partnership and the cost-effective, fully functioning system, are viewed with admiration, and no doubt a little envy, by our near neighbours.

Bob was also integral to the creation of SmartRural to bring improved connectivity to those farming and working in rural areas held back by the limits and constraints of internet and broadband in remote and geographically-challenging parts. His vision, capacity to think 'outside of the box', and dogged determination will all be missed, but Bob has left an incredible imprint on SAOS and we hope he'll not stray too far away from SAOS in the future (sorry Lorna!)

For the last few years, Bob has also helped make a considerable contribution to the coffers of RSABI, by acting as our post-conference dinner 'Rauctioneer' and donating some great lots as well as lots of great banter, turning the original auction into our 'rauction' (and creating merry hell for those trying to keep track of his random changes to the programme and handle the admin!)

We're sure our readers join us in wishing Bob all the very best in taking things a little easier.

We're Expanding our Governance Services Work

Regular reader will know of our belief that the key to a successful co-op is good governance. We know that, no matter how good it is, every co-op could do better, so we're expanding the services we can provide to co-ops and will also be offering these to businesses in our wider sphere.

Reviewing governance should be part of the regular organisational rhythm and as integral as budgeting. Too often though, governance reviews or stocktakes happen after something has gone wrong. Our team can help after such an event, but regular health checks are 'preventative medicine' and a brilliant tool to maximise Board and staff performance.

Our work covers everything from Board and organisational overviews, to targeted pieces of work to develop Directors or develop Board strategy. Find out more about what might work for you at <https://saos.coop/what-we-do/governance-services/>

Governance shouldn't be dry, formulaic or dull. It's the heartbeat of an organisation, ensuring clear leadership, transparency and communications. The SAOS team can help maximise how boards, staff and organisations perform.

Services include:

- Director appraisal
- Board survey health check
- Full internal review
- Full external review
- Risk register development
- Strategy development



SAOS

Regenerative Agriculture - A Path Forward for Resilient Farming



"As part of a strategy workshop, SAOS staff recently visited the James Hutton Institute in Invergowrie where JHI CEO, Colin Campbell, presented a striking visual: a map depicting historical and projected average crop stress across the UK from 1961 to 2080. The takeaway was unmistakable, our climate is changing rapidly, and agriculture will bear the brunt.

The forecast indicated that parts of southern England, and in some years well beyond, are expected to suffer severe crop stress due to hotter, drier summers and increasingly unpredictable rainfall. Conversely, the JHI models suggest that Scotland's agricultural potential may grow, as warmer temperatures allow a wider variety of crops to be planted, such as maize, already being grown in the Southwest of Scotland. Other regions in the UK, particularly England's Southeast and Midlands, will increasingly be under pressure with limited irrigation. A growing shift is already occurring towards more drought-resistant crops, such as grapes now being planted in Sussex and the surrounding counties.

In this context, Scotland's role in the UK's food system is poised to become even more crucial, especially for staple crops like potatoes and brassicas. Here, regenerative agriculture enters the discussion. While some might dismiss it as nothing more than "good old-fashioned farming" (such as integrating livestock into crop rotations) regenerative agriculture involves much more than a nostalgic glance at the past. According to Groundswell, organisers of the UK's leading regenerative agriculture event, it is "any form of farming, i.e. the production of food or fibre, which at the same time improves the environment. This primarily means regenerating the soil. It's a direction of travel, not an absolute."

At its essence, regenerative agriculture focuses on rebuilding soil health, the cornerstone of sustainable food systems. Six key principles drive this approach:

- 1. Know Your Context** - Every farm is unique. Soil type, climate, enterprise mix, and long-term goals influence how regenerative principles should be implemented. The crucial first step is grasping your specific context.
- 2. Minimise Soil Disturbance** - Ploughing and heavy chemical use disrupt the intricate underground networks of worm tunnels, fungal threads, and microscopic air pockets. Preserving this structure is vital for maintaining resilient, living soil.

In his blog, Douglas Bowden-Smith shares some of what he's learned having immersed himself in 'Regen ag'

3. Keep the Soil Covered - Bare soil is at risk. It can be damaged by rainfall, scorched by the sun, and compromised by frost. A protective cover, either from growing crops or crop residues, serves as a shield against these elements.

4. Maintain Living Roots Year-Round - Continuous root presence nourishes the soil food web, sustaining bacteria, fungi, and larger soil organisms. Living roots also support mycorrhizal fungi, which assist plants in accessing nutrients and water.

5. Encourage Plant Diversity - Nature avoids monocultures. A diverse crop mix fosters a healthier soil ecosystem, mitigating pest and disease threats. Diversity above ground cultivates resilience below ground.

6. Integrate Grazing Livestock - Well-managed grazing rejuvenates soil, particularly using multi-species swards and mob grazing techniques. This approach allows the land to rest and recover, boosting fertility and carbon storage.

Over the last 18 months, I've become increasingly engaged in the burgeoning regenerative agriculture movement. I've attended the European Regenerative Agriculture Summit, where 600 delegates convened, including representatives from Unilever, Mars, Nestlé, and Lloyds Banking Group, the UK's largest agricultural lender. This year I have also attended the Oxford Real Farming Conference and plan to attend the Groundswell event again, the UK's largest dedicated regenerative agriculture event, with 8,000 visitors.

What is clear to me, is that with the introduction of the Whole Farm Plan this year and the mandatory requirement for a carbon audit (which is intrinsically linked to the health of the soil) farming in a more environmentally conscientious manner will become future government policy and is gaining ever more traction, as evidenced above.

However, the uptake of these alternative forms of agricultural practices is somewhat slow. It's easier to continue with what you know. In the East Neuk of Fife, I've observed farmers like Doug Christie at Durie Farms, (recently named Carbon Farmer of the Year) leading the charge. Doug has been practising direct drilling and various regenerative techniques for over two decades. While there are inspiring examples like this, widespread adoption is still limited.

Regenerative agriculture isn't merely about changing farming practices, it's about gearing up for a future where resilience, soil health, and ecological balance are crucial. As the UK's climate evolves, and with this our food producing areas, farming in ways that restore rather than deplete resources has become imperative. This is no longer optional - it's essential."

The Co-operative Solution

Maintaining the theme of our cover story, we continue to spread the word about the benefits farmers and crofters gain by co-operating and we believe that co-operation is the solution for achievable, sustainable agricultural and rural development; enabling the sharing of risk, reducing costs, increasing resilience, building scale, boosting negotiating power, and sharing learning and experience.

Agri co-ops can improve the profitability, efficiency, and resilience of their members. And these benefits extend out across Scottish agriculture, providing both business and public benefits to the rural communities they support.

But these advantages and benefits are not guaranteed. Like any type of business, co-ops face challenges. They are often set up to help in difficult circumstances and, like any business, can face operational and governance challenges.

SAOS helps maximise the benefits of co-operation by supporting the set-up and effective running of co-operative and Producer Organisation businesses.

We believe that more support is vital to help tackle the many challenges facing farmers and to meet the Scottish Government's objectives for agricultural and rural development policy.

Environmentally: A co-operative (rather than competitive) approach can enable climate change mitigation and nature restoration measures to happen at greater pace and scale.

Find out more on all these, and our Angus Growers Case Study on our website at <https://saos.coop/what-we-do/co-operation/the-co-operative-solution/>

Socio-economically: Co-ops are about people. Each individual co-op member represents a family farm and small business within a rural community, focused on driving value back to the rural communities where it was produced, not to external shareholders.

Economically: Co-operation and collaboration can add value to produce, supporting the production of high-quality food. A co-operative and collaborative approach retains more value within the Scottish economy, driving efficiencies, enabling innovation, and helping farm businesses reduce their reliance on direct support payments.

Our three **Priorities for Support** are:

Co-op Support Service

We want to maximise the benefits of co-operation by providing more support for the set-up and effective running of co-operative and Producer Organisation businesses and to help raise awareness of the opportunities and benefits they can offer their farmer members.

Food Processing, Marketing & Co-operation Scheme

Many farmers and crofters feel they do not get fair returns on their produce, with value also lost from the rural communities in which they operate.

Investment and support through a FPMC scheme would add value to agricultural products and improve value returned to the businesses and their communities.

Producer Organisation Aid Scheme

Through co-investment with industry, the Fruit and Vegetables Aid Scheme has supported growth, innovation, efficiency, and positive environmental practices for the sector.

We would like to see this scheme extended and expanded to include Producer Organisations in the dairy sector.

Experience from the horticulture sector, where co-operation is common, shows how making match funding available through formal co-operatives can kick-start collaboration and transform sectors.

Our Angus Growers Case Study demonstrates how co-investment with industry can drive innovation and unlock growth, as well as helping businesses adapt to market demands and become more sustainable.

The Fruit and Vegetables Aid Scheme Vital support driving innovation and sustainability through co-investment with industry

Angus Growers is a co-op of 16 members, based in Angus, Perthshire, and Fife, who grow strawberries, raspberries, blackberries, blueberries, and cherries.

The co-op has seized the opportunities the Fruit & Vegetables Aid Scheme has provided its members and, since 2013, has invested over £18 million through their operational programme, with member contributions matched by additional funding. This includes five key trial projects that are playing a crucial role in shaping the future of soft fruit production.

Research and Development

The Fruit & Vegetables Aid Scheme support for research and development activities has been key to enabling Angus Growers to innovate and improve their production in a variety of ways:

Propagation

Historically, soft fruit plants have been imported from the Netherlands, which has several professional propagation businesses. Importing plants obviously has a carbon cost but there are other drawbacks risks to this practice. The plants exported may not be of the highest quality and health, potentially leading to lower yields and the possibility of disease, requiring more pesticide applications.

To reduce risk and increase resilience, Angus Growers have co-invested in propagation trials through the Fruit & Vegetables Aid Scheme. The scheme has funded the tunnels, trays, and irrigation systems necessary to establish a propagation system and trial operation. Successfully propagating plants on behalf of its grower members will reduce costs, better control plant health, and allow selection of only the best crops to plant on, to produce high quality food.

Growing media

As an alternative to peat, Angus Growers grow almost all their fruit in coir. Coir is made from coconut husks in tropical countries and exported around the world. The length of this supply chain, the raw materials and processing used, all add to its carbon footprint and can also result in delivery delays.

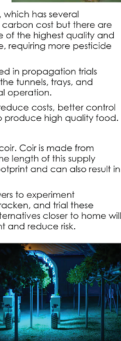
The Fruit & Vegetables Aid Scheme funding has enabled Angus Growers to experiment with blending spent coir with woodchip, hemp, wool, heather, and bracken, and trial these alternatives, with some of these trials now upscaling. Finding viable alternatives closer to home will help increase business resilience, improve their environmental footprint and reduce risk.

Pesticide reduction using technology

Perfect, unblemished fruit is a market requirement. Angus Growers employ their own agronomists, who work with growers to achieve this, but the work is difficult and costly. The use of pesticides has been reduced over the last few years meaning growers must use alternatives, at significant cost.

The Fruit & Vegetables Aid Scheme funding has enabled Angus Growers to pilot UV light robots to prevent and control disease. These robots autonomously shine a UV light on fruit plants, killing disease-causing microbes.

Results indicate they can reduce powdery mildew pesticide treatments by 60-100%. And increase fruit production by 15%. A win-win for high-quality berries and a lower pesticide future.



SAOS Member Co-op Directors – you are cordially invited...

The Highland Show is nearly upon us once again and we look forward to welcoming SAOS's member co-op directors and our invited guests to the SAOS/ScotEID stand.

Join us for a catch up drink and some nibbles **4-6pm on Thursday, 19th June**

If you do plan to come, **please RSVP by email by 12th June to:** jennifer.thompson@saos.coop

We hope to see you either at the reception or pop in for a catch up on the latest with ScotEID and SAOS and do make use of the tea room and our catering during the rest of the show.

We'll again have some of the glorious blooms from the Flowers Grown in Scotland group, who SAOS helped bring together.

(The SAOS/ScotEID stand is situated ringside on 7th Avenue - look out for Edie the pink and green EID cow!)

Another Profitable Year and Board Changes at ANM

ANM Group presented its annual report and announced Board changes at the AGM in April, with Dave Green stepping down after ten years as Deputy Vice Chair and Alan Hutcheon, co-opted onto the ANM Board in 2018, and current President of the Institute of Auctioneers & Appraisers of Scotland, taking on the Deputy V C role.

The co-op announced a trading profit of £1,511,000, following the Group's acquisition of the Glasgow based auction business Sweeny Kincaid and the positive impact of their trading within the Group. ANM has also reported an increase of 12.5% in turnover from last year's £10.2m to £11.5m this year. The co-op's throughput figure for the past twelve months was slightly under £182 million.

ANM's continued success has enabled payment of substantial benefits to members, including £836,000 in commission savings and an increased 3.5% dividend of £229,000. The Annual Report also confirms an additional 84 trading members joined the co-operative during the year.

ANM Group Chief Executive, Grant Rogerson said: "These results show that our strategic focus is fundamental to delivering success for members. Our relentless drive to provide an efficient and valuable service to members has resulted in unprecedented values in the live ring and significant benefits delivered for members.

"To generate a trading surplus against such a challenging climate for our sector is a ringing endorsement of our co-operative values. We welcome these results, and I'd like to put on record my thanks to our members whose continued investment and support reflects their ongoing confidence in our Group."

SMRA Boosts its RHS Presence



The Scottish Machinery Ring Association (SMRA) is gearing up for an action-packed four days at this year's Royal Highland Show. With exciting competitions, hands-on training sessions and insightful discussions, the SMRA stand is a must-visit for farmers, agricultural professionals and machinery enthusiasts alike.

Attractions across the four days include a Training Simulator, with a 'Top Gear'-style leaderboard challenge to test skills and gauge the best performance in the shortest time. There is also a Case IH Selfie Frame to encourage engagement and promote the Case IH rebate scheme through the SMRA. Individual Machinery Rings will also be offering visitors the chance to win £200 towards a training course.

A major attraction will be a draw to win a brand new 400cc 4wd Honda ATV (pictured) helping to raise funds to support RSABI and Farmstrong Scotland. Contact your local ring to take part, details at:

<https://scottishmachineryrings.co.uk/>

Pre-apprenticeship Scheme Gains Further Support to Help Young People Into Agricultural Careers

Agri Minister, Jim Fairlie, recently launched the newly-procured Land Based Pre-apprenticeship Programme, with £1.8 million committed over three years. SAOS was commissioned by the Scottish Government to conduct a feasibility study and scope out the possible expansion of the scheme.

Also confirmed was the relaunch and procurement of the Next Generation Practical Training Fund. The fund is now open until March 2027, with at least £300,000 a year being available to help young people access skills training in a flexible, individual way.

He said: "I know from my own experience the hard work and dedication that it takes to enter the industry as a new entrant farmer and

the challenges young people can face. These two funds will help more people get practical training to launch their agriculture careers.

"The pre-apprenticeship programme has been expanded to take on close to 400 people and to date we have had more than 60 applications for the training fund. This is a really promising start and is a positive step towards improving safety on-farm and training up the depleted post-Brexit labour force."

Lantra Scotland Director, Dr Liz Barron-Majerik, added: "Lantra works to enhance Scotland's natural environment and support the rural economy, by increasing the number and diversity of employees in

Scotland's land-based and aquaculture sector and driving their skills development. The training fund and the pre-apprenticeship programme are both of great benefit to new entrants to agriculture as they start on their career path, and so I'm delighted that we're going to be managing them on behalf of, and in partnership with, FONE and the Scottish Government.

"We look forward to working with our training provider partners on the delivery of the training funds, and the Scottish Machinery Rings, SRUC and Borders College on the pre-apprenticeship programme.

We encourage others interested in becoming involved to get in touch via scotland@lantra.co.uk"

Our latest co-op videos feature Tarff Valley and an updated Machinery Rings video for 2025

watch online at: <https://www.youtube.com/@saos-workingtogetherinfood3562>



Building Better Business Resilience

As part of our ongoing delivery of Scotland Food & Drink Partnership work on Food Security and Resilience, the first of the pilot assessments for individual businesses and their supply chains took place in April.

Seven members of the Scottish Shellfish senior management team completed an online questionnaire exploring factors influencing resilience such as financial performance, markets, people and skills, and product development. That assessment highlighted areas of key strengths and areas for improvement for the business and supply chain partnerships, which were then explored further through a very open discussion at a workshop session.

As a pilot project, the process is still in development, and feedback from the Scottish Shellfish team has been helpful in making amendments to improve and strengthen the questionnaire.

We are keen for more of our members to participate in the project which will help us identify collective resilience issues. If you are interested in finding out more about this project or other aspects of our work on resilience, please contact allene.bruce@saos.coop

Venison Supply Chain Project Update

As we reported in the last issue, SAOS is involved in a new venison project, which was launched at the end of January, to explore ways to help low-ground deer stalkers improve their carcass handling facilities, enabling a more professional approach and the ability to cull more lowland deer and increase their throughput.

Fifteen applicants have so far been awarded grants as part of the pilot scheme.

The applicants have predominantly been awarded 50% funds for new chiller facilities and other larder improvements. The successful applicants will now begin to purchase and install their systems, some of which will then generate case studies. Any lessons learned from the process will be incorporated into the next round of the pilot which is due to launch later in the summer.

Currently applicants should:

- Demonstrate Best Practice for carcass handling and an increase in throughput
- Demonstrate a sound business case and how the facility will be sustainably managed for the future
- Primarily be based and delivered within LDNS's Scottish operational lowland area, demonstrating no conflicts with other facilities and benefits to multiple actors
- Be willing to supply follow-up details on how the facility performs.

The £119k pilot fund (with £85k available for capital spend), secured by NatureScot and SAOS, is administered by SAOS, working closely with the Lowland Deer Network (LDNS) and Scottish Venison.

LDNS has also helped assess the merits of collective purchasing of chills to try and achieve the best value for stalkers.

Any queries on the scheme can be sent to venison@saos.coop



Barcelona Launch for the new Scottish Quality Langoustines Scheme

Our CEO Tim Bailey was present at the official launch of the new Scottish Quality Langoustine scheme at Seafood Expo Global/Seafood Processing Global in Barcelona recently.

SAOS was commissioned by Seafood Scotland with the help of funding from The Scottish Government to scope out, design, develop and pilot this critical initiative to underpin the reputation of Scottish langoustines, develop new markets and promote supply chain collaboration.

Tim commented: "It's been a very satisfying journey working with the sector to get to this launch stage and getting support from the whole industry to make it happen.

"The credibility of the scheme will now be managed by our independent certification business, Food Integrity Assurance, who will provide the robust verification to underpin the Scottish Quality Langoustines brand."



SAOS Hosts Isle of Man Delegation Biogas Visit

A delegation of 20 farmers, government officials, planners, and representatives from Manx Utilities recently completed a two-day study tour in Scotland, organised by SAOS's Jim Booth. The purpose of the trip was to explore large-scale, farm-based anaerobic digestion (AD) plants to gain a deeper, first-hand understanding of how these renewable energy technologies are operated successfully in practice.

With no green energy currently produced on the Isle of Man, there is growing interest among island businesses in accessing renewable energy sources. Currently, electricity is generated through a gas-fuelled power station operated by Manx Utilities, with additional balancing support provided via an interconnector to the UK mainland.

As part of a bold new proposal, the Isle of Man is considering the development of a new Energy Park on a disused airfield near Ramsey, featuring a blend of solar power and two AD plants of 4-5MW. (Wind turbines have been ruled out due to limited public support.)

The farmers there are suffering from the challenge of operating with the associated high costs of getting

inputs and produce on and off the island.

To supply feedstock for the AD plants, the proposal includes the formation of a farmer supply co-operative - this is what led to the initial enquiry and involvement of SAOS.

The group visited two operational farm-fed AD sites, and heard directly from two other experienced farmer-operators:

- Stracathro Farms, near Brechin
- Peacehill Farms, Wormit, Fife
- Andrew Booth, of Savock Biogas, Aberdeenshire
- Trevor Jackson and Mike Bayne, of St Boswells Biogas and Borders Machinery Ring

The speakers showcased practical insights into the design, management, and economics of AD systems, drawing on years of experience.

Brian Brumby, the trip organiser, reflected on the value of the visit: "Having direct access to four farmer AD operators, most with 10 years' experience, was amazing. All the speakers were very open, sharing their experiences.

"We now have a better understanding of the pitfalls, challenges, and how to make large-scale AD plants a success. The trip exceeded our expectations -we are indebted to Jim and SAOS."

As momentum builds for greener energy solutions on the Isle of Man, the visit marks a promising step towards harnessing local agricultural potential in the drive for sustainability.

