

Scotland's Land Reform Futures International Symposium

Summary Report

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Cruden Bay, Scotland. Photo by Naomi Beingessner

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Highlights

The 2025 Scotland's Land Reform Futures International Symposium was hosted in Aberdeen, Scotland by the James Hutton Institute on 11th and 12th November, with funding from the Scottish Government. The theme was “**Achieving collaboration, cooperation, and a just transition in land: lessons from and challenges facing Scottish land reform**”. It provided a valuable overview of land tenure issues and land reform in the Global North. The programme included:

- twenty-five speakers in-person and online,
- five plenaries,
- breakout discussions,
- informal networking while viewing posters and presentations in the research 'marketplace'.

A total of 80 people attended both online and in person, with people joining from as far away as Japan.

Session topics were composed to share experiences of land reform in Scotland and learn from the outcomes of alternative land tenure models in other countries. They included:

- Scottish land reform in a global context
- Monitoring change and evaluating impacts of land reform: Scottish and international experiences
- International Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (ICARRD+20)
- How do alternative land governance models work in other countries? What are underlying legal, financial, social, cultural factors?
- Achieving the public interest beyond landownership diversification

There are several **key learning points** from the Symposium. First, given the broad overview of land tenure issues and land reforms in the Global North, it is clear that land ownership is not a settled issue and there is appetite for change. Second, it highlighted the importance of efficient land mapping, cadastre¹ and admin systems for equitable land distribution and responsible governance. Lastly, the role and opportunity of an 'agile' public land sector, for example, to support sustainable agroecological food systems transformation and support new entrant land access, shows an opportunity for involvement of local authorities in land reform.

The International Symposium enabled new researcher collaborations, knowledge exchange, and generated social learning. The programme included open space and social activities for networking and informal discussion. Outcomes include a research collaboration on cadastres between Scotland's Rural College (SRUC) and symposium speaker Jan Spijkerboer and citations in work by the Scottish Land Commission.

¹ A cadastre is an official public record of the ownership, value, and extent of land within a jurisdiction



Acknowledgements

The Scotland's Land Reform Futures project team wish to thank all the speakers and participants of the International Symposium held on 11th and 12th November 2025, as well as members of the project Stakeholder Advisory Group, members of the Scottish Government's Land Reform policy team, and colleagues at the James Hutton Institute and Scotland's Rural College for their support.

The team wish to acknowledge the Scottish Government funding for the event and this report as part of the [Strategic Research Programme 2022-2027](#).

This report draws on ideas and examples shared by all Symposium participants during plenary and breakout group discussions. Any errors are due to author interpretation.



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Introduction

There are a number of developments on land reform in Scotland, with the recent passage of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2025 through the Scottish Parliament and the concurrent Review of Community Rights to Buy, alongside the '[Just Transition](#)'² to a green economy policy. Academic attention has been drawn to Scotland's attempts at land reform in the Global North (Calo et al., 2022; Hoffman, 2013; Lawrence et al., 2021), with lessons from over two decades of land reform legislative impact. Despite land reform policy and the increase in community ownership (Scottish Government, 2025), recent ownership data analyses have demonstrated increasing private landownership concentration related to the ownership of land for 'green land investment' purposes (McKee et al., 2023; Wightman, 2026).

As part of a research project on land reform, to explore these issues and more, the 2025 Scotland's Land Reform Futures International Symposium was hosted in Aberdeen, Scotland by the James Hutton Institute on 11th and 12th November, with funding from the Scottish Government. The theme was "**Achieving collaboration, cooperation, and a just transition in land: lessons from and challenges facing Scottish land reform**". It provided a valuable overview of land tenure issues and land reform in the Global North. [The programme](#) included twenty-five speakers in-person and online, five plenaries, breakout discussions, and informal networking while viewing posters and presentations in a research 'marketplace'. A total of 80 people attended both online and in person, with online attendance from countries including Canada, Japan, Italy, the Netherlands, and Belgium.

Symposium purpose, aims and objectives

The Symposium stems from a project funded by the Scottish Government as part of their Strategic Research Programme (SRP) (2022 – 2027) called '[Scotland's Land Reform Futures](#)'. This project has been carried out by a team of researchers from The James Hutton Institute and Scotland's Rural College (SRUC). Within the Strategic Research Programme (SRP) (2022 – 2027), the Scottish Government committed to holding an international land reform conference, and that formed a key activity within the Scotland's Land Reform Futures project. The research proposal stated that "The project stakeholder advisory group will host an international symposium of leading land reform academics and policy makers to share experiences of land reform in Scotland and learn from the outcomes of alternative land tenure models in other countries". The Scottish Government were keen to have the opportunity to learn from international experiences. An additional motivation was to foster new international research collaborations to respond to future research calls within the United Kingdom and internationally.

Members of the project research team lead the organisation and coordination of the Symposium. They developed a theme and key concepts working closely with the project's Stakeholder Advisory Group (SAG) as well as in consultation with Scottish

² A just transition to a green economy which determines to achieve net zero in a way that distributes the costs and benefits fairly, and which tackles inequality and injustice.



Government policy teams. It was agreed that the Symposium main objectives were: (i) to share experiences of land reform in Scotland and learn from the outcomes of alternative land tenure models in other countries; and (ii) to allow collaboration and discussion between policy makers and land reform academics (both within and outwith Scotland). The key questions were:

1. How do alternative land governance models work in other countries? What are underlying legal, financial, social, cultural factors? How are multiple land-based objectives achieved (e.g. housing, agriculture, community development, social justice, climate action, etc.)? What success factors may be translated into Scottish land governance? What other methods are empowering for communities that do not require land ownership?
2. What are key lessons to share from Scottish land reform? What can be learned from community landownership (e.g. as a mechanism for redistributive land reform)? What do trends such as natural capital investment mean for land reform? What might a Scottish contribution to the International Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (ICCARD+ 20) in 2026 look like?

It was decided that the project team would host a two-day in-person symposium with hybrid discussion and presentation elements, using facilities in the 'Hutton Hub' in Aberdeen. Research team members compiled a list of potential participants: leading land reform academics, practitioners, and policymakers from their own, and the Stakeholder Advisory Group's, knowledge and networks. Invitations were extended to international contributors, plus Scottish Government, Scottish Land Commission, Stakeholder Advisory Group members and other key Scottish land reform academics. An exploratory fieldtrip was planned for a small group of Stakeholder Advisory Group and project team members to the Netherlands a month before the Symposium to see examples of alternative land governance and bring back learnings to the Symposium.

Field Trips

Netherlands

Members of the Scotland's Land Reform Futures project team and Stakeholder Advisory Group participated in an exploratory fieldtrip to the Netherlands from 13-15th October, 2025. The purpose was to build knowledge of different land governance strategies that may be relevant to the Scottish context (in particular, ongoing land reform policy development) and to learn more about alternative land governance and landownership initiatives. The fieldtrip group comprised two members of the research team and four members of the project Stakeholder Advisory Group, who were keen to connect with land and agriculture policy makers and representative organisations in the Netherlands.

The fieldtrip group visited a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) Farm in [Lutkemeerpolder](#) in Amsterdam, where they spoke with volunteers and learnt about



the organisation. The farm has a vegetable box scheme with annual subscribers who harvest their own vegetables. The group also discussed difficulties with their tenancy, which was insecure and dependent on an unresponsive landowner. It echoed other long-term sustainability issues facing those who manage land without long-term land tenure security (Holland et al., 2022; Pierri et al., 2025).



Lutkemeerpolder CSA Farm

The group also visited [Boterhuispolder Farm](#) in Warmond, Leiden, where the farming couple talked about land access issues for aspiring young farmers. These farmers had personal experience with insecure land tenure, to the extent that their son had moved to New Zealand as he did not see a future in farming in the Netherlands.

At Boterhuispolder Farm, the group also met with land researchers and practitioners Henk Boxma, Jan Spijkerboer, Johan Wedts de Swart and Hans Vandermaelen and learnt about Dutch and Flemish Land Policy (for details on this exchange, see Figure 1). At the meeting, they discussed land tenure in their respective areas and how they could learn from one another. The Flanders Land Use Database and how it shapes land policy was of particular interest.

Scotland–Netherlands–Flanders Exchange on Active Land Policy for Rural Area Transformation

This exchange was initiated by Scottish researchers and policy experts involved in the Scottish Land Reform agenda, who are keen to learn about land policy and associated land governance models in both the Netherlands and Flanders. All three regions are characterised by a growing societal and policy awareness of the need for an active land policy in rural areas to address current and future challenges such as the sustainability of agriculture, the increasing capital value of land, dealing with extreme drought and flooding, carbon sequestration, and building vibrant rural communities.

The main focus was on sharing knowledge, examples and ideas about how active land policy can tackle these challenges. This includes concrete instruments for land policy and land consolidation, tenancy policy and the allocation of public land, monitoring land ownership and land transactions, and the role and involvement of citizens and communities.

Figure 1 Scotland-Flanders-Netherlands Exchange

Finally, the group visited Land Van Ons at their [Out Ade site](#), to learn about peatland restoration and rice growing experiments. This was a great example of how the



organisation is [working together](#) with a farmer, volunteer groups and the local university. [Land Van Ons](#) is also an interesting model: a Co-op to which people donate money and then become members. The Co-op then buys land and leases it to new entrant farmers who wish to farm the land in a way which is beneficial for biodiversity.

The Stakeholder Advisory Group members who attended the Fieldtrip shared their reflections with the rest of the project team and at the Symposium. Members described the trip as enlightening and said that they were able to have nuanced conversations which gave them a deeper understanding of each other's perspective and professional stance on land policy in Scotland, including the many overlapping priorities and reasonings behind them, that otherwise would not have happened without the opportunity. Stakeholder Advisory Group members also highlighted that the conversations also allowed them to understand more about their positions and the roles of their own Scottish organisations.

One significant issue noted was high land values and land accessibility in the Netherlands – one Stakeholder Advisory Group member commented they were 'blown away by the land prices' – and how surprisingly difficult it is to access land because of this, especially for young people. Stakeholder Advisory Group members also learned about the [Flemish land use database](#) that had been set up to improve access to land.

The Stakeholder Advisory Group members also felt that it was interesting to discuss Scottish land issues with non-Scottish audiences, with the concept of community land ownership and the role of land commissions being a key point of interest. It was reflected by the Stakeholder Advisory Group members that these may be things that we in Scotland take for granted.



Lunch at Boterhuispolder Farm

There have already been several positive outcomes from this trip. First, the networking opportunities were invaluable, and this was highlighted at the Symposium where Jan Spijkerboer and Hans Vandermaelen presented. A research collaboration



on cadastres between Scotland's Rural College (SRUC) and Jan Spijkerboer is currently underway. It also allowed for various important and fruitful round table conversations, providing opportunities to discuss both comparisons and similarities of land related issues in Scotland and the Netherlands. Overall, the Stakeholder Advisory Group members expressed how informative and beneficial this fieldtrip was for their learning and thinking on land issues. Learning about the innovative approaches in the Netherlands was inspiring.

Rottal Estate

On the 10th of November 2025, two of the research team members accompanied two Symposium presenters from France and Canada on a field trip to [Rottal Estate](#) in the Angus Glens, Scotland. Rottal is a mixed upland estate of about 3,000 hectares focused on biodiversity protection, traditional land uses, and environmental restoration.



Rottal Estate field trip

The focus of the trip was to learn about the land management partnership between landowner Dee Ward and Nikki and James Yoxall who undertake regenerative agriculture and conservation grazing with their cattle herd on the Estate. This type of partnership provides a mechanism to create land access for new entrants to farming. Nikki Yoxall explained that the benefits to her in comparison to a traditional farm tenancy included

greater flexibility, a potentially longer duration, and the avoidance of a 'power relationship', as found between landlord and tenant. The Symposium presenters found this to be an inspiring example to learn from for their own research.

Nikki Yoxall also provided a tour of the estate, explaining the work done to re-meander the Rottal Burn, showing areas of tree planting, and visiting the cattle where she explained the mob grazing approach undertaken by her and her husband.



Symposium speakers and participants

The Symposium programme included five plenary sessions and a keynote address over two days, with speakers in-person and online. On each theme, international presentations were complemented with Scottish 'context'. On the first day, participants took part in three plenary sessions and a lunch time research 'marketplace' with posters and displays of related research initiatives. The day ended with a drinks reception, music by the Hazlehead Academy ukelele group, and an informal dinner with the option of viewing films by Dr Penelope Anthias in the Hub's Immersive Suite. The second day began with an optional breakfast presentation, and continued with two plenary sessions, a breakout session, a keynote, and an address from the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands. The day ended with a final plenary discussion that highlighted key learnings and messages. Descriptions of the sessions, each presentation, and participant-submitted biographies follow.

Day One – 11th November 2025

The Symposium opened with a [welcome](#) from Deb Roberts, Deputy Chief Executive and Executive Director of Science at the James Hutton Institute. She spoke about the history of the Institute and its vision, offered some key facts about its operations, and outlined some key impacts. This was followed by an [overview](#) of the Scotland's Land Reform Futures project and International Symposium by Annie McKee and Ian Merrell. They outlined the purpose and objectives of the Symposium and provided the context of Scotland's land concentration that led to land reform legislation. They briefly discussed the themes and aims of the Scotland's Land Reform Futures project carried out by the James Hutton Institute and Scotland's Rural College, which include:

- Community land ownership and engagement in land use decision making
- The role of land ownership and land reform in achieving net zero emissions and reversing biodiversity decline
- Advancing social theory on community empowerment, social justice, and the potential for progressive property rights in Scotland
- Increasing understanding of the impacts of land-based public funding mechanisms on land values
- Increasing understanding of landowner investment and ownership behaviours
- Considering how the monetisation of ecosystem services influences both land reform and land use outcomes

Plenary Session 1: Scottish Land Reform in a Global Context

The first plenary session on Day One was chaired by Patrick Kirkham, Head of Land Reform at the Scottish Government.



- Presenters spoke about Scotland's history of land ownership from feudalism to the present and offered ideas about where land reform could go in the future.
- Presenters compared Scotland's history of land reform to other countries that engaged in redistributive reforms (e.g., Mexico, Ireland, Japan) and places with Indigenous and community land rights (Bolivia, countries in Southeast Asia) and discussed what Scotland could both learn from and share with others.

'Are we there yet?' The long journey to a Land Reformed Scotland

Michael Russell, Chair of the Scottish Land Commission presented "*Are we there yet?' The long journey to a Land Reformed Scotland*". He described the long history of land reform in Scotland and the continuing strong support for change, as well as three themes key to the future of land reform in Scotland. First, community landownership is around 3%; the vast majority of land is still privately owned. There is a need for capacity, funding and long-term support to maintain progress. Second, understanding ownership in Scotland remains a challenge. Transparency is essential. Third, climate change and land use are increasingly important, attracting corporate investment and what some call 'a new wave of enclosure'. A crucial question is who benefits from a green economy.



[A video of Mr. Russell's speech can be found here.](#)

Biography: Michael Russell is the Chair of the Scottish Land Commission. A former Scottish Government Minister, he has had a long involvement in land matters.

Scottish land reform in international context

Fraser Sugden presented "*Scottish land reform in international context*". He asked how Scotland came to be one of the most unequal countries in the works in terms of landownership, how Scotland's experience of agrarian transition and land reform compare globally, and how the comparisons could inform Scotland's land reform future. He covered Scotland's feudal history and the imposition of capitalism in agricultural production, supporting land concentration, in contrast to countries with revolutions resulting in redistributive land reforms. Fraser suggested that due to an apparent failure of market-based reforms to diversify landownership in Scotland, there is a need to replace the willing buyer-willing seller model for land reform in Scotland.

[A copy of Fraser's presentation slides can be found here](#)

[A video of Fraser's presentation can be found here](#)

Biography: Fraser Sugden is an agrarian political economist at the University of Birmingham. He has conducted extensive research on agrarian change, landlord-



tenant relations and land reform. His work is global in scope, though he has a particular research interest in Nepal, India, China and Scotland. He is interested in the comparative experience of redistributive land reforms across the world, and for the last decade has also been involved in the grassroots piloting of collective farming models, to support land consolidation and tenant mobilisation in the Indian states of West Bengal and Bihar.

Scotland in global land reform context: progressing community rights in a context of concentrated ownership

Megan MacInnes presented “Scotland in global land reform context: progressing community rights in a context of concentrated ownership”. She discussed the power accruing with concentrated private ownership – a global trend – and the need to ensure land ownership is publicly accountable and in the public interest. Megan asked if human rights are a catalyst or obstacle for Scottish land reform. She sees community ownership as a model to deliver wider community development, rather than communities being passive recipients, which is something that Scotland could share with other places. Megan concluded her talk saying that land is about connection – it’s always emotional rather than technical – and we need to tap into this emotion.

[A copy of Megan's presentation slides can be found here](#)

[A video of Megan's presentation can be found here](#)

Biography: Megan MacInnes has worked for 25 years on land reform, community land rights and natural resource governance, in Scotland, internationally and in South East Asia. She grew up on a croft on the Isle of Skye and now lives as part of a crofting family in Applecross, where she has been the Local Development Manager for the Applecross Community Company since 2021. In this role she is also a co-opted member of the Applecross Community Council. Megan held the post of Commissioner for the Scottish Land Commission between 2017 and 2023 and between 2009 and 2020 worked with the international human rights and environmental NGO Global Witness. She is a graduate of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London and the University of East Anglia.

Session Q and A – Participants brought up the need to understand land reform more broadly, for example, involving tenement housing and minerals. A question was raised about how to make the Scottish legislation ‘stronger’, and some support for moving away from ‘willing seller’ was expressed. Fraser Sugden pointed out that compulsory sales are central to most successful land reform. The topic of public funding was brought up and whether the Scottish public would support more Government investment in land reform.

Thinking community land dynamics across continents: Bolivian native land titling and Scottish community land ownership

Annabel Pinker presented “Thinking community land dynamics across continents: Bolivian native land titling and Scottish community land ownership” with Carey Doyle. Based on their fieldwork with community landowners in Scotland, Annabel described resonances between Bolivian and Scottish land struggles, including that they unfold



within wider landscapes of ownership regimes, market logics and extractive industries and are interwoven with extractive capitalism. Tenure and ownership of land do not imply autonomy. There are tensions between people's 'land imaginaries' - their "understandings, views, and vision of what land is, can and should be" (Sippel and Visser, 2020) and the logics of property laws and ownership.

[A copy of Annabel's presentation slides can be found here](#)

[A video of Annabel's presentation can be found here](#)

Biography: Annabel Pinker is a social anthropologist working on the politics of land and energy at the James Hutton Institute, Aberdeen, Scotland.

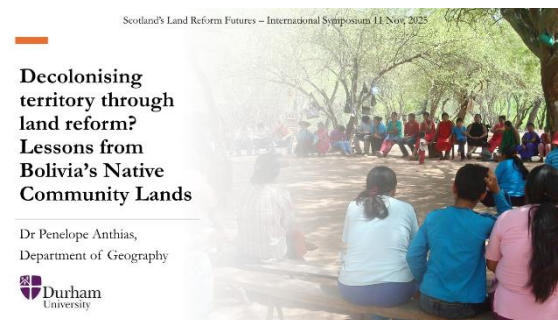
Decolonising territory through land reform? Lessons from Bolivia's Native Community Lands

Penelope Anthias presented "*Decolonising territory through land reform? Lessons from Bolivia's Native Community Lands*". She described Bolivia's history of Indigenous dispossession and genocide, where land was privatised and given to elites. With grassroots Indigenous resurgences in the late 1900s there was a global shift towards respect for Indigenous rights and cultures. Penelope described the resulting native community lands (TCS) as a new form of ownership - inalienable, indivisible, irreversible, collective property. While these have helped a shift in relations around land and citizenship, the implementation has been contested and results mixed. For example, private landowners have resisted and received adjustments and concessions based on existing power relations. Only a third of the land has actually been handed over and it is not of good quality. However, Bolivian struggles have relevance for Scotland, showing the importance of ongoing social pressure when power asymmetries and capitalist interests may hinder transformative change.

[A copy of Penelope's presentation slides can be found here](#)

[A video of Penelope's presentation can be found here](#)

Biography: Penelope Anthias is Associate Professor in Human Geography at Durham University. Her research examines struggles over land, indigeneity and resource extraction based on ethnographic research in Bolivia's Chaco region. She is the author of a prize-winning book on Indigenous land claims and has made two documentary films.



Plenary session 2: Monitoring change and evaluating impacts of land reform: Scottish and international experiences

The second plenary session of the day was chaired by Duncan MacPherson, an independent consultant on community purchases who lives on a community-owned estate in the Scottish Hebrides.



- Presentations on research in the Netherlands, Canada, Australia, and Scotland demonstrated the importance of good quality, accessible data in order to monitor and evaluate changes in land tenure.
- Some presenters discussed the financialisation of farmland and nature and the challenges that poses.

Land data transparency and analysis: Scotland

Keith Matthews presented “*Land data transparency and analysis: Scotland*”. His team’s research looked at 18 Scottish datasets on land ownership, assessing their transparency and quality as well as how accessible and usable they are by stakeholders such as policymakers, agencies, communities, and individuals. Keith explained that no single data source maps ownership boundaries and links them to owners in Scotland, and gave some examples of the data needs of policymakers in the recent Land Reform Act. He suggested two ways to improve the data landscape: 1) a cross-government data integration exercise to collate and integrate all relevant land ownership data, to be held in a trusted research environment, for without payment use by researchers, analysts, policy teams and stakeholders, and 2) a renewed commitment to collect and update land agricultural land tenure data at land parcel level.

[A copy of Keith's presentation slides can be found here](#)

Biography: Keith Matthews is a senior researcher with 34 years of experience of working in, and leading, inter-and transdisciplinary research across social, natural and computational sciences. He leads the Hutton Land Use Transformations project undertaking pan-Scotland, policy relevant and policy led analysis of land use change.

Land data transparency and analysis: Kadaster

Jan Spijkerboer from the Dutch 'Kadaster' presented “*Land data transparency and analysis: Kadaster*”. He explained the history and workings of the Dutch cadastre as well as all the services it provides for the public, practitioners, and researchers. It aims to provide legal certainty in ownership and use of all estate above and below ground level and function as a permanent geo-info platform accessible to all. It tracks land prices and land mobility, among other data and measures. The Netherlands has no tax on agricultural land or land protected for nature, instead; tax is on buildings and commercial property. The challenges they face are high land prices, low turnover of land, and the competing needs of space of living and working, energy, nature, sustainable water management, outdoor education, and water management.

[A copy of Jan's presentation slides can be found here](#)

[A video of Jan's presentation can be found here](#)

Biography: Jan Spijkerboer has become an all-round expert on land acquisition and sales and has the ability to oversee the results of main strategies to the level of concrete implementation. He is closely involved in the development of new strategies for state agencies on the land market. He has experience as a mediator/judge on land tenure issues.



The Financialisation of Scottish Land: Natural Capital and Forestry Investment in Scottish Land

Ian Merrell presented “*The Financialisation of Scottish Land: Natural Capital and Forestry Investment in Scottish Land*”. He explained why Scotland is attractive to natural capital and forestry investors, with its national targets and incentives, planting potential, and degraded peatland. His team of researchers, working with the Scottish Land Commission, has tracked rural land market values since 2021. The boom in demand and increasing land prices at the beginning of that period slowed in 2023, and it appears that natural capital sales almost halted in 2024, with companies looking at forming partnerships with landowners or leasing land rather than buying land themselves.

Companies were instead leaning towards forming partnerships with landowners instead of purchasing land themselves. Alternative models, such as leasing land or funding projects for future credits, gained popularity.

[A copy of Ian's presentation slides can be found here](#)

[A video of Ian's presentation can be found here](#)

Biography: Ian Merrell is a Research Fellow at SRUC and leads on the work around land reform and land use change. He has wider interests in rural development, entrepreneurship and innovation.

Growing land inequality: The case of Saskatchewan, Canada

Annette Desmarais presented “*Growing land inequality: The case of Saskatchewan, Canada*”. She gave the context of the loosening of Saskatchewan’s land ownership restrictions in the 1970s, results of which were primarily anecdotal because no one was tracking ownership and investment. She described the process that she and André Magnan began in 2014, analysing land titles data to identify land held by investors and large farmers, and tracking changes in land tenure over time. Investor land ownership has gone up consistently since restrictions were loosened in 2002, but is only around 1.3% of farmland. Large private farmland owners have also been significantly increasing their holdings. The titling data demonstrates distribution of ownership and various levels and critically provides entry points for future research. While large owners and investors are not the majority of owners, in certain rural municipalities they have done 20-30% of land transactions and paid considerably more than other buyers. Land title registries are important to understanding what is happening on the ground, but Saskatchewan’s does not include rented farm land so aspects of land control are not well understood.

[A copy of Annette's presentation slides can be found here](#)

[A video of Annette's presentation can be found here](#)

Biography: Annette Aurélie Desmarais is Professor Emerita at the University of Manitoba and current President of the National Farmers Foundation in Canada. She was a Canada Research Chair in Human Rights, Social Justice and Food Sovereignty (2013-2023). Her main areas of research are agrarian change, peasant



and rural social movements, food systems transformation, the financialisation of farmland, and alternative models of land tenure.

Financial investment in farmland in Australia

Sarah Ruth Sippel presented “*Financial investment in farmland in Australia*” based on fieldwork from 2016-2019. Traditional asset classes had been performing badly in global markets, so farmland became an attractive investment in Australia with its stable politics and government, developed infrastructure, and nearby markets. Sarah described empirical research with agri-finance actors and rural people on contested investments, showcasing three key purchases: two sales to foreign investors that did not proceed, and one to a pension fund. Australian land as open space for foreign direct investment was challenged after these ‘controversies’, with renegotiation of land’s investibility. The government distinguished between land sold for foreign food security and land sold in the national interest, allowing the latter in the pension fund case. Sarah shows that financialisation doesn’t happen by accident or in the same way everywhere. It grows out of what society sees as acceptable uses of money and ideas about how the economy should work. Financialisation reflects public debates about shared values, but it also makes existing inequalities between farmers worse.

[A copy of Sarah's presentation slides can be found here](#)

[A video of Sarah's presentation can be found here](#)

Biography: Sarah Ruth Sippel is a professor of economic geography and globalisation studies at Münster University. Her research has investigated land and natural resources, the global food system, sustainable livelihoods, labour and migration, and the intersections of global finance, digital technologies, and agri-food. More recently, she has also started a new project on diverse economic, resiliency, and food sovereignty practices in rural Italy (Molise). Empirically, she has worked in North Africa (specifically Morocco), Australia, the US, and the Mediterranean (France, Italy).



Session Q and A: Participants asked about Indigenous stewardship, going beyond recognition – is the coloniser paradigm – white settler agriculture – being upheld by this research? Sarah replied that this was not a public debate when she started this research but noted that it is more prominent in an academic context now; the public imagination is about (mostly white

settler) family farmers. Annette spoke about the Land Back movement in Canada that has forced people to think about stolen land, saying alternative land models must consider Indigenous land relations. She gave the example of the Treaty Land Sharing Network that provides land access for Indigenous land users. However, she said that it is a struggle when, for example, the Saskatchewan government did not consult with Indigenous people on the disposition of Crown land.



Session: ICARRD+20

This session was chaired by Olivia Oldham Dorrington, a PhD researcher at the University of Edinburgh. The aim of the session was to discuss key learning points relevant to the International Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (ICARRD+20), that was due to be held in Colombia in February 2026.

- ICARRD+20 is an opportunity to facilitate commitments to agrarian reform and rural development and strengthen international cooperation.
- The Symposium presentations, and Scotland's example, show that landownership in the Global North is not 'settled' and needs to be considered in addition to reforms in the Global South.

Update on the International Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (ICARRD+20) and the Global Land Observatory

Francesco Pierri presented "*Update on the International Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (ICARRD+20) and the Global Land Observatory*". He described the key goals, outcomes, and governance of ICARRD+20. Goals include discussing global land governance and its impacts on the Sustainable Development Goals, raising the profile of agrarian reform in the 21st century, and strengthening the role of rural communities as stewards of ecosystems, agents of development, and decision makers. Outcomes will likely include facilitating renewed commitments to agrarian reform and rural development and strengthening international cooperation on land issues such as food sovereignty, rural resilience, and climate justice. Francesco explained the Global Land Observatory, a Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)-led data and knowledge sharing facility in collaboration with International Land Coalition (ILC), an independent global alliance of People's Organisations, civil society and intergovernmental organisations working together on land governance, and CIRAD (The French agricultural research and international cooperation organization working for the sustainable development of tropical and Mediterranean regions), along with its preliminary findings on the unequal distribution of global agricultural land holdings.

[A copy of Francesco's presentation slides can be found here](#)

[A video of Francesco's presentation can be found here](#)

Biography: Francesco Pierri, PhD, is a land tenure officer for the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). He is Food and Agriculture Organization focal point for ICARRD+20. He previously served as Food and Agriculture Organization Representative to the Republic of South Africa, and as chief international adviser to the Minister for Agrarian Development of the Federative Republic of Brazil.

ICARRD+20: What can Scotland offer and what can Scotland learn?

Olivia Oldham-Dorrington presented "*ICARRD+20: What can Scotland offer and what can Scotland learn?*". She contended that the question of property in the Global North is not settled or finished with private ownership as a natural endpoint, and Scotland shows this. Scotland can also learn from other countries, such as how land



reform can be part of a broader agrarian reform and the importance of going beyond redistribution of land.

For discussion, Olivia asked: What is special about Scottish land reform? What does agrarian reform look like in Scotland? How might Scottish land reform go beyond redistribution?

[A copy of Olivia's presentation slides can be found here](#)

[A video of Olivia's presentation can be found here](#)

Biography: Olivia Oldham-Dorrington is a PhD researcher at the University of Edinburgh, where her work focuses on the way we own and govern land influences the way we produce food. She has a particular focus on the role of private ownership, and the possibilities of collective property relations.

Session Q and A: The discussion raised questions such as how crofting fits into future reforms and what 'indigenous' means in a Scottish context. It was suggested that Scottish land reform has not 'done enough' for new entrants to agriculture or women. One person asked whether the focus should be on land use rather than land reform. Some participants felt that agriculture is a less important focus than rural development. Others suggested that the complex, bureaucratic law and legal frameworks through which land reform is carried out may be impeding land reform and imagination about what is possible.

Research Marketplace

The Research Marketplace consisted of posters (in the Immersive Suite) and visual presentations (in Conference Suite 1a and 1b). They comprised:

- 1) A showcase of Scotland's Land Reform Futures and associated Strategic Research Programme (2022-2027) land reform research, featuring:
 - Land Ownership Data in Scotland – Dave Miller
 - Citizen Land Science to Support Land Reform – Sam Poskitt
 - Exploring the effects of community landownership in Scotland – Annabel Pinker
 - Land Reform: Mapping Land Ownership, Financial Flows into Land and Land Use Change – Ian Merrell
 - Assessment of Landownership Change using Registers of Scotland Data – Simon Gibson-Poole
- 2) Other presenters:
 - The Community Land Academic Network – Catriona Mallows
 - 'Reversing the Gaze': Knowledge Stories and the Struggles for Community Land Rights in Scotland – Atenchong Talleh Nkobou



- The Property of Farming: An investigation of how property relations affect the possibility of agroecological transformation in Aotearoa New Zealand – Olivia Oldham-Dorrington
- Crofting Knots: Tenure, Parcelisation, Succession – Soheila Shourbaji
- The Rapid Engagement with Stressed Peatland Environments and Communities in Transformation (RESPECT) project – Miranda Geelhoed
- The Just Walk from Skye to Glasgow – David Lees
- 22 Years of Community Right to Buy in Scotland: Considering Success and Justice – Carey Doyle
- The ‘Who Owns Scotland’ project – Andy Wightman
- A fairer, greener Scotland? Rural perspectives on Scotland’s “just transition”: an ethnographic study of upper Tweeddale in the Scottish Borders – Pete Ballantine
- Do Community Landowners Farm? Exploring a Land Reform paradox in Scotland – Roz Corbett



Snapshots from the Marketplace

Day Two – 12th November 2025

Day Two began with an optional breakfast presentation by Dr Yumi Isaka Kato and then a welcome from Prof. Lee-Ann Sutherland, Director of the International Land Use Study Centre. Lee-Ann described the Symposium venue, the [Hutton Hub](#), a multi-million-pound development that offers a space for academics, businesses and the public to collaborate and use cutting-edge technology to help the north-east of Scotland achieve a Just Transition to Net Zero. She explained current ways



researchers are using it and the potential for further use of creative technologies and participatory methods.

Land Matching Service in Japan and Scotland: Comparative Experiences of Land Reform

Yumi Kato Isaka presented “*Land Matching Services in Japan and Scotland: Comparative Experiences of Land Reform*”. She traced the practices and relationships of social actors and institutions in agricultural land markets, in a case study in Japan and another in Scotland. She asked about the importance of social ties for policy delivery. She found that institutions disconnected from existing informal networks are unlikely to achieve their policy goals. Co-working with established networks and trusted brokers is essential to reach these goals, and social ties within/around the community are the epicentre of land policy delivery.

[A copy of Yumi's presentation slides can be found here](#)

[A video of Yumi's presentation can be found here](#)

Biography: Yumi Kato Isaka is a qualitative researcher specialising in land issues focusing on social networks, based on her Ph.D. comparing between Scotland and Japan at Newcastle University. After working for 10+ years at the Ministry of Agriculture in Japan, she is now an associate professor at Nagoya University.

Plenary Session 1: How do alternative land governance models work in other countries?

This session was chaired by James MacKessack-Leitch, who leads the Scottish Land Commission’s work around land and human rights, governance, and ownership, and is also a member of the Scotland’s Land Reform Futures Project’s Stakeholder Advisory Group.

- The featured countries face the same challenges: high land prices, land inaccessibility for new entrants, and an aging farmer demographic.
- Examples were given of regulatory systems and experimental governance and ownership models that increase land access.
- These alternatives often address other goals such as mitigating and adapting to climate change, supporting local development, and addressing power relationships between landowners and land workers.

Lessons from the Netherlands and Flanders: Netherland field trip

James MacKessack-Leitch and Catriona Mallows presented “*Lessons from the Netherlands and Flanders: Netherland field trip*”. They discussed their participation in the October 2025 field trip to landholdings in the Netherlands (as described above) and learnings for Scotland, in particular regarding the ambitious role of the public sector, different options to access land, and the utility of the cadastre. Catriona reflected on the high land prices and challenges for new entrants accessing land. She described partnerships and governance models that addressed water governance, restoration, and climate change. James reflected on the role of municipalities (and the scale of ‘local’) as strategist, planner, and developer. He emphasised the fundamental role of the cadastre to public sector delivery (e.g. tax,



planning). As the Netherlands, Belgium and Scotland share many of the same challenges in tenant farming, including farmer age, lease length, and access, James suggested that learning around Scotland's tenant farming commissioner could be shared with them.

[A copy of James and Catriona's presentation slides can be found here](#)

[A video of James and Catriona's presentation can be found here](#)

Biographies: James MacKessack-Leitch leads the Scottish Land Commission's work around land and human rights, governance, and ownership. This touches upon a range of land reform issues from developing policy and legislative proposals, to articulating the nature of land rights and what ownership means, to improving access to land for new entrants to agriculture.

Catriona Mallows is a Research Associate at the University of the Highlands and Islands. She has worked for the public and third sector in rural development in Scotland, New Zealand and Canada, with research training and interests in land reform, political ecology, and climate resilience and adaptation.

The SAFER³ model

Kirsteen Shields presented "*The SAFER model*". She discussed the history and drivers of the SAFER model in France, beginning with post-World War Two agricultural reforms, mechanisation, and the creation of SAFER to carry out land consolidation. Currently, SAFER has four missions in the public interest: to participate in the protection of the environment, support local development, develop agriculture and forestry, and ensure transparency in the rural land market. Kirsteen dismantled common misunderstandings about SAFER, and she explained that SAFER is a private body with a public purpose that increases land transparency. Kirsteen's review of SAFER for the Scottish Land Commission can be found [here](#).

[A copy of Kirsteen's presentation slides can be found here](#)

[A video of Kirsteen's presentation can be found here](#)

Biography: Kirsteen Shields is Senior Lecturer in International Land and Food Systems at the RDSVS, University of Edinburgh. Her research and teaching encompasses land governance, human rights, agriculture, food systems, and the environment.

³ Société d'aménagement foncier et d'établissement rural. A translation could be "Land Use and Rural Settlement Corporation". SAFERs were created in 1960, by the Agricultural Orientation Law, to reorganize farms, as part of the establishment of a more productive agriculture, and with the objective of encouraging more young people into farming and agriculture (Shields, 2023).



The SAFERs, an evolving and multiscale tool of the French farmland regulation

Adrien Baysse-Lainé presented “*The SAFERs, an evolving and multiscale tool of the French farmland regulation*”. He discussed how SAFERs work in practice, carrying out land market activities and producing data, in a context where two-thirds of French farmland is rented by farmers on relatively cheap and secured leases. The main purchaser of farmland in France is farmers (who have first right of refusal on leases) and next is SAFER. After SAFER purchases land, it is open to applications for purchase; if there is competition, local and provincial committees share opinions, and a regional board makes the decision to whom to sell the land. SAFER also produces data on the land markets both continuously and for more precise surveys. Every year they publish the reference prices of land at a local scale. They also provide knowledge tools and analyse data, e.g. automatised mapping of abandoned farmland. SAFERs are typically locally led, and the results depend on their insertion into power relationships.

[A copy of Adrien's presentation slides can be found here](#)

[A video of Adrien's presentation can be found here](#)

Biography: Dr Adrien Baysse-Lainé is a CNRS researcher at the Université Grenoble Alpes (France), active in the fields of rural, legal and environmental geographies. His main research project questions the metrics of farmland concentration in France through the lenses of corporate structure, gender, soil quality and the situated production of law.

The California Land Equity Task Force: Can a legislative reform slow the trends of farmland consolidation in the heart of America's breadbasket?

Adam Calo presented “*The California Land Equity Task Force: Can a legislative reform slow the trends of farmland consolidation in the heart of America's breadbasket?*”. Although land is not on the agenda in the USA, property is not fixed or absolute. Adam gives the example of the California Land Equity Task Force, which was formed to create policies proposals to address agricultural land consolidation and land inequity in the state. Given past racial discrimination, the Task Force



focused on tribal stewardship and land return, prioritising secure land tenure. Their key policy ideas include: establishing a restorative land fund; directly transferring public land back to California Native American Tribes; facilitating the return of privately held land to California Native American Tribes; establishing a California Producer Pension Fund for farmer security; create and land market monitoring programme; and addressing power imbalances between landowners and tenants.

[A copy of Adam's presentation slides can be found here](#)

[A video of Adam's presentation can be found here](#)

Biography: Adam Calo is Assistant Professor of Environmental Governance and Politics at Radboud University, researcher of the interaction between land governance and environmental sustainability, and author of the Landscapes Podcast.

Alternative Agricultural Land Tenure Systems (ALTS) in Canada

Jamie Baxter presented “*Alternative Agricultural Land Tenure Systems (ALTS) in Canada*”. He presented the motivation behind Alternative Agricultural Land Tenure Systems: a desire for agroecological practices, diverse and equitable land access and community-based decision making. They are also driven by demographics, with 40% of farmers soon to retire, and high land prices. Indigenous land justice also prompts changes in decision-making and governance. Jamie described several localised, decentralised models from across Canada, including community land trusts, social purpose trusts, co-operatives, and employee ownership trusts. Findings from this research include that Alternative Agricultural Land Tenure Systems are a transition pathway, dynamic systems rather than static tenure models. They involve long time horizons. Farmers want the means to build shared equity to sustain their livelihoods, keep land accessible, and realise community benefit. Finally, land access is also about safe and inclusive rural spaces.

[A copy of Jamie's presentation slides can be found here](#)

[A video of Jamie's presentation can be found here](#)

Biography: Jamie Baxter is an Associate Professor and Associate Dean (Research) at the Schulich School of Law, Dalhousie University and Board Member of the National Farmers Foundation. Jamie's work addresses the legal and regulatory dimensions of food and agriculture, with an emphasis on land tenure and rural landscapes.

Keynote presentation: Land and land-based investment governance: international dimensions

Lorenzo Cotula presented “*Land and land-based investment governance: international dimensions*”. He discussed recent developments such as the global farmland rush and energy transition investments, and increasing tenure insecurity and land inequality globally. Although land governance occurs primarily through national policy and legislation, there is a growing recourse to international law, such as the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure on land



governance, and investment law. Lorenzo described work by the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) and partners with 40 organisations in Africa and Asia in the Advancing Land-based Investment Governance (ALIGN) project. The political economies of the involved countries are drastically different, so they are looking at means of forming good practice governance in a range of contexts.

[A copy of Lorenzo's presentation slides can be found here](#)

[A video of Lorenzo's presentation can be found here](#)

Biography: Lorenzo Cotula is a Principal Researcher and Head of Programme in Law, Economics and Justice at the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), a policy research institute based in the UK. Lorenzo's work involves legal and socio-legal research, policy engagement at national and international levels and grassroots-level projects on the legal arenas where land and natural resource governance meets the global economy.

Keynote Q and A: A participant raised a question about the impacts of human rights laws for land. Lorenzo explained there is a narrow legal impact, but wider impact in awareness raising of land issues. Another questioner asked about commonalities of the different countries' policy responses in Advancing Land-based Investment Governance (ALIGN). Lorenzo replied that they were grappling with common issues: large scale investments, the expansion of the mining frontier, and carbon investments. However, they had different responses according to need and severity of issues.

[Address by Ms Mairi Gougeon MSP, former Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands](#)

Ms Gougeon addressed the Symposium attendees on the second day. She spoke of the 2021-2026 Scottish Government's vision of a Scotland where land "is an asset that benefits the many and not the few", and the role of the new Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2025 in delivering that. Speaking of the importance of academic research, she mentioned the scrutiny that the Bill underwent and the key role of "robust and impartial" evidence to support this process, some of it supplied by members of the Scotland's Land Reform Futures' project team. She singled out the rapid response research done, work on transparency, analysis of land market trends, consideration of alternative models of land tenure, and consultation of stakeholders and experts as part of the work carried out.

Ms Gougeon expressed appreciation of the expertise and experience from other countries shared at the Symposium. Interconnected issues such as food systems





transformation, rural economic development, and land use are at the forefront, and the Scottish Government has been creating legislation around this.

Ms Gougeon concluded by describing some key provisions within the new Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2025. She mentioned the advanced notice of sales and lotting of large landholdings, as well as the legal responsibilities of large landowners (i.e. owners of land over 1000 hectares) to consult and engage with communities on land management plans. She also noted the modernisation of small landholdings law. The next step, implementation of the Act, will also require working closely with researchers. Finally, the Cabinet Secretary emphasised the significance of land reform in Scotland for fairness and sustainable futures:

“We know that land reform is complex. It’s intertwined with Scotland’s rural economy, our natural environment, our country’s culture, and our history. But it is also necessary, being that tool for justice, sustainability, and resilience”.

[A video of Ms Gougeon's presentation can be found here](#)

Plenary Session 2: Achieving the public interest beyond landownership diversification

This last plenary session of the Symposium was chaired by Dr Jessica Lynch Boucher, a member of the Scotland’s Land Reform Futures Project Stakeholder Advisory Group.

- Public land management can be a route for democratic control, prioritising public value, and facilitating land access.
- Landscape transitions in Scotland must be socially just in order to succeed.

Just transformations to sustainability in Europe: Lessons from the Just Scapes project

David Brown presented “*Just transformations to sustainability in Europe: Lessons from the Just Scapes Project*”. He asked how landscapes can be repurposed in ways that are fair, inclusive, and sustainable, and introduced the concept of ‘justice barriers’ that can impede landscape transition projects. He explained barriers to achieving justice in the JustScapes project of rural cases studies in Scotland, France and the Czech Republic. David focused on the Scottish case, where locals experienced injustice and inequality in land distribution. He described two major themes from the research: unequal access to land, and urban-rural burden shifting. The analysis distinguished between surface-level issues and underlying, hidden barriers. David proposed that any transition in Scotland, especially in the Highlands, must be socially just if it is to succeed long-term.

[A copy of David's presentation slides can be found here](#)

[A video of David's presentation can be found here](#)



Biography: David Brown researches just transitions, communities and landscape regeneration, with a focus on the Scottish Highlands. For the Justscapes project, he investigated perceptions of (in)justice related to climate-influenced rural land-use change. He is currently a research associate in the Department of Sociology at the University of Cambridge.

Revamping the council farm estate for the 21st century: lessons from Bremenda Isaf in Carmarthenshire, Wales

Alex Heffron presented “*Revamping the council farm estate for the 21st century: lessons from Bremenda Isaf in Carmarthenshire, Wales*”. He described a Welsh council farm, Bremenda Isaf, a former dairy farm that is transitioning to a diversified market garden model that serves as a local hub. It is part of a broader Welsh initiative to supply school meals with local food, linking food production, community wellbeing, and sustainability. The case study exemplifies a new model of public land management that prioritises public value, however, farms within this model must become financially self-sufficient. Many councils in Wales are selling farms, which Alex argued is short-sighted. He discussed how council farms could serve as an alternative entry point for land access by underrepresented groups. He proposed that this would require strong local buy-in and the creation of new “public-common” partnerships that blend community participation and public stewardship.

[A copy of Alex's presentation slides can be found here](#)

[A video of Alex's presentation can be found here](#)

Biography: Alex Heffron is a part-time farmer in the southwest of Wales and full-time PhD researcher at Lancaster University. His research looks at the political economy of post-Brexit farming and farmland.

Towards a democratic appropriation of public farmland: emerging debates and policy initiatives in Flanders

Hans Vandermaelen presented “Towards a democratic appropriation of public farmland: emerging debates and policy initiatives in Flanders”. His talk began by exploring farmland market dynamics in Belgium, where rising land values are shaping agricultural transitions. While community land acquisitions of farmland exist, they remain limited in number and scale. New debates are emerging around how public land can be used more democratically to support sustainable and inclusive farm transitions. Hans proposed repoliticising land issues and that regaining democratic control to ensure public land remains a tool for sustainable and democratic farm transitions and provides a way for the public to have some say over land use. There is a need for policy innovation to ensure public land remains a tool for sustainable and democratic farm transitions rather than an asset for short-term financial gain.

[A copy of Hans's presentation slides can be found here](#)

[A video of Hans's presentation can be found here](#)

Biography: Hans Vandermaelen is a scientific researcher at the Institute for Agriculture, Fisheries, and Food (ILVO) in Flanders (Belgium) and professor of public



landscape infrastructure at Ghent University. His research focusses on land policy, land ownership and land use, soil care and landscape agroecology.

Outcomes

The International Symposium was designed to share experiences of land reform in Scotland and learn from the outcomes of alternative land tenure models in other countries. The programme included open space and social activities for networking and informal discussion. The research 'marketplace' disseminated current research findings and supported the development of new collaborations.

Final plenary session

For the final session of the Symposium, participants chose one of four breakout groups. The topics were: International Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (ICARRD+20) – Scotland's contribution, land observatories, considering different governance models, and the role of the public sector. The focus was on key lessons for Scotland. Groups reported back in plenary at the end of the day.

International Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (ICARRD+20) – Scotland's contribution

The Symposium covered many land tenure topics in Global North, which is a gap in International Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (ICARRD+20). It was suggested that the papers be consolidated into a paper for ICARRD+20. It was felt that the focus should be on more than agrarian reform, with more attention paid to rural development.

The breakout session participants considered key takeaways from the Symposium for Scottish land reform. One participant brought up what they saw as an 'identity' crisis for Scotland, which has a history of being both colonised and coloniser. Contemporary land relations feed into future visions. Concerns about justice are strong, but remain addressed through dominant methods, e.g., markets. There are limitations to the extent to which legal frameworks can drive necessary changes. There is also a need to consider urban centres, where residents also deal with issues around rent, land access, and landlessness. Participants asked, how can civil society engage effectively with these issues?

Creating a land observatory

Participants felt strongly that ownership and tenure data are critical to know what is going on in a country, and that a land observatory would be a useful tool. There are good examples of systems in Europe from which to learn best practice. One participant asked what the case would be for spending public money on a land observatory – what benefits are provided? It was pointed out that the current Scottish system puts off investors (e.g. 310 titles on one piece of land) and that the Dutch cadastre makes its own money from its key functions. Issues discussed included the need for significant political commitment to generate change including strong buy-in from across the political spectrum. Also discussed was a deep cultural hesitancy



about the sharing of ownership and tenure information as a barrier to a fully open system. Participants agreed on the importance of a complete land register as base to stack other data layers on, which could be a standard open access product available to researchers and other stakeholders.

Considering different governance models

This breakout session brought up numerous barriers to different models in Scotland. While cooperatives have historically been embraced in Scotland, it is difficult to build equity when land is cooperatively owned. An attempt to set up a Scottish farmland trust faced challenges. It is difficult for community trusts to facilitate access for new entrants because of complexities around tenancies. Model leases are needed for agricultural tenants and community growing space, and a ground lease is needed for new entrants to build capital. Some felt that community ownership should be better supported as communities are still struggling with using the right to buy. However, a participant pointed out that community ownership does not address all the priorities people have for land.

Role of the public sector

The participants in this breakout engaged in imagining how the public sector could lead by example in alternative land governance. Although there is a perception that the public sector is not very agile, Forestry Land Scotland is quite dynamic. Wales's council land model and use of public land can lead to invigorated food markets and food production. A question was raised whether the state could play a role in the land market, and in particular, in natural capital markets.

There was interest expressed in France's SAFER model. A concern was expressed about the impact of SAFER on profitability, and the potential loss of farm value and unprofitability. SAFER is a contributor to increasing GDP in France and does have an impact on land prices. Suggestions were made that Scotland needs to look at the impact of the subsidy system and better enforce existing legislation.

Before concluding this session, Patrick Kirkham, Head of Land Reform at the Scottish Government, stated how important it is for government to hear about what is happening in international contexts. He expressed hope that participants would continue discussions and share learning from policy and research.





Feedback from participants

The research team gathered feedback from participants in two ways. First, participants were offered the opportunity to share their thoughts via short video interviews – vox pops. Second, participants were invited to fill out a feedback form at the end of the Symposium.

Vox pop videos

For the [vox pops](#), three members of the research team came up with the conceptual framing, recruited interviewees, filmed and edited the video. They asked participants to reflect on their experiences at the symposium, posing four questions to participants:

1. What has been your main take-away/key learning point from the Symposium?
2. Which country case studies have been most inspiring and why?
3. What can Scotland learn from other countries?
4. What lessons can we share from the Scottish experience of land reform?

One participant's key observation was of a pattern around issues of the scale of governance: the difficulty of carrying out change at a national scale and the power of more local decision-making. Another said that the importance of public interests superseding landed interests was a critical takeaway. Participants found it interesting to learn from other countries' provision of opportunities for land to provide public interest. One participant from outwith Scotland emphasised that international organisations need to learn more about land issues in the Global North, as focus has largely been on the Global South. Lessons that Scotland could share with others include incentives to diversity ownership, the role of the Scottish Land Fund, and how a legislative reform can change the national conversation around land. One participant concluded that there are no 'black or white' answers, and that a "mosaic of different types of land ownership and management" is needed. There was general agreement that more work needs to be done in research and practice.

Feedback form

A feedback form asked participants to share their top three Symposium highlights. It also asked for suggestions for improving similar future events.

The most frequently mentioned highlight was the diversity (or 'mix' or 'range') of speakers, issues, geographies and professions. Participants felt this "great variety of sessions, speakers and formats" "enabl[ed] rich discussions". They appreciated the "opportunity to engage with different individuals and discuss issues in person". Relatedly, the Marketplace was brought up several times as an excellent place to learn about research and ask questions in a relaxed, informal context. One participant said, "a real effort was made to present things in an accessible and interesting manner."

"Eye-opening details of land data transparency outside of Scotland!"



The most-mentioned themes were data and transparency and alternatives models of land tenure and governance. Contributions from international presenters, for one participant, were “invaluable in highlighting the different ways that land reform and related policies are understood (and particularly the central focus of Indigenous rights in many of these conversations)”.

Several people commented that they would have liked to see more Scottish content, e.g., on the outcomes and impacts of community buyouts, or more details on the 2025 Act. Another wanted more detail on how the issues that the researched countries shared had been successfully tackled. Two commenters suggested that the space at times seemed to be an echo chamber or dominated by a few voices. Another wanted more representation, and information about, direct participants in land reform:

“Some research engaging with landowners/tenants/crofters in Scotland would have been useful to better understand the reality of where we’re at, land reform implications and their views on how best the debate should move forward.”

Additionally, although the programme diversity was welcomed, participants expressed that they would have enjoyed more space for group discussion. Participants also showed a desire to have the event repeated.

At a dedicated meeting for the Stakeholder Advisory Group, members provided feedback on behalf of some of the Symposium participants, with the point raised that although they understood the Symposium was mostly targeted at an academic audience, some of the academic presentations were inaccessible. There were also a few reflections where they felt that assertions were made that were either flawed or made with lack of evidence. Nonetheless, the Stakeholder Advisory Group members felt that the Symposium was very informative and worthwhile.

Academic outcomes

The Symposium has begun to be included in publications and as a basis for research collaborations. Fraser Sugden’s presentation was referenced in [ScotLand Futures: Next steps for land reform](#), comprising a paragraph on land reforms in other European countries as well as 20th century redistributive reforms, and Megan MacInnes’s presentation was referenced in a paragraph on the worsening of land inequality in many countries today.

The Scottish Land Commission has commissioned research, *Learning from International Cadastral Systems for Transparency, Tax, and Valuation*, to provide an international comparison of cadastral systems in relation to landownership transparency, land valuation, and their uses as a tool for designing and implementing taxation policies. The research team, including Ian Merrell and Jan Spijkerboer, are comparing Scotland with Finland, Estonia, Netherlands and Belgium.

Two other research collaborations are underway. In one, participants from Scotland, Canada the Netherlands, and Italy are developing a research consortium for a



possible HORIZON bid. In another, Scottish input is sought on a European comparison of farmland markets regulation.

Outputs

International Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (ICARRD+20) briefing note

A key motivation for the Symposium was the opportunity to share learning relevant to the International Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (ICARRD) +20 process. ICARRD+20 was held in February 2026, hosted by the Government of Colombia, with the technical support of the FAO. It aimed to promote “just and sustainable governance of land, ecosystems, and agri-food systems” (see the FAO’s [‘Call for Policy and Position Papers’](#)), underlining rural communities’ role.

[A briefing note](#), generated from the discussion and themes of the Scotland’s Land Reform Futures International Symposium, was submitted to the Government of Colombia to feed into the International Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (ICARRD+20) Final Declaration. This briefing note provides an overview of the ‘Scotland’s Land Reform Futures International Symposium’ and the central learnings relevant to international discussions of land and agrarian reform.

Key discussion and learning points include:

- In many countries in the Global North, including Scotland, private ownership of land is increasingly concentrated, and there is evidence of new trends of land financialisation and commodification, in particular relating to developing natural capital markets. These trends can increase land prices and decrease its availability, inhibiting land access for new entrant farmers and aspiring community landowners.
- The experience of land reform in Scotland demonstrates the support for communities and landowners, enabled by Government policy, funding, and but also that challenges remain regarding community capacity, funding availability, as well as pace and scale of change.
- There is a need for continued attention in the Global North on equity in land access to ensure ownership diversity and representativeness, and to redress marginalisation and historical injustices.
- Efficient land mapping, cadastre and administration systems are important for equitable land distribution and responsible governance.
- There is an important role and opportunity for an ‘agile’ public land sector that leads by example, and the involvement of local authorities in promoting democracy in land governance.



Conclusion

The Scotland's Land Reform Futures International Symposium showed that there is a keen interest in land reform and related issues in the Global North. Several participants expressed a desire for future, similar events.

The event presented several key learning points. Presenters emphasised the importance of robust land data and transparency around land ownership for responsible land reforms and governance. Participants were inspired by the opportunities for the public sector and local authorities in supporting transformative change. Finally, the value of having participants from multiple sectors and locales was greatly appreciated for the rich learnings and prospects of future collaborations.



Members of the Scotland's Land Reform Futures Symposium organising team



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