



## **FARMING SCOTLAND CONFERENCE PROVIDES INSPIRATIONAL BUSINESS INSIGHT**

**Business improvement, growth and diversification were very much the focus of this year's Farming Scotland Conference, with just a sprinkling of Brexit politics thrown in.**

**The conference, which is now in its 14<sup>th</sup> year, once again took place in Carnoustie and was officially opened by the Provost of Angus, Cllr Alex King.**

As is befitting to an area boasting some of the best arable ground in Scotland, potatoes were much discussed.

Rob Clayton, Strategy Director of AHDB Potatoes, was the first speaker to take to the conference stage. Mr Clayton delivered a wide-ranging presentation under the heading "Growing Potatoes in an Island Nation", and examined consumption trends and challenges, production efficiencies, crop protection and future market in the context of Brexit.

"It is important to look at how the rest of the world views the UK potato sector," Mr Clayton stated.

"We are recognised as innovators."

"We do however have some stiff competition, with growth in productivity lagging behind many of our EU neighbours," Mr Clayton stated, pointing out that research using commercial UK producers had identified huge potential for improving yield and increasing margins by up to £700Ha.

Mr Clayton told Scottish seed potato growers that they should cherish and "hang on" to the high-health status of their crop, especially post Brexit, as it provides a unique selling point for export markets.

David Barnes, the Scottish Government's Deputy Director in the EU Hub for Agriculture and Environment, was next to take to the conference platform.

Mr Barnes gave an update on current Scottish agri-policy, and issues around Brexit, with the overriding message being that there is still little clarity as to how Brexit will impact.

A message that did come through loud and clear from Mr Barnes was that, currently, only 45% of Scottish farm produce is processed in Scotland, a figure which must be improved if farmers are to grab a higher share of the value of the wider food and drink sector.

Immediately afterwards, Iain Stirling, from Arbikie near Arbroath, detailed how his family farming and distilling business was performing extremely well in the quest to add value, from farm-to-bottle.

Mr Stirling gave an insightful overview of how he and his brothers had diversified the family farm, from a dairy unit to a distillery, which now turns home grown potatoes, barley and wheat into award winning gin, vodka and most recently whisky.

Giving wise words of advice to fellow farmers and food and drink producers, Mr Stirling stated:

“We had the ingredients, knowledge and site, so we took a decision to start distilling.”

“However, producing a good product is one thing, getting it on to the shelves is a completely different challenge.” Mr Stirling described how experience gained by himself and his brothers across many different industry sectors had proven invaluable in helping to establish, grow and secure markets for their products.

The final conference speaker, Ian Pigott, gave a feel-good presentation, with a hard-hitting message, on the importance of educating the next generation of consumers as to where their food comes from.

Mr Pigott praised the work of RHET, stating that on-farm education is necessary to help counter media scare mongering regarding topics such as glyphosate.

Mr Pigott gave the example of how Fair Oaks Farms in Indiana, now one of the largest dairy farms in the USA, had overcome any public hostility or misconceptions by opening a visitor centre alongside its farming operations, giving full transparency of farming methods.

**ENDS**

**Notes to Editors**

- This press release is issued by Scene & Herd PR on behalf of the organisers of the Farming Scotland Conference. Contact [monty@sceneandherdpr.co.uk](mailto:monty@sceneandherdpr.co.uk) / 0772 989 3648 for further media information.
- The 14<sup>th</sup> annual Farming Scotland Conference took place at the Carnoustie Golf Hotel on the morning of 2nd February 2017. Further information at: [www.farmingscotlandconference.co.uk](http://www.farmingscotlandconference.co.uk)
- The Farming Scotland conference is organised, sponsored and hosted by EQ Accountants, Bell Ingram, Thorntons Solicitors and The Royal Bank of Scotland.