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UNION LAUNCHES CAMPAIGN TO TACKLE STIGMA AGAINST DYSLEXIC FARMERS

Sir Jackie Stewart voices support for NFUS campaign

NFU Scotland is calling for cross-party support for a campaign it is launching to raise awareness of the problems facing dyslexic farmers.

In recent months the Union has been working with a NFU Scotland member with dyslexia who has experienced some difficulties in dealing with the Scottish Government Rural Payments and Inspection Directorate (SGRPID) as a result.

Work has been ongoing with Dyslexia Scotland, the Scottish Government and SRUC over recent months and there has now been recognition that dyslexia can cause significant disadvantage for farmers and crofters in their dealings with SGRPID.

Former racing driver Sir Jackie Stewart OBE, President of Dyslexia Scotland has voiced his support for this campaign, which is aimed at ensuring that those affected by dyslexia have access to the appropriate tools and mechanisms and are not unfairly discriminated against.

It is now recognised that at least 10 per cent of the population are likely to be dyslexic, four per cent of those being severely dyslexic, with the Specific Learning Difficulty known to be hereditary – however, in the farming community this percentage could be far higher. SRUC, Scotland's rural college has confirmed that 25 per cent of its current agriculture students are dyslexic.

NFU Scotland has written to Alasdair Allan, Minister for Learning, Science and Scotland's Languages and has also raised the issue with Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Food and Environment Richard Lochhead MSP and Scottish Parliamentary Education and Culture Committee Dyslexia Cross-Party Group Convener, Margaret Mitchell.

Nigel Miller, President of NFU Scotland, commented: "We have opened discussions with Dyslexia Scotland, SRUC and SGRPID and are pleased that all have responded positively. In particular the suggestion from Roy McLachlan, Deputy Chief Agricultural Officer, to consider setting up a 'Farming with Dyslexia' working group is warmly welcomed.

"One of our main aims is to try and remove the stigma that many people with dyslexia feel about their condition. Dyslexia is a disability recognised under the Equalities Act 2010, which came into law in Scotland on 27 May 2012. We recognise and are very grateful for the time and attention that dyslexia has received by those in the Scottish Government and Parliament.

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“These are sometimes referred to as the three aims or arms of the general equality duty. The Act helpfully explains that having due regard for advancing equality involves: removing or minimising disadvantages suffered by people due to their protected characteristics; taking steps to meet the needs of people from protected groups where these are different from the needs of other people; and, encouraging people from protected groups to participate in public life or in other activities where their participation is disproportionately low.

“We believe that in order to ensure that farmers and crofters who have dyslexia are not unfairly discriminated against, SGRPID must make stronger efforts to adhere to the key principles of the Equality Act as outlined above and accommodate the needs of their dyslexic customers.

“We are keen to hear from our members with dyslexia, or indeed family members, to come forward, in confidence, to share their experiences with a view to effecting positive change for the future.

“We believe that the campaign has the potential to bring real change for many people with dyslexia and their families. This is the time to address the issue before the next generation of dyslexic farmers graduate from college, where they have received good and appropriate support, only to be faced by a payment system, with all the associated rules and regulations that will inadvertently disadvantage them.”

Sir Jackie Stewart, OBE, President of Dyslexia Scotland said,

“I am a severe dyslexic. The frustration that a dyslexic person can have by not being able to do things like fill in forms is something that people who do not understand learning disabilities, have difficulty in comprehending. This is particularly true when forms and official papers have to be handled.

A large percentage of dyslexics are so embarrassed that they do not want to admit that they cannot read or write as well other folks, but the frustration that it causes and the disruption it can lead to, can be very serious; not only for the person involved, but also for society in general. Dyslexics can be very creative and very successful but far too many, who are not given help and assistance, can end up in very sad circumstances.

I congratulate the National Farmers Union for taking this matter to the highest levels to ensure that those dyslexic members are given the help and assistance that will allow them to produce for the community and the nation. Dyslexic people can be very creative and very resourceful, but they do need more time to do things involving paperwork particularly. Government and local authorities need to be more aware that a great many people may need help and assistance.”

Ends

Note to Editors:

- NFU Scotland has two members available for interview who have dyslexia: Sandy McCreath, a farmer from Dumfries and Galloway and Sandy Murray, NFU Scotland's Crofting Highlands and Islands Committee chairman, are both available for interview. Please contact ruth.mcclean@nfus.org.uk or 0131 472 4108.
Photographs of both are also available upon request.
- For a copy of the full letter please contact media@nfus.org.uk or telephone 0131 472 4000.
- Dyslexia Scotland is the national voluntary organisation representing the needs and interests of people with dyslexia in Scotland. It provides advice and support for dyslexic children, parents and adults with dyslexia. Dyslexia Scotland is based in Stirling, with a network of 17 volunteer-led branches around Scotland.
Helpline: 0844 800 8484 www.dyslexiascotland.org.uk