Resilient Cereals Framework

OUR VISION

The Scotch Whisky industry has a secure and resilient supply of high-quality cereals, produced by a farming system which protects the health of the land for future generations of farmers, distillers and the communities that rely on it.

Scotch Whisky has a long-standing connection and dependence to Scotland's land, environment and climate. As a significant end-user of cereals, the industry has both an opportunity and a responsibility to support the long-term resilience and health of the land on which it depends. Not only are cereals one of three key ingredients to produce Scotch Whisky, they are one of the most exposed to the risks of a changing climate.

Scotch Whisky production consumes around half of Scotland's annual spring barley crop (~600,000 tonnes) and around 5% of total UK wheat production (~700,000 tonnes). In 2024, that equates to roughly 180,000 hectares of land in Scotland used in the spring rotation to grow spring barley for malting[1]. Cereal production also represents a significant proportion of the industry's carbon footprint, with over 50% of emissions attributed to purchased goods and services, primarily cereals and packaging.

Reducing carbon emissions alone will not secure the industry's future cereal supply. Climate change models project a reduction in Scottish barley yields from the 2040s onward due to reduced and more erratic rainfall. Farmers and distillers are already experiencing the impacts of climate change: Storm Babet devastated crops in 2023, while water scarcity in eastern Scotland in summer 2025 disrupted distillery production and inhibited spring barley growth. Evidence suggests that improved soil health and water-holding capacity can increase resilience[2].

The SWA Resilient Cereals Framework sets out a shared ambition to go beyond carbon reduction and actively support the land we depend on. This includes improving soil health, restoring biodiversity, strengthening water systems, and reducing climate-related risks across the value chain. Increasing the proportion of cereals grown using resilient farming practices will also help secure a long-term supply of lower-carbon grains for Scotch whisky and support progress towards the SWA's 2040 ambitions.

The framework will guide the priorities of the SWA Cereals Working Group and drive member action across four focus areas: Policy & Advocacy; Research & Knowledge Sharing; Communication & Engagement and Responsible Procurement.

The Working Group will report annually on progress against agreed actions and targets and will periodically review the framework to ensure it remains relevant and impactful.

[1] Scottish Government, Scottish cereal harvest – cereal usage (disposal) estimates 2024. Spring Barley total tonnage for merchants for malting, 1,213,413t / 6.5t (average yield per hectare 2024)

[2] Barley Responses to Climate Change, The James Hutton Institute, 2022

Four focus areas designed to drive collective change across the supply chain.

01

POLICY & ADVOCACY

Engage with government, regulators and NGOs to ensure future policy and regulation supports the supply chain's transition to resilient and low-carbon farming.

ACTIONS

- Engage with UK and Scottish governments, regulators and agencies to shape agricultural policy, research programmes and regulatory development affecting cereal farming, climate resilience and carbon reduction.
- Develop and share case studies and learnings from member company/supply chain farm trials, growers groups and landscape scale initiatives to demonstrate what is workable at scale to shape realistic, outcome-focused regulation and policy mechanisms.
- Work with supply chain partners to agree shared policy priorities and advocacy messages, enabling a single and impactful voice that supports resilient, low-carbon cereal production while protecting farmer profitability.

02

RESEARCH & KNOWLEDGE SHARING

Drive research and knowledge sharing to derisk the transition for the supply chain/accelerate the uptake of proven solutions and good practice on farm.

ACTIONS

- Share knowledge from trials and pilot projects to develop a trusted body of evidence of farm practices which work in the field, reducing risk and uncertainty.
- Work with Scotland's research community to commission and shape research in cereal variety breeding and agronomy which respond to supply chain needs.
- Advance industry understanding of regenerative and resilient farming practices impact on crop quality, performance and enduse requirements, enabling adoption and adequate transition support for growers.

03

COMMUNICATION & ENGAGEMENT

Engage with SWA membership and supply chain stakeholders to promote resilience and communicate industry priorities and progress.

ACTIONS

- Foster dialogue on supply chain challenges, resilience and successes with the NFUS via the SWA/NFUS Liaison Group.
- Promote industry commitment to sustainability through increased SWA and distiller visibility at key supply chain events.
- Drive industry engagement and leadership in climate resilience via member meetings, forums and events with impactful speakers, discussion and comms.

04

RESPONSIBLE PROCUREMENT

Promote the adoption of climate resilience and carbon reduction in member company cereal sourcing.

ACTIONS

- Deliver guidance, tools and webinars to support responsible procurement and supply chain engagement across SWA membership, including signposting to appropriate regulatory compliance requirements.
- Support supply chain collaboration and support transparent dialogue via Scottish Quality Crops SWA board membership.