

Scottish hill farmers lose organic enthusiasm

More than 300 Scottish farmers have dropped out of the Scottish Executive's organic farming scheme as subsidies have dried up and profit margins have tumbled, confirms Scotland's deputy environment and rural minister Rhona Brankin.

“The high drop-out rate has come amongst hill farmers who thought organic conversion was a route to easy money,” says EFRC director Lawrence Woodward. “Nearly £22 million has been wasted in the last four years by the Executive on organic conversion in what we all knew was a flawed scheme. This was an artificial exercise in inflating the UK's organic acreage.”

The Scottish Executive set a target of doubling the area of quality land in organic production to 30 per cent by 2007 and so far reckons it has achieved 21 per cent. Overall though there has been a downward trend in Scottish farmland supported by the organic aid scheme since 2003.