



NEWS RELEASE

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Crofters raise the banner in Euro-seed protest

Crofting was raising the banner during a recent protest in Europe against legislation which agriculturalists fear will be a tax on traditional farmers to support multinational seed corporations.

Two young members of the Scottish Crofting Federation, Karen MacRae and Susan Garde Pettie, both from Lochalsh, took part in the protest in Strasbourg while they were attending a training course in the French city.

Karen ended up leading the protest holding one end of the demonstrators' banner which read (in French): 'Free to sow the seeds'. (*Karen is on the left of the banner in the picture*) She said they had gone on the demonstration to help raise awareness of a new law passed by the French Parliament that is putting a tax on farmers who save their own seeds. The benefits of the tax are to go on agricultural research and development.

Karen added: "The farmers' fear is that the tax will support research and development into unwanted genetically modified seeds with the cost of the research being drawn, in part, from traditional farmers who have, for generations, saved their own seeds locally.

"What is important is that although we were protesting in France this is not just a French issue: the feeling among many representative organisations, including the SCF, is that the agri-industrial complex is making a concerted effort to privatise the sources of life.

"Seeds, literally, are the source of life and it is wrong that the rights and controls over seeds should be being placed in the hands of a small number of multinational companies whose focus is on maximising their shareholders' returns. There are real concerns that legislation of this sort will increase their domination of the sources of life."

SCF chief executive, Patrick Krause, said that it was important for the organisation to make links with other groups in Europe which face similar issues to crofters.

He said: "In the UK, because of outbreaks of BSE and foot-and-mouth, we are already very aware of the harm that the irresponsible use of new technologies can cause. But it often seems as if the response of government to problems caused by the agri-industrial complex is to introduce policies that further penalise traditional farming methods and support the very organisations that have been creating the problems in the first place. Crofting agriculture, its culture and the ethos that underpins it can offer a positive alternative to the long-term harm often associated with the irresponsible commoditisation of food production systems."

The protest in Strasbourg was organised by Confédération Paysanne, a confederation of French peasant farmers, and it coincided with a political training course for young people being held in the city by the international peasant farmers movement, Via Campesina.

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