



## **NEWS RELEASE**

**Use: Immediate**

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### **EXPANDING MUTTON MARKET WOULD HELP PRESERVE ENVIRONMENT, SAY ISLAND CROFTERS**

The Scottish Crofting Federation (SCF) has backed calls by island crofters for an expansion in the market for mutton.

Western Isles crofters say the hills and moors on the islands are suffering from lack of grazing, and this situation could be turned round if there was a greater emphasis on mutton for the mainstream market.

Richard MacLennan, who has a small blackface herd in Borge, Harris, says ageing crofters find it hard to gather sheep from the hills.

He said: "Less people work with dogs now. It's hard work to keep a hill flock. There is also a lack of hefted ewes to make good mutton after breeding."

Mr MacLennan is a member of SCF's Scottish Crofting Produce (SCP) mark, a hallmark in quality produce from crofts.

Sandy and Ali Granville, from Tolsta Chaolais, Lewis also rear beef, lamb and mutton under the SCP quality mark, and are convinced there is a latent market for more mutton.

Mrs Granville said: "Our mutton comes from two year old wedders although we also supply some older meat for connoisseurs. They live on beautiful hills and islands, eating heather. It is no wonder they taste so good. We sell to private customers all over the country and they can't get enough of it."

SCF's Donald Murdie said: "If the hills and moors are not grazed, the environmental implications are serious for the islands. The landscape will change irrevocably to scrub and coarse vegetation which is difficult to get back. It also poses a serious fire risk with devastating consequences for ground-nesting birds. Fire would also unleash carbon locked up in the vegetation into the atmosphere."

He added: "More needs to be done to improve the image of mutton including recognition of its qualities from national meat industry.

"We need to show people that it comes from a nature prime animal, naturally reared. It's not just any old sheep."

Ends

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**Notes to editors**

- Pictures can be found at: <http://www.crofting.org>