

Livestock Improvement Scheme axed as interim measures for crofting support announced

The Scottish Executive's commitment to livestock in the crofting areas is drawn into question following the announcement on April 5 of a decision to withdraw the Livestock Improvement Scheme. The Ram Purchase Scheme and the Shetland Ram scheme are to disappear entirely - ironically withdrawn on the same day that the Scottish Executive launched the Voluntary Scrapie Flocks Scheme, designed to encourage higher health status in Scottish sheep. The Bull Hire Scheme, seen by many as fundamental to the support of cattle-keeping in the crofting area, will close - although all existing commitments will be honoured - and be replaced by a grant for the purchase of a bull. This grant scheme and changes announced to the Crofting Counties Agricultural Grants Scheme are interim measures, while the proposed Crofting Development Programme is developed and given legislative status under the yet-to-published Crofting Reform Bill.

Reacting to the Ministers' announcement, SCF Chair Ena McNeill, said "High quality, healthy livestock is crucially important in the crofting area and this scheme has supported great improvements in crofting livestock. The decision to close the ram schemes does not fit with efforts to improve sheep health, particularly in the eradication of scrapie, while the removal of the bull hire scheme threatens all the progress made bringing crofters' cattle to a very high standard. The Bull Hire Scheme has recently seen a year on year increase in use and has helped reverse negative trends in cattle-keeping in some crofting areas. We are concerned and very disappointed by the decision to remove this valuable scheme, which has assisted crofters and crofting

townships improve the quality and health status of cattle and sheep. We hear plenty of rhetoric about the Executive wanting to support remote and fragile crofting areas and keep livestock in the north and the west - we want to see the evidence."

The decision, which appears to run contrary to the policy direction of the Forward Strategy for Scottish Agriculture and the recent CAP reforms, has been widely criticised, not only by the SCF and other crofting groups, but also by auctioneers, beef finishers and environmental organisations. An SAC evaluation and the consultation exercise carried out last year showed enormous support for the retention of the scheme, which is held in very high regard by crofting communities, who also rate very highly the level of service provided by the Commission staff involved in the scheme. Many Highlands and Islands MSPs have joined the SCF in questioning the rationale for this decision and seeking ways in which the position can be improved.

The SCF has written to Deputy Minister Allan Wilson, seeking an urgent meeting to look at ways of mitigating the impact that this decision could have on the crofting area. In particular, as SCF Chief Executive, Patrick Krause, explains, we have been seeking explanation of the real reasons behind this decision. "In order to be fully involved, in the development of a successor scheme, or seeking the re-instatement in a different form of this one, we need transparency. We must be clear why this decision has been made - so far this transparency has been lacking. We are keen to look at all the alternatives - if the scheme can be operated in a different way, by a different

body, or perhaps a crofter-led co-operative, we will look at it."

The details of the Bull Purchase Grant scheme were not announced, but following our own discussions with Scottish Executive officials, we understand that the intention is to bring in consultants to design a scheme based around providing 50% of the purchase price of a sire with particular qualities and health status as part of a programme of planned improvement. Members can be assured that we are demanding to be involved and consulted in the design of any successor scheme, to make sure that a workable and practical scheme can be designed - one that does not undo the good work of the LIS and create additional cost and difficulty.

The news is not all bad, however. Changes announced to the Crofting Counties Agricultural Grants Scheme will bring standard costs up to a more realistic and appropriate level and the 'actual costs' basis of grant will still be available. Although support has gone to 50% for all measures, something not supported in every area, it is likely that the increase in cost rates for measures should ensure that crofters receive about the same



The scheme is well used in Tیره, where buyers flock to buy high quality animals.

levels of support for particular activities. CCAGS support will also go to prior approval, something welcomed in many areas as providing certainty of receiving grant assistance.

Crofters Commission staff have assured us of their desire to develop the Crofting Development Programme in close co-operation with crofting representatives - a positive step in trying to ensure that we end up with the sort of support that crofters and crofting communities need to develop and thrive.

Tarbert AGM hears of successful year of consolidation and stability

The last twelve months have been exceptionally busy for the Scottish Crofting Foundation, with good progress made on many fronts - so heard the Foundation's AGM in Harris on the 18th of March.

Reporting to the meeting, attended by around 70 representatives of branches around the crofting counties, SCF Chair Ena McNeill outlined good progress against all the organisation's strategic

objectives for the year and highlighted particularly the successful reversal of a negative financial trend. Thanks to major efforts in fundraising, the SCF has secured generous support for many aspects of its work, with financial forecasts for the coming year healthy and membership steady. The SCF now receives support from Scottish Natural Heritage, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, NFU Mutual, the Carnegie UK Trust, the Steele Charitable Trust and the Caloustie Gulbenkian Foundation. Ena highlighted the hard work of the small staff in achieving these successes.

Mrs McNeill told the meeting that the organisation was a respected and credible voice for the crofting area and had played a significant role in a variety of policy developments over the last twelve months. In particular the huge programme of consultation meetings with members over the winter had allowed the organisation to put

forward a strongly representative view on CAP reform and changes to crofting support. Intensive work from many office bearers on the Less Favoured Area Support Scheme had seen some small move in the right direction for the coming year. Efforts would continue to have this scheme targeted properly at the most disadvantaged and fragile rural areas. A notable success was the achievement for the whole of the crofting area of derogation from rules on fallen stock. The ongoing support received from MSPs of all parties was exceptionally important for ensuring that the views of crofters were taken seriously in the corridors of power and the SCF was very grateful for efforts undertaken by many political representatives on behalf of crofting.

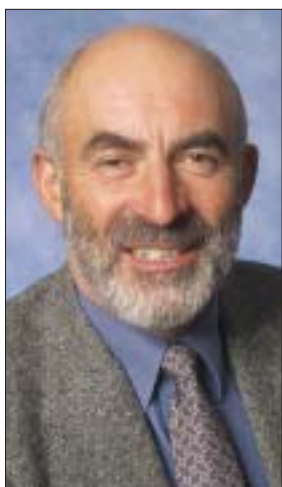
A strong SCF was vital, said Mrs McNeill, to ensure that crofting views were heard. This work could not be done without the enormous commitment of members and all office bearers who gave

willingly of their own time to organise and attend meetings and represent crofting interests from European to local level - many away from home for days at a time. In particular Mrs McNeill paid thanks to retiring Directors Hector MacLeod, Iain D MacLeod and Mairi MacFarlane.

New Directors John Laing from Harloch, Skye and Donald Linton from Glencruitten, Oban were welcomed to the Board, elected unopposed.



Donald Linton



John Laing

A WORD FROM THE CHAIR

"The weather forecast and the bull", that's the answer my sister Agnes gave to her friends when asked, "What was happening in North Uist when you were home for Easter holidays?" At that time the Department bull (usually a Shorthorn or Highlander) was housed in the township bull house and the cows were haltered and brought to the bull. My father's stackyard was used as the bulling place, so the men discussed crofting while the bull got on with the job. At 12:55 pm the weather forecast would be on the radio so the women got the orders to listen carefully - of course they would often forget, so their usual answer would be, "South West wind, showers and bright periods!" Nothing unusual there.

So once again the bull has been the focus of discussion and we're all dismayed at what has been happening. Surely a scheme that has worked so well for 103 years could continue?

Balmacara headquarters has been extremely busy since I last wrote - you will read about all our involvement in policy work on other pages. After a very enjoyable and successful conference in Harris, there is a very positive feeling around. Taking stock of views expressed at the conference, it was clear that an issue of great concern to members is housing - both the issues of multiple housing development on croft in-bye land swallowing up areas of good ground and the parallel need for affordable rural housing to enable our young people to stay and our communities to thrive. There was strong support for SCF to play a more pro-active role in the housing debate and come up with suggestions of how we wish to see housing developed in the area. Many people seemed to support looking at options for providing housing opportunities on the common grazings as one way of dealing with both issues and following on from discussions at the conference, the SCF is proposing to hold a seminar on housing in the crofting area to explore all the options and possibilities.

We will have a new face soon in the office to replace Carol Anne who is leaving to get her house built and get busy on the croft. We will miss her, but as she's not too far from Balmacara she will be popping in for a cup of tea and no doubt keeping us all right.

Office staff, office bearers, and area representatives have all been consulting each other on important issues, and those views and decisions have been conveyed to the proper channels. Obviously we can't win every battle but I know many of you will be delighted that home kill is allowed once more. We must ensure that this is not abused. We are waiting for the local authority to clarify rules on the disposal of waste.

Crofting work is seasonal; there are lots of calves and lambs on the ground and many of you have planted the crops of corn and potatoes. I wish you all a prosperous, productive growing season. It will soon be time for peat cutting but I think this heavy rainfall will delay that.

To all of you out there, my sincere thanks for all the hard work that goes on representing crofting and our way of life.

A GROWING BUSINESS

John Bannister - Secretary of SCF's Sleat & Strath Branch and Secretary of the Skye and Lochalsh Horticultural Development Association - discusses a growing trend toward crofting commercial horticulture.

How times change. Some ten or so years ago the word horticulture was rarely heard in crofting circles and the thought of commercial horticulture running alongside or instead of livestock production was unthinkable. This flies in the face of historic fact since our forebears sustained their families using their horticultural skills among other means of making their living. Of course the range of species produced then would not have been as widely available as it is today but nevertheless real horticultural skills were very evident in former crofting times. There are many reasons why these skills became lost in the intervening years, but that's another story best told through the writings of the late F Fraser-Darling and his book 'Crofting Agriculture' (1947).

Thanks to persistent work by the Skye and Lochalsh Horticultural Development Association, which is mainly made up of crofters, the 'H' word is rapidly entering the consciousness of even the diehards who ten or so years ago would have dismissed the idea as preposterous. Seasonal production of fruit and vegetables can and does fit very comfortably with the yearly round of a livestock enterprise, given certain safeguards against unwanted entry by livestock or wildstock (deer and/or rabbits). Whilst not suggesting for one moment that it is easy, it can nevertheless be seen in the light of current experience and practice to be a genuinely sound crofting venture.

In the context of crofting horticulture we are not here talking about lettuce ranches, potato prairies or endless strawberry fields - that is not possible in the environment and landscape in which we operate. We are here talking about growing fruit and vegetables at a relatively low capital outlay on a very small scale - whatever can be practically fitted into the land we have available - preferably inbye near the house. Trial plots of house vegetables make a worthwhile start and are especially welcomed at the table of visitors who, for instance, would go into raptures about a freshly dug carrot that snaps instead of bending, strawberries picked moments before serving, the flavour of rare potato varieties, progressing toward more and more different species and varieties in the years to follow. On the way there will be problems and frustrations aplenty but invaluable practical experience will be gained nevertheless, and no short-cut can be found or any book that I know which specifically deals with the way we have to grow our crops in the Highlands and Islands (excepting Mr Fraser-Darling's masterpiece, alas now long out of print). At this stage surplus produce can either be sold or given away to friends and neighbours.

Sooner or later, the would-be grower needs to consider either to give up the idea altogether (after all it's not for everyone); just simply produce for his or her own family needs and not sell at all; or take it seriously and grow for a localised market - those same friends and neighbours, passing croft-gate trade, local hotels, restaurants and shops or even a farmers (crofters) market. There is



Small areas of ground can produce a wide variety of crops for local markets.

potentially a huge market for seasonal fresh local produce, as any grower in Skye and Lochalsh can testify. If the growers in Skye and Lochalsh have any problem at all it is their ability to grow enough to satisfy the market demand and that demand grows year on year as local production gains a justifiable reputation for its freshness and quality.

The would-be crofter/grower may prefer to operate on his or her own but there are very good reasons for joining together with other growers. For instance: a group of growers can bulk purchase inputs (seed, fertilizer, sundries, machines, polytunnels) at good discount or reduced transport costs; the peaks and troughs of production can be levelled through such a group network (a shortfall in one area can be made-up from a surplus in another); training needs can be analysed, devised and accessed locally; marketing (not easy to

grow and market at the same time) and, not forgetting the all-important mutual help (available at almost every level), sharing experience and meeting together in a social setting. These are just a few of the many advantages of working together. It works in Skye and Lochalsh and I see no reason why it should not work elsewhere.

If you think that the growing of fruit and vegetables would be a limited activity then look at this random, alphabetic list of produce regularly grown (organic and orthodox), typically in the open, throughout a geographic spread of Skye and Lochalsh:-

FRUIT: apples (Several Scottish varieties of cooking and eating); blackberry (cultivated bramble and associated varieties); currant (several varieties of black and red); gooseberries; heathland berries (bil', blue', cran'); pears; raspberry (various); strawberry (various).

VEGETABLES: artichokes (globe and Jerusalem); asparagus; beans (broad, French and runner); beet: beetroot; brassicas (broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, cauliflower and kale); carrots; celeriac; celery; kohlrabi; leeks; lettuce; marrow (including courgettes, squash and pumpkin); onions and shallots; parsnip; peas (mangetout and petit pois); potatoes (63 varieties of early, second early, main crop and salad); radish; rhubarb; spinach; swede and turnip; herbs (many and various); others (Chinese leaves, chives, coriander, fennel, parsley, water and land cress).

To the amazement of many folk these crops can be grown successfully to a high quality in many crofting areas and whilst the principles of horticulture remain constant wherever you are, the techniques and methods applied do need the practical experience and knowledge gained from working the land where it is. The latter could be the subject of another article or even an as yet unwritten book on the subject.

This leads me to the subject of shelter and the weather (something we know a thing or two about). Today's polytunnel technology is very advanced and many crofters have found a commercial-size polytunnel to be invaluable and so flexible in use. Again the mix of livestock and horticulture can make the polytunnel a year-round asset to the crofter. Imagine a warm, dry and light environment in which to work on anything from the occasional construction project, poultry run, lambing/calving shed, feed and hay store and in the spring, summer and early autumn months the growing of salads (lettuce, rocket, land cress, etc), tomatoes, cucumbers, peppers, courgettes, strawberries, raspberries and even grapes. The topic of polytunnels also needs much further discussion than I have space for here and which I shall probably write one day soon in the comfort of my own tunnel on a sunny spring afternoon, whilst listening to the radio with a mug of tea to hand. It's a hard life!

WESTER ROSS CROFTING INITIATIVE

The Scottish Crofting Foundation has been involved in the development of a new pilot scheme aimed at helping crofting communities in Wester Ross to stimulate and bring forward development proposals. Communities will be supported and encouraged to work up ideas and prepare plans for the future use of croft land and other local resources. Sponsored by the Crofters Commission, Highland Council, Ross and Cromarty Enterprise and Scottish Natural Heritage, with the backing of the Wester Ross Alliance, the project aims to ensure a co-ordinated approach to crofting community development.

Ewen MacKinnon, SCF Director and Highland Councillor for Lochcarron

said: "This is a practical scheme to help local crofting communities develop plans for their own future and guide them through the process of identifying and securing funds to take them forward. With our commitment to ensuring viable and active rural communities, the SCF is very supportive, recognising the need for local developments to be instigated and driven within our communities. We encourage people in the area to get together and consider how best to take advantage of this opportunity."

Given the important role of crofting within the area, townships and communities with the most appropriate outline proposals will be assisted to develop and deliver their initial plans. Assistance of up to £5000 can be made available to further develop these plans, with advice and support available from the sponsors to enable proposals to be taken forward. If successful this approach may become

more common in the future but initially there may be a limit to the number of communities that can be assisted.

John Toal, Commission Development Manager for the area, explains: "Our intent is to attract new funding opportunities for crofting and ensure more rounded development. While looking at new ideas and directions, this initiative will remain structured around the essential requirements for crofting communities."

Development proposals should have three main aims: **maintaining and developing croft land, improving the viability of crofting communities, and ensuring community commitment.** Proposed activities should have support within the crofting community, with a representative group of participants and a realistic prospect of being taken forward.

John Toal concluded: "As with anything worthwhile there will be a need for time and commitment. However, we will

look at ways of ensuring that there will be guidance and help for both project planning and delivery. Involvement will allow your crofting community to explore new opportunities and possibly source additional help and funding. Your time and commitment will be part of the investment in developing the future of your townships and community."

Interest may be expressed within a single crofting township or by a group of townships forming an identifiable community or geographic area. Further information and the opportunity to discuss initial ideas will be available to any interested township or community. All that is required initially is to make contact with John Toal, Development Manager, Crofters Commission, 4-6 Castle Wynd, Inverness, IV2 3EQ. Tel: 01463 663 426. E-mail: john.toal@crofterscommission.org.uk, or Crofting Foundation HQ.

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CAP REFORM - THE OUTCOMES, IMPLICATIONS AND PROCESS

Since the announcement on implementation of CAP reform in Scotland, the SCF has been heavily involved in ongoing discussions about the implications of these decisions and work to develop the detail. In our initial response to the CAP consultation we supported decoupling, but only on the basis that sufficient support is targeted through other mechanisms to ensure that the importance of viable crofting and farming in remote and peripheral areas and small units is properly recognised. Much of our ongoing work involves the detail of the beef National Envelope and Pillar 2 - or Rural Development - measures to ensure that this support is available and properly targeted. We are also closely involved in the issue of cross-compliance standards, which will have to be followed by all those in receipt of the new Single Farm Payment.

We were called to give evidence to a Parliamentary Committee enquiry examining the direction of the reforms and looking at some of the detailed mechanisms and have been attending the numerous stakeholder groups dealing with various CAP issues, liaising with other organisations who may share some of our views and ensuring that MSPs are briefed on the various issues.

The Decisions

The outline decisions on the implementation of CAP reform in Scotland, announced on February 12 by Allan Wilson, Deputy Minister for Rural Affairs, mean that from January 2005 direct support will be fully decoupled and paid on the basis of historic claims in the 2000-02 period. This applies to payments in the so-called Pillar 1 - the main headage and arable subsidy schemes.

The SCF had been one of a number of Highlands and Islands organisations calling for a gradual move over time away from an historic system, which distributes support very unevenly. Our views in the respect have been heard at least to some extent, with the Deputy Minister recognising the longer-term difficulty in justifying this basis of payments and promising that this would be reviewed 'at the earliest possible opportunity'.

In evidence to a Scottish Parliament Committee enquiry the Foundation said: "[We] welcome the Deputy Minister's recognition... that the historic basis of payments is not justifiable in the longer term... The Minister recognised that this is not a long-term solution, but part of a process of evolution: this view is shared by the SCF."

"Direct support payments are currently very unevenly distributed, with the more intensive systems in receipt of the largest support payments, while the more extensive receive less. This system, as of course is to be expected, bears no relationship to the delivery of public goods - it would be surprising and entirely by chance if it did. What this means, in effect, is that the management of agricultural land is rewarded at enormously

different levels at the moment - without any reflection on the public benefits delivered by any particular system. In Fife, the average payment per hectare for every hectare of agricultural land is £181; in Lothian the figure is £144. Whereas, in Shetland land management is carried out for only £24/Ha, in the Highland area this falls to £15/Ha and in the Western Isles, the figure is £9. We do not believe it to be the case that a farmer in Fife delivers 20 times the public benefit of a crofter in the Western Isles."

The SCF submission continued: "There is also a marked discrepancy between the nearly 10,000 smallest producers (or 47% of Scottish producers) who between them currently receive 4.2% of the total budget and the 389 largest farming enterprises, which while accounting for 1.9% of Scottish producers, receive 17.3% of the total annual budget. While these differences may be expected in a production-based system, they become increasingly difficult to justify once the link with production is broken. Hence the reason that the SCF and others have been advocating and continue to advocate a gradual move away from a purely historic payment model."

Mr Wilson also announced an intention to use a beef National Envelope and modulation of at least 10%. The Foundation welcomed the decision to use a National Envelope for beef to mitigate against the effects of decoupling in the short term and ensure protection for suckler systems which are important for the protection and enhancement of the environment. In our evidence to the Parliamentary committee, we stated: "Many extensive and high-nature-value farming systems with a good cattle/sheep mix are found in upland and remote areas, and we believe it is crucial to retain and encourage mixed agriculture in these areas through targeted use of the beef National Envelope. Many of these systems are very fragile and will be lost unless immediate and effective support is made available when payments are decoupled."

Modulation of 'at least 10%' is made up of two components. 5% is compulsory European modulation, of which every producer's first 5000 Euros of the Single Farm Payment is exempt. The other component of modulation is Scottish-level modulation. The SCF had advocated that a similar exemption be applied, but this was not favoured and the Scottish modulation will apply to all support received. In practice, this means that many crofters and those on small units will only contribute through the Scottish modulation. The use to which the

modulated - or rural development - money will be put is one of the key focuses of attention, now and for the next eighteen months at least, as measures are developed for the short-term and also for the longer-term goal of introducing Land Management Contracts. Crofting should be in a very strong position to benefit from this funding and we will do as much as possible to make sure that the benefit of this money and the match funding it attracts is felt in the crofting area.

As well as groups discussing National Envelope proposals, Cross-compliance measures and the development of Land Management Contracts, a group is also discussing the details of implementing rules, including entitlement trading and the use of National Reserve. Options under some detailed issues will out for consultation shortly. The SCF participates in all these groups with many members involved in the discussions and teleconferences over what our views should be on particular proposals. One or two people then take these views forward to stakeholder meetings in Edinburgh.

These groups include representatives from a wide range of organisations with very different standpoints, so discussions can be heated on occasions and we can only ensure that our voice is heard. Whether or not our view is taken up is outwith our control, but we are trying hard to have our points accepted in what are basically political discussions, trying to present logical arguments, forming alliances with other organisations where relevant, and ensuring that MSPs are well briefed.

There is still a great deal to be done just to finalise the reform package that will be in place from January 1, but it is also clear that this is far from the end of the process. We can expect to be debating further CAP reform issues in years to come.

Members seeking general information on CAP reform are asked to speak in the first instance to their branch or area representatives.

Delight as Food Standards Agency rewrites Private Kills Guidance

SCF Director Norman Leask welcomes FSA Scotland's new interpretation of rules on home kill for your own consumption.

Killing an animal for your own domestic consumption is deemed lawful again in specified circumstances, following a revision of FSA guidelines. This is welcomed by SCF, members were concerned about rules which prevented the humane slaughter of an animal for your own private consumption.

The new definition of the guidance issued in March means that provided rules on animal welfare at slaughter, removal of specified risk material (SRM) and disposal of by-products are fully adhered to, a crofter can himself dispatch an animal for consumption by his own family. The meat may not be sold in the course of a business, which is particularly relevant to those running bed and breakfast establishments. The position of itinerant slaughterman is not currently clear - depending on whether or not a court would judge a 'sale' to have taken place in the killing and dressing of an animal.

First interpretation of the guidelines developed under a European Regulation on Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathies had seen home kill for your own domestic consumption outlawed. Growing food for your own family is an important part of crofting and in many areas - perhaps particularly Shetland - there was widespread

concern over the application of these rules. The first interpretation of the rules meant that the very best of extensively-reared, fully traceable home-grown meat could not go for human consumption, even within your own household.

It had remained traditional practice in Shetland, as in many other crofting areas with limited slaughterhouse provision, to kill an animal or two a year to provide meat for your own table. As well as fresh meat, this would also provide you with reestit mutton, where the meat is salted and dried - each family having its own unique recipe. This new guidance will allow this tradition to continue.

As we have been advocating in the discussions on transportation of animals, we should be thinking about trying to minimise unnecessary long-distance transport of animals. Of course, many journeys are unavoidable, particularly in store-producing areas such as ours; but this is an instance of where transport can be minimised, with potential animal welfare advantages, provided that the welfare of the animal at slaughter is a principle concern.

It is very important for the maintenance of this situation that we do adhere fully to the other rules on welfare, SRM and disposal of by-products. The definition and disposal requirements of specified risk material and other by-products should be ascertained from the local authority, which has a duty to enforce the legislation.



Farewell to Carol Anne

Among the presentations made at the annual dinner was one to Carol Anne Stewart, who, after three years on the staff, has decided to spend more time getting her Balmacara croft in order, building her house and seeing more of her son before he sets off for school. Carol Anne has admirably filled the roles of administrative assistant, then finance manager for the organisation. She joined the SCU in April 2001 and will be known to many members as the friendly and helpful voice on the end of the phone.

The organisation of events like the conference and AGM had benefited from Carol Anne's motivation and enthusiasm, said SCF Chair Ena McNeill. Making the presentation of an engraved Caithness glass bowl, Ena thanked Carol Anne for all her hard work and effort on behalf of the SCF and wished her well for the future.



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L'agneau d'Ecosse !

Kyle of Sutherland Branch secretary Russell Smith from Drumbhan, Bonar Bridge describes his recent visit to the Paris Show.

"L'Ecosse est renommée pour sa nature vierge, son air frais, et ses grandes espaces."

The Office des Viandes d'Ecosse (aka Quality Meat Scotland) had backed a group of farmers to carry out a fact-finding visit to the SIA agricultural show in Paris and feed back information on potential market opportunities to the rest of the industry. It was an opportunity to talk to French producers, to learn how they do things and what their consumers want. Would I be able to offer a crofting perspective to my fellow producers? Mais oui, bien sûr, indeed! So after a hectic two days with a party of Scottish farmers (with me as the one crofter) here are my thoughts

The Paris Show is huge. Think of the size of the Royal Highland Show but without the machinery and all indoors and in the centre of Paris. It is the showcase of the French livestock industry and brings animals and meat production to the city dweller. There is an explicit link between fluffy, cuddly animals running around fields and joints of meat – the main livestock hall had live animals on one side of the aisle and carcasses hanging up on the other. They have meat-tasting sessions - like whisky tasting but with meat where an expert leads the tasting and educates the audience. Politicians attend and get photographed holding woolly lambs because there are votes in being farmer friendly. The place was packed on both days we were there and it runs for over a week.

And the animals are huge – there was a 1,689 kg Blonde d'Aquitaine bull and a 527 kg Genisse Main-Anjou carcass on display. There is a range of breeds that I had never heard of, sheep like Rava, Romanov, Rouge de l'Ouest and Cotentin with not a Cheviot or Blackface in sight. The Texels and Charollais were more familiar.

QMS and the other devolved bodies' stand was the only non-French presence anywhere in the halls. QMS's Market Development Manager Lauren Vernet headed up the Scottish activities.

The cooking demos were particularly well attended – délicieux! A couple of people were on the stand representing Wales and no-one was there from England. There were a couple of Border Leicesters (which were sold on the first day) and two Lleyn on display. The French buy on taste and will pay a premium for home-produced meat. Purchases are judged on the quality of the meat not on how the animal was reared.

They eat cuts that either would never sell or are not allowed in Britain. We didn't try the cheek meat, intestine sausages, calves feet, or cockscombs. The Paris meat market is a modern building with all the latest in technology for handling carcasses. The whole building is fitted out to act as a cold store. It was quietening down

when we got there at about 06.00 but was still very busy.

Overall in the EU, lamb consumption is up by 1% while production is down by 1.5%, so there must be an opportunity there

The French livestock industry is dominated by small producers. There is very little traffic through live auctions and most farmers finish their own lambs. Around 50% of production goes through co-operatives, owned by the local farmers. The co-ops slaughter and process the meat, negotiate with supermarkets and market the meat. The co-ops provide a guaranteed outlet for member farmers at a fair price with some of the annual price fluctuations ironed out plus a share of the profits. They also share expertise, and give advice to raise standards. Members must follow good practice or they are out of the co-op. Around two thirds of output goes to the supermarkets and one third to butchers.

There are lots of small local abattoirs throughout the country, which helps their PGI (Protected Geographical Indication) status as animals are raised and slaughtered in the same geographical region.

Some producers go for three lambings per year so that they can have lambs of the right weight and age to meet the market demands for the three key times of the year: Easter, the barbeque season in summer and Christmas. Being warmer than us they are not tied to an annual cycle of lambing with the spring grass and sales in the autumn. Ewes are kept outside but lambs are finished indoors.

Labelling standards are different from here for example we saw meat in supermarkets labelled as "vache latier" - dairy cow.

A major problem for the industry is the ageing population of sheep farmers (does this sound familiar?). There are half a million farmers of all types in France which gives them a fair amount of political clout. There is seven million quota for six million sheep so they have room to expand. Shoppers will pay a premium for French produced lamb since consumers support home production (that doesn't sound so familiar!) at about 1 / kg. France is not self-sufficient, so again there is room for the sheep industry to expand. They say that they don't mind imports from Scotland provided it is a quality product sold at a premium price, so it doesn't undercut home production and lower the price their producers get. Lamb is in decline in France – other meats are more popular – and the sheep industry is doing tasting sessions for Parisians at the show, some of whom have never tasted lamb before.

The French are trying to manage the switch from production based subsidies and have gone for 50% partial decoupling so as not to give everything away at once. They reckon that more changes will come and so have kept something back for bargaining later. It also gives people time to change (if they want to) while

encouraging expansion of production since they are not self sufficient in lamb.

All the French producers we spoke to considered a quality mark such as a PGI to be essential so they could command a premium price. Within French schemes there is not the same emphasis on animal welfare as in Britain and their schemes seem to be based on product quality not production standards. The geographic part of the PGI is based on French regions (Aquitaine, Bretagne etc) not on France as a whole. The top scheme is Label Rouge which covers all sorts of foods: only about 5% of production makes it into the scheme and so it gets a big premium. There are strict conditions, eg born & bred on same unit, no powdered milks, less than a certain age, and the product is table tasted regularly. The scheme is (we were told) open to Scotch lamb producers to apply for Label Rouge and so get a premium per kilo with lambs selling to £100!

An integral part of the PGI is for the animal to be born, reared and slaughtered in one country – hence the arguments about English beef being finished in Scotland or Scottish lamb which is finished in England. The French are keen on Scotch lamb not on UK lamb or English lamb because of image, the tradition, and the quality. (We did try to find out if the Auld Alliance meant anything to the French but it didn't seem to or maybe our language skills weren't up to explaining what we meant.) Maybe they would buy UK-branded lamb but at a lower price. Traceability is also a key factor in a quality scheme along with farm assurance and geography.

Incidentally, the images used in advertising Scotch lamb are all of the Highlands, not the rest of Scotland. There is a picture of Eilean Donan castle in the Agneau D'Ecosse brochure and a poster on the stand showed a couple of Cheviots in Lochinver with Suilven in the background. Tartan is everywhere and the fresh air and wide-open spaces quoted in my opening surely refer to the Highlands. Should we be making more of the "crofting" brand with its positive image of grass-fed, outdoor-raised animals, non-intensive farming systems, and sustainability. Shouldn't we register the trademark and get rid of the crofter bistros, crofter pies, crofter karaoke and all the other excesses!

A Protected Geographical Indication is vital for the export market (to show product quality) and for the home market (to show animal welfare) and so must be protected. To qualify, animals must be born, raised and processed in Scotland. The animals must be produced and slaughtered in accordance with Quality Assurance schemes accredited to European Standard EN45011 (ISO Guide 65), using the same standards as the Specially Selected Assurance Schemes.

We may not agree with all the rules in the farm assurance certification scheme but we do need

something to demonstrate production standards, including guarantees to consumers on animal welfare. The scheme is optional. There are still markets for non-farm-assured stock - perhaps to local butchers or English finishers, but we hope to get a premium price for farm-assured animals. One cattle breeder reckons that being farm assured gives him £45 per head more at auction. There are other schemes available such as the Soil Association or Genesis Schemes, so you have to pick the one that suits you. And the Quality Assured Producers Scheme part of SAPS more than paid for the membership last year. We should make sure that the Crofting Foundation's voice is heard when the rules of the scheme are being revised. What is good practice for a farmer with 2,000 ewes and 200 cattle near a big city might be completely over the top for a crofter with 50 ewes at the end of a single track road with no neighbours within 10 miles.

If PGI status is vital then it needs to be consistent – so that a finisher can't buy from non-assured producers and pass them off as farm-assured by mixing in with other lots from farm-assured holdings. This is easier to monitor for cattle than for sheep. 94% of cattle producers are in a scheme but only 82% of sheep producers. Do crofters see farm assurance as a benefit or as just another tax? Do we need to see premium prices at Lairg, Fort William, Thurso and Dingwall for farm assured store lambs in order to convince us?

One effect might be to encourage us to finish more – especially now we have the Scotch Premier abattoir in Dornoch. This will keep jobs and profits in the Highlands.

The French are very keen on their co-ops. Should we not be doing more to co-operate in finishing, marketing, purchasing, sharing machinery and providing technical help? Does QMS have a role in establishing co-ops (since their aim is to improve the profitability of the Scottish livestock industry)?

The French are keen on product assurance rather than production assurance. This is more difficult in our industry where store producers do not deal with the abattoirs. How do we feedback from slaughterhouse to finisher on the quality of carcass and then feedback from finisher to store producer? Individual tagging means that this is theoretically possible, but it is practically very difficult when a finisher can be buying 20 lots from 15 different producers. So we have to stick with production assurance, i.e. certifying the quality of production as a guarantee (or at least an indication) of quality of the meat and so we can convince consumers here in Britain that animal welfare standards have been met.

Because if farmers and crofters don't set the standards, then someone else will. And it might be Margaret Beckett or the RSPB!

And finally, thanks to Laurent and Kathy and Quality Meat Scotland – I have eventually caught up on my sleep.

Growing the beast

Patrick Krause, reports good progress over his first year in post.

It has been a year since I joined the SCF as Chief Executive. My brief for the first year was about tending to the core of the business with the emphasis being on consolidation and stabilisation.

We have seen the Board reformed, the Areas Advisory Council active and involved in policy formation and the creation of Policy Working Groups. We have re-employed and developed the post of Crofting Environment Officer and have created the post of Volunteer Support Worker. Using this structure we have had very active and inclusive consultation and have made remarkable progress in representing the interests of crofters at national level.

It cannot be over emphasised that this is entirely dependant on the hard graft of individuals, office-bearers and staff, from board to branch, who give up their time for the crofting cause. Our thanks to all.

And if the people are the life of the organisation, then the funding is the blood. We have been successful in getting some financial support from development agencies and trusts, which has enabled the organisation to carry on in its business. We have turned the corner and are now on track to balance our accounts this year, or even to generate a small surplus.

And now we have to look to develop, both operationally and financially. We need to put on weight. Finding funding to realise our ambitions is a time-consuming task, and one that has to be done from both the HQ and at branch level. At the central level we are concentrating on finding further funding for the environment officer post, for a crofting advice line, for our consultation operations and more.

But to compliment this we need to also look at developing at local level. Many funding agencies specialise in community projects and there are many opportunities for branches to attract funds for local initiatives and for the organisational development of the branches. If you are interested in sourcing funds for your branch, please get in touch with me.

For the organisation to be as effective as possible, it needs to grow from the grass-roots level.

IT'S CENSUS TIME AGAIN

The next Census is scheduled to take place in June this year, and the SCF encourages all members to ensure that they complete and return their census forms.

CAP Reform and the Animal Health and Welfare Strategy mean that it is even more important than usual that a good response is forthcoming. Dr Andrew Moxey, SEERAD's Head of Analytical Services Division explains: "It would be very helpful to have a comprehensive snapshot of agricultural land and livestock to assist in both implementation of the Single Farm Payment and on-going veterinary activities.

Due to some changes to our internal business procedures, the Census form will be slightly different from previous years. This is mainly due to our attempts to better join-up farm information between different parts of SEERAD, such that we all use the same data and farmers only need tell one bit of SEERAD once if something changes, not different parts several times."

The Foundation welcomes any attempt to streamline bureaucracy, and we hope members will take the time to complete their forms, which may result in less form filling in the future.

What does cross-compliance mean for you?

Part of the CAP reform agreed in Brussels requires all those in receipt of agricultural support payments to comply with a particular set of conditions. Receipt of subsidy will be dependent on adherence to 18 existing pieces of legislation some of which, like the Birds Directive, have been in place for many years.

The new aspect of cross-compliance rules is the requirement to maintain ground in Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition (GAEC). These cross-compliance standards are developed at Scottish level from a European framework, which is

based around avoiding soil erosion, protecting soil organic matter, soil structure and ensuring a minimum level of maintenance.

A working group, in which the SCF was represented by John Laing, met to consider the interpretation of this framework in Scotland and proposals were drawn up by SEERAD following the discussions of the group. These proposals now form a consultation document, open for views until the May 21 and available from SEERAD offices or on the Scottish Executive website, and linked from the SCF site. All SCF branch office-bearers should also have a copy of the consultation document.

In general, the 23 measures proposed seem for the most part pretty reasonable, although local circumstances may mean that particular measures might be more problematic in some areas than in other. In order to put together a representative view from members, we would like to hear your views. The need for local flexibility, the definition of permanent pasture and a number of issues regarding common land are likely to be some of the main issues mentioned in the SCF response.

A draft response will be circulated to all Branches shortly. Please feed in your views.

Over Thirty-Months (OTM) Rule Review

Last July the Food Standards Agency (FSA) advised Ministers that it would be acceptable to replace the OTM rule with BSE testing of OTM cattle. This followed completion of a twelve-week public consultation exercise and discussion at the Agency's Open Board meeting on 10 July 2003. Since then, the Agency and Defra have been helping Ministers to understand more about the background and risk assessments. On 2nd April 2004 the Risk Assessment Group (RAG) met for an initial look at information which has emerged since the Agency gave its advice to Health Ministers last year and this will be discussed further by SEAC at the end of April.

Although the OTM Rule review process has taken longer than initially anticipated, it is to be expected that Ministers should give the matter very careful and detailed consideration. Meanwhile, Rural Affairs Ministers have decided not to go ahead with a cohort cull of pre-August 1996 BSE cases. As a result, UK cattle born before that date will remain permanently excluded from the food supply.

Once Ministers agree the way forward, implementation of their decision will take at least six months. In the meantime the Agency's advice on OTM rule change remains the same.

Published papers are available on the FSA website at www.food.gov.uk and the latest information is also available on the Defra OTM Review website at www.defra.gov.uk/animalh/bse/otmreview.htm.

LEWIS AND HARRIS SHEEP PRODUCERS ASSOCIATION

Calum Angus Mitchell, LHSPA coordinator, describes the achievements of the organisation.

Formed in 1998, the Lewis and Harris Sheep Producers Association (LHSPA) now has over 100 members and is growing in strength. Initially it was set up by a group ably led by SCF director Neil MacLeod, to assist Lewis and Harris crofters who were keen to use ewe pregnancy-scanning technology. Since then it has developed to co-ordinate this annual service. In February 2004 5,874 ewes were scanned, and a range of short courses were arranged on animal husbandry, breed development and the production of quality lamb for store and meat markets.

In 2002 the LHSPA and its sister organisation the Lewis and Harris Cattle Producers Group - with assistance from Ian Cairns, local College of Agriculture Advisor, and other professional bodies - took on the running of the Long Island Auction Mart at Steinish near Stornoway, in partnership with Dingwall & Highland Marts Ltd, on a 10 year lease from Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, following the liquidation of the previous company Lewis and Harris Auction Marts Ltd. Run entirely through the voluntary input of the management committee and members, this was a huge undertaking but one that was absolutely critical for the future of sheep and cattle production in Lewis and Harris.

The area had witnessed the decline of livestock auctions from weekly to autumn sales, and crofters were being threatened with the closure of their remaining island slaughterhouse. The situation clearly required urgent attention, not only to halt a failing crofting economy but also to start addressing the real problems affecting the sector and implement a realistic strategy for the future development of the industry and its key stakeholders and assets.

In early Spring 2004, the association was successful in gaining significant funding through the Action 35 Initiative (A Strategic Framework for Crofting and Farming in the Western Isles) to appoint someone whose role would be to coordinate and progress the aims and work of the LHSPA on behalf of its membership.

I knew some of the LHSPA members and was aware of their achievements and determination not to allow crofting in Lewis and Harris to collapse and die! They were people who made things happen, and they were the people who were there to meet me in the October morning darkness to accept my lambs and a few thousand

others at Steinish Mart; checking-in and directing each crofter's trailer load and process movement documents in duplicate - in the rain! Behind the scenes these people had overcome all the hurdles, health and safety checks and SEERAD regulations, plus the advertising and bureaucracy that is involved in running a livestock sale. Yes, there were buyers there too, not enough, but quality lambs came within striking their £1/kg target price.

I was happy, as were most of the crofters around me. If this could be achieved with voluntary input what could they achieve if they were really set loose, we wondered in the cafeteria afterwards? This determined bunch of men and women had even found time to get the caterers in as well ... and they were not finished yet! Another accomplishment marked the association's high point in 2003 when they secured an agreement with the local Coop Supermarket in Stornoway, to begin again the sale of quality local lamb, albeit on a limited basis.

The future of the islands' crofting economy had at last taken a major step forward with crofters who had invested in Quality Farm Assurance Standards being rewarded with carcass prices in excess of £3 per kilo! It was therefore with considerable excitement that I read the advert for the post of LHSPA coordinator in the local press last February. I did not want to lose the opportunity to become involved with these people and their association. I was immediately on the phone requesting an application form. Later in the month I attended the job interviews and was appointed coordinator of the LHSPA!

My name is Calum Angus Mitchell and I am currently in my final term of a three-year BSc course in Rural Development at the Lews Castle College campus of the UHL. I was born and raised in the crofting township of Brue on the West Side of Lewis, 11 miles west of Stornoway and as they tell me in these parts "I've got sheep in the blood!" Before I had the strength to hold my father and grandfather's Blackface ewes I knew I wanted to be working with these tough but likeable animals and the people who breed them, many of whom possess similarly commendable characteristics. Already my work has involved undertaking a comprehensive questionnaire survey of the LHSPA membership whose stock range from a few sheep to a few hundred. I am quickly realising that there is

quite a lot more to the Long Island than I knew only a few months ago.

The scenery and environment in which so much of members' stock is raised is enough to make any self-respecting, quality restaurant owner and chef simply drool - and LHSPA members intend to give them the opportunity to do just that! Of course some notable personalities in the hotel and catering trade have known that for years, and have built an international reputation on serving this quality produce to clientele who appreciate and savour it as much as LHSPA members do.

In 2004, the LHSPA aim to build on the success of the management group's achievements to date and I hope to be involved in progressing a range of educational, training, health, development, and marketing initiatives aimed at adding value to the local sheep sector and securing improved returns for LHSPA members. Training will include courses on stock development and health, quality farm assurance, tup/ewe dressing, tup 'MOT', lambing and shearing, carcass assessment and other innovative ideas allowing members 'to walk the food line' with local lamb produce. Achieving this requires a lot of work, coordination plus commitment from LHSPA members. We also need to provide what the markets require, and increasingly that includes Quality Farm Assured, well-finished lamb.

Analysis of the LHSPA members' survey makes interesting reading - not only about the membership's own profile but about the investments many have made in recent years despite desperately disheartening returns for their efforts and little political interest or support in tackling their problems. Amongst members' main concerns is the closure of the local abattoir for more than half the year, depriving local crofters of an important spring market, and confining them instead to back-end glut sales when prices are traditionally not at their best. To have a sustainable future, Lewis and Harris crofters must have abattoir facilities available on the island from at least August to April.

And that takes us to another huge problem affecting members - The Minch, and the excessively high ferry and freight charges to take livestock, feedstock and produce on or off the islands. Two recent examples illustrate the situation: It costs £123 to transport one tup from Ullapool to Stornoway pier and it costs at least £15 plus VAT to transport one big round £10 hay bale from Inverness to Stornoway - absurd, yes;

sustainable, no way!

As a young crofter who has been studying 'rural development' issues for three years, I welcome the opportunity to be given the chance to assist fellow crofters take on these seemingly insurmountable difficulties. So many of my age group are departing the islands, as governments and development agencies are scratching their heads watching a falling population materialise in front of their eyes - yet the lamb on Stornoway's supermarket shelves this spring has travelled half-way-around the world and proudly tells islanders that it is 'Produce of New Zealand!'

Meanwhile Lewis and Harris lambs graze on the crofts and hills within sight of the ferries that bring in their Kiwi cousins to the shelves of local shops, while the islands' crofting economy is being strangled by a system that keeps the local abattoir's gates closed for eight months of the year! Common sense suggests something is seriously amiss, but as a wily stockman told me recently: "you'll find lad, that common sense is not so common after all"

Yes, the economic, social and environmental aspects of our crofting townships are being shaped and reshaped by a changing European Common Agricultural Policy, but unless those who influence the shaping take heed of the islands' crofting families, they will soon find themselves driving down a policy from the chambers of power onto what could soon be wasteland being visited only by a clipboard desperately searching for the cry of the last corncrake.

The sheep sector is undoubtedly an important factor in the rural development of Lewis and Harris. It does sustain our rural communities and it does provide a working, living, diverse, fertile, beautiful and sustainable land - and puts prime, fresh food on the table. No one can manage this land better than active crofters who know every nook and cranny of it and have the knowledge and skill to breed livestock that will survive its harsh winter and spring.

I am looking forward to working with LHSPA members and the challenges that lie ahead. **Mur a dèan sinn fhèin e, cha dèan duine eile (If we don't do it, no one else will)!**

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Crofters Commission Board – a profile of its members

We have asked each board member of the Crofters Commission to write a short piece briefly introducing themselves and the work they do to SCF members. In this article, board chairman David Green outlines his role and that of his colleagues.

Like myself, Commission board members were appointed by Scottish Ministers for an initial two year term which started in October 2002. After a fairly lengthy interview process, I was appointed to the part-time post of chairman, primarily to give leadership to the board of seven members overseeing the task of the Commission to 'reorganise, develop and regulate crofting'.

I have stayed on my croft in Achnahair beside Achiltibuie, my wife's home village, for about twenty years. We work about 90 sheep and fairly recently have diversified some of the croft into a small self-catering business.

The other board members are Sarah Allen, Robin Currie, Marina Dennis, Issie Macphail, Roddy Murray, Drew Ratter and Andrew Thin. Between us we have considerable experience of crofting, and all of us are very enthusiastic about promoting its value as a way of life.

Board responsibilities

I should make clear that this new board was appointed to give new strategic direction to the Commission. This is a wide remit which includes setting policies, agreeing and scrutinising performance targets and forward planning. Importantly, this remit also embraces progress towards more accountability and transparency as the Commission moves towards becoming a fully-fledged modern Non-Departmental Public Body, as proposed by the forthcoming crofting legislation.

The board members still chair hearings, but do not have the area commissioner role of the previous Commission, which was responsible for taking the regulatory decisions in their 'area'. We have set up a number of working groups consisting of board and senior staff to promote crofter

housing, crofting organics etc, although these are still at an early stage of development.

The board also take the decisions on hearings held throughout the crofting counties, and other cases which the regulations state can only be decided by the board, such as whole-croft decroftings. Increasingly, the board is keen to bring regulation alive by, for instance, using it more imaginatively to create new crofts etc. In addition, it aims to work more closely with others on the important consultations affecting the future of crofting, for example by joining together with a number of Highlands and Islands agencies to promote a largely joint position on CAP reform.

However, as we try to streamline the bureaucracy and improve turnaround times for regulatory business this has allowed a reprioritisation of the Commission's policy towards more 'grass-roots' projects. There are about 50 of these on the go just now. They range from involvement with the Tìree Development Partnership, set up to assist develop Tìree economically and socially, to assisting the Achintraid Cattle Group in making progress towards introducing more cattle into the area. As a result, there are now dedicated development managers for all of the crofting areas. The last four new appointments are actually based in the crofting counties, from Barra and Argyll in the South, to Lewis and Shetland in the North and West.

One of the first decisions made by the new board was to hold their board meetings in public and take as many as was practical into the remote crofting counties. This means that the board members now get to meet local crofters and others in the communities, as well as seeing at first hand some of the challenges and initiatives in these areas. Consequently, in the last year or so the board has been to South Harris, Lerwick, Assynt, Dornoch, Ullapool and, on its most recent outing, to Barra.

To give a flavour of the agenda for these last few days away - we met Angus Macleod, the Oligarry grazings clerk who,

well aware of the fragility of the population, showed us interesting plans for encouraging local folk and their relations to return by making house sites available, as well as an ambitious plan to develop a caravan site on the grazings.

We held the meeting in the Craigard Hotel, which I understand was the first official crofting meeting held in Barra since the Napier Commission met there in 1884!

We also had a look around the facilities on the island, including the small-scale slaughterhouse. This is a tremendous crofting community facility run single-handedly by Archie Maclean.

We had an extra day courtesy of the weather to brainstorm some of the thinking and ideas put to us on the island. These included using crofting allotments for those wishing to retire (but not completely), promoting crofting portakabins for new entrants, more footprint crofts (similar to those planned for Colonsay), not to mention the potential for taking the absentee initiative forward.

The Future

We need many and varied ideas to help sustain these fragile areas. Working with crofting communities and other partners, the Commission can play its part. This Commission contribution could be a regulatory reorganisation, new croft creation or an absentee initiative. Or it might be a croft or township development plan, assisted by our new staff and backed up with resources from, for instance, the Crofting Community Development Scheme, Crofting Counties Agricultural Grants Scheme, Croft Entrant Scheme or even Crofting Building Grants and Loans Scheme. It could also involve other agencies working together in partnership.

We were indeed stormbound in Barra, but learnt a lot from the formal and the informal sessions on the night we were stranded there. And Celtic beating Barcelona involved for us a healthy half time discussion on crofting in Barra.

ANNOUNCING ... CROFTER OF THE YEAR AWARD 2004

We are delighted to announce that 2004 will see a Crofter of the Year Award. As in previous years members and branches are asked to nominate crofters for the award. This award, sponsored by the Royal Bank of Scotland, gives the winning crofter £500 and an engraved annual trophy.

What we're looking for is a hard working crofter who has developed his or her croft and uses good husbandry to produce quality stock or other croft produce. The size of the croft does not matter - previous winners have come from all over the Highlands and Islands with croft sizes ranging from a few acres to something a fair bit bigger.

There have been traditional Crofters of the Year specialising in sheep; others with more emphasis on cattle; another couple developed a nature trail on their croft; while another had established a croft museum.

One or two winners had overcome practical difficulties and shown what can be done on a croft with hard work and dedication. Others have developed innovative animal housing facilities which have made stock management simpler.

New developments might be into horticulture or crofter forestry. Or maybe there's someone who has set up a tourist enterprise running on the croft alongside the croft work. Perhaps someone is tapping into the ever-widening interest in environmental tourism. The possibilities are endless, and the intention of the award is to show crofting's potential and its strengths, and to reward someone who is a good example of the best of our enterprising way of life.

Maybe you know someone whose efforts you feel should be recognised and rewarded. They do not have to have done anything unusual. Just a typical crofter who works the croft well and who has some community involvement and participation in co-operative township work. Previous winners have been active in their townships and have been a source of help and support to their fellow crofters.

Every township benefits from the activities of such people. Now is your chance to show the wider world what a good crofter is like, and to show that crofter that his or her efforts are appreciated.

We have decided to change the nomination process a bit to make judging between very different contestants a bit easier and ensuring that we ask the same questions about all nominees. The nomination forms have been sent to Branch Secretaries. Nominations should be supported by 10 people and endorsed by the Branch. Entries should reach the SCF office by the end of June 2004.

Sustaining Remote Communities: The Role of Crofting

In his address to the SCF conference, Frank Strang, Head of Land Use and Rural Policy at SEERAD outlined the Scottish Executive view of crofting and its role in sustaining remote communities.

Mr Strang started by addressing positive elements of the new CAP deal: a new freedom to farm; explicit recognition of public benefits from farming; and national flexibilities

Freedom to farm, he remarked, is shorthand for decoupling - reducing bureaucracy and allowing farmers and crofters to get on with what they are good at. Responding to the market, not the rules of European schemes, putting a premium on quality and marketing and continuous improvement. The near consensus in Scotland on full decoupling should not disguise how radical this is.

The single farm payment explicitly recognises that society wants farmers to farm. It goes further than ever before by separating society's support from the price mechanism, recognising the clear distinction between the market for agricultural produce and support for other public goods. A number of commentators have been saying for years that European farming must eventually follow the crofting model.

The national flexibilities we secured, Mr Strang continued, allow us to design support reflecting Scottish needs. CAP reform was not about immediate radical redistribution, but in the longer term an objective basis will be needed for the decoupled payment, linked to buying outputs which society wants. The historic payment will not deliver that indefinitely, but neither will an area basis. Whilst decoupling is here to stay, the government will be taking the first opportunity permitted by the EU to review the payment regime. Like many others in the EU, it will be looking to move forward to a solution which gives an objective basis for continuing support.

The national envelope for beef should provide short-term stability to the market and provide an incentive for the retention of cattle in the more peripheral areas. Ministers have much work to do on the details and have already started discussions, including with the SCF.

The Executive was clear that modulation should increase significantly the scope for support which genuinely furthers rural development. In doing so it strengthens the underlying rationale for agricultural support. Discussions have started, with the SCF and others, on what measures to include.

Mr Strang said that around 2,900 crofters are positively managing their land in the interests of conservation through participation in agri-environment schemes. Last year around £9million came to the crofting counties - over a third of the Scottish total. But the key point, entirely consistent with the CAP deal, is that such environmentally friendly farming is not somehow peculiar to a small number of consenting crofters. It is mainstream crofting: in other words this variety of wildlife and habitats have

been created and sustained by the extensive agricultural practices that characterise crofting.

Mr Strang recognised crofting's essential role in retaining and where possible augmenting the population. Populations in the crofting counties are higher than they would have been under other systems. Infrastructures are in place to encourage people to return and to make a living. Existing crofting arrangements are being made to work better. The Crofters Commission is tackling absenteeism and has resolved well over 1000 cases since 1997, with over 450 crofts released to new entrants. The entrant scheme has supported almost 400 new entrants.

Mr Strang was not concerned by the SCF's criticism that the crofting reform proposals did not set the heather alight. He asserted that the system is basically in good health, but the proposals will make it better. He indicated the scope for new crofts, the reduction in bureaucracy, the tightening up on neglected crofts, the wider use of croft land and improvements to the status of the Crofters Commission.

On the proposed changes to crofting grants, Mr Strang was able to say little. CCAGS, the Livestock Improvement Scheme and CBGLS await announcements from his political masters. He emphasised that Ministers committed themselves in their



Frank Strang

Partnership Agreement to continuing with crofting grants. They were very appreciative of the constructive contributions made by the SCF to the consultations.

More programmes are evolving where local people are being involved in finding holistic solutions for local places, for example Leader, Initiative at the Edge and the Crofting Communities Development Scheme. A similar concept underlies land management contracts. The Executive will want to see how far it can take this in developing the new SRDP, combining local ownership with programmes which can be delivered efficiently and on time. Projects which have been worked up by and for local communities do more than deliver specific, tangible outputs. They raise confidence and capacity for the future. This was the logic behind the land reform agenda and in particular the crofting community right to buy, which he hopes will be in force before the summer.

Mr Strang concluded by saying that in addition to what government can do, crofters themselves have a role in sustaining remote communities. If remote communities are to thrive crofting needs to be forward looking and to promise a future. That is why his department is so keen to give the Crofters Commission a clear remit for development, for ensuring that crofting acts as an engine for progress. That is why they want crofting reform to address any barriers to crofters taking new opportunities such as windfarms. It is also important to ensure that, just as the First Minister is encouraging Scotland as a whole to be a welcoming place, crofting communities continue to embrace people, wherever they come from, who bring in fresh talent and are willing to put that talent to good use in the service of the community.

Finally, he stated that if we are to keep alive the history, traditions and cultures of these precious remote communities, then clearly both government and crofters themselves have a part to play.

Mr Strang's full address is available from SCF HQ and from our website.

Upbeat conference hears from range of rural development experts

A beautiful day in Tarbert provided an excellent setting for the SCF conference. The depth of knowledge that each speaker brought to the debate was clearly appreciated by delegates from all over the crofting counties.

Opening the conference SCF Chair Ena McNeill welcomed everyone and explained why the title 'Making Hay: Crofting with the CAP' had been chosen. "The recent reforms", said Mrs McNeill, "present us with major changes and opportunities and we must concentrate on what good we can get from them - we must make hay when the sun shines."

Delegates were urged to grasp every opportunity available to protect the crofting way of life - making the most of whatever chances arise, whether in terms of supportive policies or by passing on knowledge and skills to the next generation. Crofting education in primary schools, suggested Mrs McNeill, might be one way to help ensure that crofting it is not consigned to the history books.

On the definition of crofting, Ena related "Last week at a conference of European small farmers we were often asked 'what is a crofter?'. I think the answer we gave was rather clumsy. We tried to explain that a crofter was similar to a small farmer, but he didn't own the land; nevertheless he did have security of tenure. Later on, I thought we should have said 'a crofter is a person who makes part of his living from the land; he has respect for the land and treats the soil with a certain tenderness. He takes great pride in his livestock and in the environment and of course there is some kind of deep-rooted bond between the crofter and the croft.' As

the SCF moves from strength to strength and we grasp every opportunity that comes out of these CAP reforms, no-one should be ignorant about the definition of a crofter."

Ena then welcomed Alex McDonald, Convenor of Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, to chair the morning session and lead the panel discussion at the conclusion of the keynote speeches.

SEERAD's Frank Strang spoke first, highlighting the opportunities of CAP reform and the flexibilities secured by Scotland to tailor a solution that fits Scottish conditions. With much still to play for in this reform, the emphasis on public goods delivered by public money must ring bells in the crofting areas, he said.

Adam Harrison from WWF continued on this theme, highlighting how there was much yet to be done to target the CAP effectively. He highlighted particular areas where more needs to be done by the Scottish Executive to ensure that crofting is adequately supported and continues to contribute to rural economies, rural communities and the environment. He highlighted the increasing rural development programme as a growing area of work that crofters need to be fully involved with and arguing effectively about the rural development benefits that crofting provides.

Iain McIver, a former SCU president, took the podium for the final key-note speech and developed the theme of seizing opportunities to reflect the role of the individual crofter in the

township and in the community. Many crofters, himself included, were not clear about how the CAP reform would pan out. Taking the issue wider than the CAP debate, Iain reflected on making best use of opportunities for the benefit of the crofting community and the environment. Developments must not produce short-term financial benefits at a cost - we must plan and invest for the future, for the good of the environment and the community using today's opportunities.

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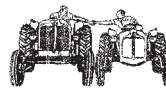
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Providing quality education and training

The new CAP: will it allow crofting to be a model of sustainable rural development?

In his conference address Adam Harrison from WWF Scotland identifies the opportunities that could and should be available for crofting in the new scheme.

Mr Harrison outlined the history and development of CAP. Despite policy changes and the introduction of new measures over the years, crofting has not benefited as it should. The new proposals offered UK and Scottish governments the opportunity to develop a scheme which could address the needs of remote rural communities while rewarding them for their environmental management and maintenance of rural communities. Regrettably both governments have not chosen to implement the full capacity available to them within the EU measures, preferring to retain the status quo with sees the majority of support going to the few largest farming operations in the more favoured areas.

The Scottish approach to both the SRDP and the recent CAP reforms shows that there is a growing mismatch between what the Executive says and what it delivers in practice. Despite promises, budgets are not being shifted, and where the CAP is spent is not changing. The old beneficiaries are still benefiting and standards are not improving. The justification for the new single farm payment is so weak that pressure will soon be growing for agriculture to justify to the taxpayer why in 2010 they are paying a farmer for what he was growing in 2001.

The task for crofting, Mr Harrison believes, is to show the value of our version of the European model of agriculture to the taxpayer and the more immediate community of which we are a part. We should demonstrate that the single farm payment is delivering environmental and public health and animal welfare standards. We should argue at the national level for a re-evaluation of the historic basis for payments. Crofters should be arguing hard



Adam Harrison

that they should be major recipients of the national envelope. But the real opportunities in the shorter term for crofting lie in the changes that are about to happen to the rural development programmes in Scotland.

The modulation we have agreed to, although modest, does mean that rural development measures will be changed in 2004 and that there could be further, even bigger changes in the next programme period from 2007. A national debate has already started on priorities for the new rural development funding; only about £16 million now but rising to £40 million by 2007. Priorities for the Crofting

Foundation in that debate should be:

- To ensure that we review the whole package of rural development funding, the LFASS, agri-environment and woodland grants – alongside thinking about the new money.
- Push for far more innovation in using all the options available. There are now 23 unused measures that are currently used in the UK let alone across the rest of Europe. Use the opportunity to target the LFA towards supporting areas with 'environmental restrictions' rather than simply 85% of Scotland. This would allow us to use the LFA as a 'support'

for crofting that is key to managing protected areas.

- Make sure that schemes are designed to favour the nature of crofting rather than simply farming. It could support the types of agriculture, like crofting, that is one part of a range of options that make up the livelihood of the individual. Greater investment in new skills, diversification and increasing business options are more likely to be of benefit to crofters than they are to agri-businesses.
- Ensure that there are better links between the schemes and that individual measures deliver multiple benefits.
- Argue for a greater level of devolution of rural development planning. A series of rural development plans across the country each in partnership with local agencies such as SEPA, SNH, LECs, local authorities, etc but also with local crofters and charities. Only then will the schemes fit the needs of different areas.

A specific opportunity to tailor support to crofters' particular needs and strengths is presented by the development of Land Management Contracts, Mr Harrison said. Debate is already starting and the SCF needs to push hard for LMCs to be flexible enough. Crofters should:

- Make sure LMCs deliver more than just the CAP. They could be an opportunity to combine a whole range of rural support in one package.
- Call for LMCs to allow collaborative schemes based on a shared theme.
- Lobby for LMCs to be supported with local facilitators who can help to negotiate through what will still be a morass of applications, and help bring together co-operative schemes and develop ideas for local themes.

The most important question raised is how targeted schemes should be. LMCs are being discussed in terms of developing three tiers. The first is the single farm payment, the third is roughly equivalent to the current rural development measures like the agri-environment schemes, which are selective and competitive. But there are also plans to develop a Tier 2 approach which is open to all and does not require a great deal of extra expenditure.

Balance is needed between ease of access and ensuring that the use of public money does deliver public benefits. The danger is that in order to 'sweeten the pill' of modulation the Executive will water down the impact of the money so far that it will yet again add to the accusation that this is 'money for nothing'.

Just as the ability of agriculture to 'compete' for production payments has meant that the most favoured 20% of farmers swallowed 80% of the payments because they had the best land, we ought to have a system of targeted rural development payments. But instead of being targeted at the most advantaged, it ought to be targeted at those most in need of assistance and those most able to deliver the environmental and other benefits the public want from agriculture.

So Fife, which gets 20 times the level of direct payments that the Western Isles get, does not have 20 times the need for rural development and certainly does not deliver 20 times the environmental benefits. If the Executive is lacking the courage to change the direct payments under the CAP, they must not be allowed to continue to bias the rural development and environment schemes in the same way.

The full text of Adam Harrison's address is available from SCF HQ or from our website.9

We must value crofting ourselves Conference told

Former SCU President, Iain McIver developed the conference theme; exploring opportunities for integrated land use to benefit crofting and crofting communities

A face well known to all in the crofting organisation, Iain McIver, in his first speech to the organisation in a number of years, began with a reflection on the development of the SCF. In reference to the late Angus MacRae and the many others whose talent and determination had gone into the crofting organisation since its inception, Iain described the Foundation as built on the shoulders of giants. We all have a responsibility to take it forward, he told delegates.

Like many crofters, Iain said, he is not clear exactly what the CAP reform will mean for crofting. The SCF must continue to campaign for a move away from an historic basis of payments to something more equitable in order to support crofting activity, but regardless of the policy context, we must be aware that crofting underpins social and economic activity in the area and the onus is on us to try and make it work. While 'freedom to croft' could sound appealing, it must not become 'freedom to not croft'. We should ensure that ways are found to ensure that CAP reform leads to more sustainable management of hill ground and rough pasture. Livestock keeping is an essential aspect of crofting – for individuals, for communities and the environment of the crofting area. In responding to CAP reform, we need to ensure that we have appropriate livestock and look hard at

markets and marketing to make the most of our high quality produce. To avoid the potential risks of declines in livestock numbers under CAP reform, we must work together to address key issues, like appropriate breed selection for the market and for the ground (many would say that a thin sheep is better than a dead one), marketing, livestock housing, animal health and the availability of auction markets and processing facilities. Within Lewis and Harris, the Lewis and Harris Sheep Producers and the Lewis and Harris Cattle Producers Associations were taking on these types of initiative.

In order to have crofting valued by others, we must value crofting ourselves, said Iain. It is not only the Scottish Executive and people in Brussels who we must inform about the benefits of crofting, but we should also ensure that our local communities know and understand the value of crofting and what it delivers. We should ensure that croft land is properly used and look at ways of releasing crofts and croft land to those who will work them, rather than allowing them to become abandoned gardens. The development of crofting, he told the audience, is about the development of the wider community, with crofting as the strong foundation. It is important to recognise the difference between crofting areas and that there will be different needs in each area. Crofters need to engage in the housing debate, ensuring that our communities can thrive and develop. The development of the crofting community might need small areas of grazing land made available for

community use; as crofters we have an opportunity to help develop our communities. Croft inbye land must be preserved for crofting activity but we should think about ways of stimulating other economic activities and opportunities on less productive grazing ground, of which we have plenty, Iain remarked.

Crofters must grasp the challenge of the changing policy context - a move from a production focus to emphasis on land management and the delivery of public benefits – already fits with diverse crofting activity and should allow the further development of integrated land use. We can build on our current activities and seize opportunities to use land in innovative ways – horticulture, crofter forestry, management for biodiversity through agri-environment support and tourism all present opportunities, he said. Renewable energy presents great opportunities, Iain remarked, not just for present communities, through spin offs in jobs and diversity of jobs, but also for future generations and for the environment.

It is important to retain the links between young and old in our communities, passing on skills and helping each other, said Iain. Crofting activities will often require flexibility - flexible working hours at busy times of year, and people available to help. It is all part of the way of life. In conclusion, Iain felt, there is an opportunity for the SCF to lead the debate on integrated land use and the development of crofting and crofting communities.

Boost for shearing training in the Highlands and Islands



Instruction and individual advice helps trainees refine their skills.

Excellent new opportunities for shearing training will be available throughout the Highlands and Islands this year. Most crofters who would like to improve their skills and attain internationally recognised qualifications should be able to find a course to meet their needs.

More than 500 Scottish trainees have already benefited and several hundred more will take courses this summer, at little or no cost to themselves.

The Wool Board has acquired ESF matched funding through the Highlands and Islands Special Transitional Programme to extend its training programme which started two years ago further south.

The programme is led by Colin MacGregor who has had excellent support from the ESF and other agencies in Central and Southern Scotland and from HIPP and the SAC in the North. There is much enthusiasm.

Courses are devised to cover all levels of expertise and also include gear maintenance and wool handling and will be run as locally as possible. A number of new instructors, specially trained by the Wool Board, will be joining the team this summer and some of the islands will have courses for the first time.

All courses available are publicised on the Wool Board's web site, www.britishwool.org.uk and administered through the Wool Board's shearing office in Callander. If you have any questions, you can e-mail or ring the office on 01877 339657.

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The Highlands & Islands Sheep Strategy (HISS) is a partnership for breed improvement between The Blackface Sheep Breeders Association & North Country Cheviot Sheep Society

Becky Shaw, SCF Environment Officer reports on a trip to Brussels to participate in a European conference on CAP reform.

Mid-March saw the SCF renewing links with a European small farmers organisation, in which the SCU had played a fairly active role a number of years ago.

The conference in which we were invited to participate was on the future of sustainable family farms in Europe post CAP-reform and was organised by the Co-ordination Paysanne Européenne - an umbrella organisation for small farmers associations right across Europe. The topic being particularly pertinent, we were keen to go and hear the thoughts of other representative organisations on the effects of the recent CAP reform and views on the measures and further reforms required to ensure a sustainable future for small family farms.

The trip would also provide a valuable opportunity to arrange a meeting with the European Commissions and hear first hand from the European Commission their views on the interpretation of CAP reform measures, particularly the beef National Envelope (about which more can be found elsewhere in this edition). The opportunity to browse Brussels shops for local specialities was an added perk.

We were very fortunate in receiving financial support to attend the conference from CPE (the European Commission supported the costs of the conference), Western Isles Enterprise and the North Uist Partnership. Representatives of the SCU/SCF have made many trips to Brussels over the years, primarily to meet officials of the European Commission. However, on this occasion we were all 'Brussels novices'. So on 11th March, Ena, Norman and myself set off from Prestwick armed with only rusty French, bound for a city of which we did not even have a map - planning never really was my strong point! Quickly reminded that the world is a small place, we stood in a queue waiting for a bus into Brussels with Karen MacRae, who is the Investors in People adviser for the SCF and is often in the Balmacara office.

Our first meeting was with staff of the European Commission, which we would visit en-route to the conference venue, our final destination. Armed with bags and suitcases sufficient to give the impression that we were taking residence in the building, we arrived at one of several offices in central Brussels that contains staff of DG-Agriculture.

Scottish Crofters go to Europe

Managing to divest ourselves of the baggage, we had a very interesting and useful discussion, primarily on the interpretation of the National Envelope provisions, with a very courteous member of Commission staff. I was very impressed - as I have been before when meeting Commission staff - by the ability of officials from all over Europe to communicate so well very detailed and technical subjects in what is often a second or even third language.

After this meeting we set off for the conference venue - a residential and conference centre attached to a Franciscan church and monastery in the east of the city. Other delegates arrived in dribs and drabs over the course of the evening and it became clear that the SCU had been highly thought of in the past, with particular successes in the social sphere. 'Ah, our friends the Scottish Crofters; we will drink beer, I think' being the welcome from a Swedish delegate, on whom Donald McDonald from Baleshare seems to have made a good impression!

Among the representatives were farmers specialising in small-scale vegetable production in Malta, dairy farmers from the Austrian Alps, Swedish farmers who combined dairy cows with farm forestry, French and Spanish farmers involved in suckler cows, sheep and small-scale dairying, and livestock farmers from the west of Ireland and the tip of Cornwall. As an umbrella body, CPE is made up of small farmer organisations which share similar views and aims. Some of these quickly became obvious as we met and talked on that first evening. A belief in the importance of the small family farm to the countryside; the social and ecological connection of people, land and food production; the ability to produce, on a small-scale, excellent, natural food and the rights of the consumer to have access to this food; and perhaps overriding all of these, a distaste for industrial agriculture and environmental and animal husbandry practices that go against what these farmers feel is right. This was clearly going to be an interesting and thought-provoking few days - and one that I would find useful to remember as a bigger picture in the ongoing discussions on the detailed implementation of CAP reform measures.

The keynote speakers began the conference the following morning. As members of CPE speak so many different languages, simultaneous translation was available throughout the whole event - with every word spoken in English, French, Spanish, Italian, Dutch, Portuguese and German being translated into each of the other languages by a team of translators in booths at the back of the hall. Although somewhat overshadowed by the events in Madrid the day before, that first morning was particularly interesting and gave an indication of the direction of recent CPE campaigns.

A European Commission speaker, a member of the Fischler cabinet, started off with a very defensive view of the reform package and one which showed the highly theoretical level of thinking in which the Commission operates. Focusing on the detail of the reforms and the contexts of EU enlargement and the international perspective, the speaker said that the reform would pave the way for sustainable agriculture and satisfy public environmental concerns through reducing the tendency for over-production. Farmers and food industries in member states could take advantage of the opportunities offered by enlargement. On WTO negotiations and Cancun, she said that the CAP had less and less competitive distortion effects and that the failure to reach agreement at Cancun had not been about the agricultural debate. The EU is set to take a harder line with developing countries, she said - not being willing to negotiate until the intentions of developing countries are clear.

The second keynote speaker was a Professor of Economics from Dijon, who was thoroughly opposed to the logic of the present CAP reform, believing that economic concepts cannot be applied to the agricultural sector, as agriculture is a chaotic and unstable market, where supply and demand do not always follow logic. He believed that there was no gain in global-well-being terms from allowing agriculture to be driven completely by the free market and that the current reform, rather than stabilise agriculture in Europe, would produce more uncertainty. This reform, he argued, would see increasing concentration of

agriculture in a decreasing number of enterprises, the loss of people from the land would continue and intensify under the reforms and production would increasingly be in the hands of older farmers.

The third speaker - a farmer from Hungary - gave a picture from an accession country, where administrative systems are being put in place in preparation for accession to the EU and participation in the CAP. Although new Member States were only offered 25% of the level of support received by existing Member States as a decoupled payment, they will also receive a 30% top-up, paid as a coupled payment through various envelope mechanisms. Although farmers will receive more financial support than they currently do, many Hungarian are concerned that their own domestic markets and small processing industries will be damaged by cheap imports from the rest of Europe. They are looking for ways, he said, to protect their local markets, where they have a competitive advantage.

These speakers set the scene for discussions during the rest of the two-day conference, which focused on the detail of the current CAP reform and the implications for small farms and whole regions. We discussed shared concerns and potential solutions and found many similarities - particularly from within Britain and Ireland, but also with the delegates from Sweden and Norway. Some of the debate was quite philosophical, bits of it highly practical, but all of it interesting.

One thing that was clear to me was that, although sometimes frustrated by the feeling that our views are not being heard by the Scottish Executive and administration, we enjoy far more political support and clout than many of the organisations represented there, many of whom are obliged to use radical tactics to have their views heard. The exception to this seemed to come from Norway, where, according to what we heard, a very supportive government assists and promotes retention of sustainable small-scale agriculture and local food production through its policies and support - our goal surely, is to make the UK and Scottish administrations share these objectives.

Biodiversity Plan Highlights Crofting Projects

The Wester Ross Biodiversity Action Plan was launched on Friday 26 March in Gairloch. It is the fourth in a series of seven to be produced for the Highland Council area and represents 11 months work by the Wester Ross Biodiversity Group, which comprises representatives of local land users and conservationists.

Biodiversity is short for "biological diversity", and means "the variety of life". Wildlife and habitats are important to us in many ways: for their contribution to our quality of life, for the production of food and raw materials, for tourism and for their own sake.

The plan identifies some important features of croft land from an environmental perspective. A reduction in the management of

in-by land, lack of agri-environment support, loss of traditional skills and management for wildlife and a lack of local markets were identified as the main issues. A number of projects are already taking place to try to address these issues, and the plan identifies eight future actions that could be taken forward in the next five years to move things on.

Copies of the Wester Ross Biodiversity Action Plan are available in local libraries and service points. Anyone wishing their own copy should contact Janet Bromham, the High-land Biodiversity Officer, Planning & Development Service, The Highland Council, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness IV3 5NX, e-mail: janet.bromham@highland.gov.uk or telephone: (01463) 702274.

Crofting Community Development Scheme Final Phase (2004 - 2006)

Arthur MacDonald, scheme manager, reports on the final phase of the CCDS

This increasingly popular scheme has been awarded additional funding to promote more crofter-led community development planning. Now entering its final phase to December 2006, the budget has been doubled and scheme staff are therefore keen to make contact with as many potential participants as possible to discuss the many ways of utilising the available funds.

Since the scheme opened in June 2001, an average of three groups a month have successfully applied. These include grazings committees, stock clubs, community centre committees, show committees, machinery groups, community forestry groups, organic producers groups, community councils, community trusts, a gaelic choir, land development groups, playgroups, stock marketing organisations, a shooting syndicate, historical societies, horticultural associations, agricultural societies, sports clubs, village hall committees, and environmental groups.

The main requirement for an interested group is a strong crofter influence, with combinations of the above group types often coming together locally to create more widely beneficial plans and each group contributing to the project(s) to

create a single plan.

The main requirement for eligible projects is capital assistance from a public agency along with local support. There is no specific list of eligible projects, only a requirement that two development sectors are included in a plan (agriculture, diversification, environment, forestry, heritage, marketing, social and training).

In the first three years of the scheme successful groups have on average received a £5000 incentive payment alongside the traditional capital grants such as those from local authorities, local enterprise companies and the lottery. A maximum payment of £7000 per plan is available and it is for the applicants to decide how to use this. They could allocate funds to pay their plan coordinator, assist cash flows or improve the economic viability of their plan - or all three.

In recognition that community development can be a much slower process than individual business projects, there are no annual spending requirement deadlines. The scheme is however subject to a closure date, so early contact with scheme staff is recommended if you have ideas for discussion.

Contact details can be found in the CCDS advert.



CROFTING COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT SCHEME (CCDS)

FINAL PHASE 2004 - 2006

The CCDS provides incentive payments to encourage community-based management of diverse projects.

Community groups in crofting areas with ideas for projects should contact the scheme staff for more information:

Arthur Macdonald or Mark Brennan
CCDS, 18 Upper Leachkin
Inverness IV3 8PN
Tel / Fax 01463 709821
Mobiles 07760 168750 / 723
Email: ccds@crofting.co.uk

Lewis & Harris: John Smith, Tel: 01851-707324
Uists & Barra: Joan Ferguson, Tel: 01876-580327

WHAT'S YOUR OPINION? – this issue we start a new feature, where contributors express their own sometimes controversial views. Readers are invited reply, to debate and agree or disagree with these columns, and we will welcome any input on the following issue.

Land Reform ... the Next Stages

Recently the land reform activist and author of *Soil and Soul*, Alastair McIntosh, lectured on crofting and land reform in Golspie and Fort William. These were part of Aberdeen University's KEY Learning Opportunities. Here he summarises the main points.

On 25th October 1991 I gave a launch address for the original Isle of Eigg Trust. It took place in a derelict tearoom down by the pier, damp and cold for all but the human warmth packed inside. It was an edgy event. Even to organise it had required the permission of the laird, Keith Schellenberg. That seems incredible now, but in those days it was normal, because he controlled the only usable public space.

The meeting was followed by a secret ballot organised by the Isle of Eigg Residents' Association. It had forty-eight members and there was a 100% turnout to vote on whether or not they wanted land reform to be attempted on Eigg. There were thirty-five votes cast in favour and thirteen against – a 73% majority. The rest is, as they say, history.

There was nothing particularly new in what I said that late October night. It was mostly ideas that had been moving in the tradition for a long time that I just brushed down for the occasion. Indeed, I'd spent much of the day re-reading Jim Hunter's classic, *The Making of the Crofting Communities*. What stuck me most was his account of the Paice Deer Raid.

This had taken place on 22 November 1886 at the Eiskan Estate, just a few miles down the road from where I grew up in North Lochs. Famished crofters had taken the law into their own hands. With rifles that some say Michael Davitt had sent over from Ireland, they'd satisfied their hunger in the natural way.

A detachment of eighty Royal Scots and a gunboat of marines were sent to Stornoway to deal with the insurrection. Well, they may put it down, but only smooched the fire. For what I found most mind-blowing as I re-read this story in 1991 was to think that some of the old folks still alive when we were children would have lived through this. Indeed, my father, as the local doctor, would have helped some of them to have completed their earthly journey. My generation was literally within touching distance of these great Highland and Island radicals. So how were we going to bear the torch forward in the face of Thatcherism unbridled?

Further words jumped out of Jim Hunter's book ... page 173 ... where it says that those responsible for the Raid had "hoped that as a result of the slaughter for which they had been responsible, the sporting value of Park forest would be so drastically reduced that its tenant would give it up, thus forcing Lady Matheson [to] hand the forest over to the crofters and cottars of the parish of Lochs.... 'Their object,' a group of raiders told reporters, was 'to draw the attention of the whole country to their case.'"

Hmm ... so it had been an attempt at a media-riven market-spoiling strategy, to use today's jargon! And if landed power is largely psychological – keeping people kow-towing like children who even had to ask permission for the only public meeting space – then maybe it could also be dismantled psychologically. Those deer raiders had savvy. So why not let their spirit

touch us too in this day and age?

I've recounted in my book, *Soil and Soul* (from Aurum Press), a very strange experience that I had of precisely that spirit touching as we drove over to the Eigg tearoom that night. I'll say no more about that visionary experience here. Suffice that when I got there, my speech was perfectly composed within. It just had to be spoken on behalf of a cultural spirit that was much bigger than just myself.

There needed to be, I suggested, three stages of land reform. 1) Remembering, in which we reclaim our histories, remembering and putting back together again what has happened to us; our community's story. 2) Revisioning, in which we explore new ways of becoming community with one another as a community of place. And 3), Reclaiming, in which the community makes a claim of right over that which is required for the common good.

With the passing into force now of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003, we've arrived at a stage of being able to evaluate the past decade or so of modern land reform.

I'd say that good progress has been made on the remembering. The revisioning is still in the test bed stage, but with a lot of exciting new patterns and examples emerging. And the fact that we have land reform legislation, albeit only a start to the process, is more than most of us could have dreamed of before devolution. In crofting areas especially we are poised to reclaim, where the community feels there is a need so to do. This will happen where there has been bad landlordism, but perhaps less where there is (currently!) no cause for complaint.

I don't want to dwell on those points further here. What I want to do, instead, is to add a voice to the growing chorus of folks who are looking at where we should go next. My view is that we're now ready for a fourth stage in land reform. Indeed, it is already coming to pass. It is that of strengthening local democratic processes. Put another way, it's the stage of learning (or re-learning) what it really means to be community.

When the laird or distant wheels of government had a strong controlling hand, we didn't have to work out how to do everything ourselves. What's more, the laird always threatened (or at least, enough of them did), that if the lid was taken off the social pot and his paternalism removed, "they'd fight like cats in a bag."

There is truth in this. Take any group of people who have not been healthily socialised together, and they will fight. Landlordism has understood the psychology of this and used it to keep us down. As Milton is reputed to have said, "They who put out the people's eyes reproach them for their blindness." What we must now do is to face up to the need to learn more deeply how to make community work. And that means getting more real about conflict.

There's nothing for honest folks to be afraid of here. It simply means recognising that conflict is normal in any healthy human group. Normal, yes, but it must be recognised or named, unmasked for how it affects people (including such forms as "passive aggression"), and then engaged with so that it can be processed.

In doing this it helps to have an understanding of the spirituality that underpins community. If everybody's only looking out for number one, you can never create a society that rests on

human dignity. But if everybody sets their own interests in the framework of the wider community, then something very powerful, beautiful and capable of feeding the soul can emerge. That, by the way, is what radical Highland religion at its best has always been about. It's not about being upright and uptight. It is, or at least, should be, about being real – honest to God and one another in community as membership one of another. This means learning to discern and honour the "community spirit".

Let me close by offering an example of what can be achieved if community is put at the heart of things. Let's look at the need for affordable rural housing.

We all know the problem – holiday homes and incomers.

Well, at the age of four, in 1960, when my family moved to Lewis, I was an incomer myself. My father's people were of Gaelic-speaking stock, yes, but my mother was of Anglo-Welsh stock, and I was born in a Yorkshire mining town where they worked together running the hospital children's ward.

Speak to indigenous people in any Highland community today, and in my experience they'll tell you, "We welcome those that come to give and share, but not the ones who only take." Fair enough. No problem then with incomers who are truly willing to integrate with the community and respect the place. They're welcome. But there is a problem with those, and also with those of indigenous stock, who just want to exploit the place.

There's a problem with those who, for example, would exercise right to buy over local housing stock only to sell it on so that they can turn a speculative buck. Such activity, like working the grants system, rips the guts out of fragile communities. It dishonours the community spirit and discredits the help that a wider Scottish, British and European society is willing to give rural areas. Its dishonour should be named and shamed.

But what can be done? What can be done, specifically, about the rural housing crisis?

My view is that we need a mixed market when it comes to social housing. That market should try to square the circle of free enterprise entrepreneurship, and the need for social accountability with respect to the land. This is possible, and it's starting to happen.

The Chair of the Iona Housing Partnership is Dan Morgan, proprietor of the Argyll Hotel. On an island that comprises 40% holiday homes, the community are about to build four new homes for social ownership. These will be on former glebe land, the Church of Scotland having helped them out. Dan is a former student of mine. He did his MSc and PhD in human ecology and politics – making a study of the revolution on Eigg. He's been a member of the SCU-cum-SCF since 1990.

He tells me that one of the approaches they've invented for Iona is what he calls the "50% ownership system". Social housing could be controlled 50% by the families living in the new homes, and 50% by a community trust – the Iona Housing Partnership. This allows people to get a foot on the housing ladder, so paying off a mortgage and accumulating the capital they would need if they move on elsewhere. But because the community remains the co-owner, it

(Continued on Page 10)



Glenelg was the setting for the first cross-party group meeting held outside Edinburgh. Left to right – Eleanor Scott, MSP; Patrick Krause; Stephen Varwell of SNH; Colin Macdonald, Glenelg; John Farquhar Munro MSP; Jamie McGrigor MSP and Hector MacLeod.

CROSS-PARTY MSPS DISCUSS CROFTING ISSUES

Norman Leask, John Laing and Becky Shaw made up the SCF delegation to the last meeting of the Cross Party Group on Crofting, chaired by John Farquhar Munro MSP. The Cross Party Group is generally attended by Highlands and Islands MSPs of all parties, the SCF, NFUS, Highland Council and the Crofters Commission, and provides an opportunity to discuss various crofting issues with MSPs. Top of the bill on this occasion were the implications of various aspects of CAP reform, the SCF view of the operation of the Beef National Envelope, the expected changes to crofting support schemes including the Livestock Improvement Scheme and the Over Thirty Month rule. The group met in Glenelg in November, the first meeting outside Edinburgh, allowing township representatives and local SCF office-bearers to be involved in the discussions. Following this successful visit, it is hoped that the group will repeat the experience and meet in another crofting area later in the year.

Croitearachd agus foghlam Gaidhlig taobh ri taobh

'S e fìor cheum a bha ann nuair a dh'fhosgail na chiad h-aonadan Gaidhlig bho chionn suas ri fichead bliadhna. Cha robh ann ach dha le beagan is fichead sgoilear gam fritheadadh. Tha gnòthaichean air atharrachadh gum or bhon am sin agus an-diugh tha corr is da mhìle sgoilear a' faighinn an cuid foghlam ann an aonadan Gaidhlig a tha steidhichte air feadh na dùthcha.

Abair fas agus 's e tlachd a tha ann a bhith a' cluinntinn oigridh a tha gle fhileanta sa chanan. Chi sinn cuideachd bho rannsachadh gu bheil a' chlànn sea a' deanamh a' cheart cho math ri an co-aoidhean, agus gle thrice na fhèarr, nuair a thig e gu deuchainnean naiseanta.

Carson ma than ach eil barrachd a' cur an cuid chloinne gu aonadan Gaidhlig? Gheibh iad foghlam cheart cho math, cumaidh iad canan phrìseil beo agus fosglaidh e cothraman cosnadh dhaidh nuair a bhios iad nas sine. Tha tri adhbhair shonraichte ann mi-chinnt, leibideas agus naimhdeas. Tuigidh sinn iadsan a tha mi-chinnteach agus gabhaidh leibideas atharrachadh ach de ni sinn mu naimhdeas? 'S e fìor cheist a tha sin.

Tha duilgheadas no dha eile ann cuideachd. Cha tug Bile na Gaidhlig guth mu theagas na Gaidhlig agus 's e briseadh duil a bha sin ach tha an riaghaltas air a bhith taiceil san fharsaingeachd don chanan agus tha moran uidh aig cuid de na Buill Parlamaid anns a' chanan. Tha dìth luchd-teagais na chnap-starra cuideachd ach le leudachadh air cursaichean treanaidh ionadail tha sinn an dochas gun tig piseach air an t-suidheachadh sin.

A thaobh na cloinne fhein 's e call a bhios ann mar a bi stor an cuid canain cho beartach ri canan ar sinnsearan. Tha a' choimhearsnachd air atharrachadh agus 's e corra theaghlach a tha ann far a bheil mathair is athair fileanta sa Ghaidhlig. Tha sin a ciallachadh nach eil cuid den chloinn a' cluinntinn facal Gaidhlig nuair a theid iad a-mach air geatachan na sgoile aig ceithir uairean.

Ma tha Gaidhlig gu bhith beo le beairteas feumaidh a' chomhearsnachd pairt a ghabhail ann am beatha na sgoile. Cha bhi Gaidhlig beo gun anail na choimhearsnachd. Theid faclan co-cheangailte ri muir is tir a bith. Nach ann an sin a bhiodh an call. Ma tha an uine agaibh nach tabhainn sibh cuideachadh do na sgoiltean agus bidh sibh a' fagail dileab luachmhor aig an ath ghinealach.

FROM HOUSE TO HOME

From *Communities Scotland, the Executive's housing and regeneration agency*

After living in rented accommodation with their two children for four years, Gordon and Lynda MacKenzie from Kilchoan, Lochaber, were keen to own their own home. But due to high property prices in the area they could not afford to. However, when a de-crofted site became available the MacKenzies took the opportunity to buy the land - and with the help of a Rural Home Ownership grant of almost £30,000 - were able to build the home they always wanted.

Further north in Orkney, Victoria and Raymond Muir had similar housing problems. Living in a caravan with three young children, they desperately wanted to move to a proper family home but the local council and housing association both had extensive waiting lists. They looked into the possibility of building their own home although they knew they couldn't manage it without extra financial assistance. The Muirs applied for and received a Rural Home Ownership grant of almost £20,000 which enabled them to build a new home in Kirkwall.

The MacKenzies and the Muirs are not

alone in their struggle for home ownership in rural Scotland, but as both their stories reveal, there is a solution for many in the shape of a Rural Home Ownership grant from Communities Scotland, the Executive's housing and regeneration agency.

These grants aim to help sustain rural communities by making it easier for local people on low or modest incomes to own their own home. There are many qualifying factors, but grants are generally aimed at local people in employment who are first-time buyers, and are targeted at rural areas where it is difficult for people to own their own home.

Communities Scotland's area director for the Highlands and Islands, David Nicol, explained further:

"The grant pays part of the costs you're likely to face when you're either acquiring a site to build your own home, or improving an existing property which is going to be your sole residence. In some cases the grant may also be used to help you buy an existing property which does not need improvement.


"The grant paid will be the minimum necessary to enable a property to be built or bought and or improved. We will look at the level of mortgage you can support and will

also take into account any other income, savings or support you may have. The grant will not normally be more than 33 per cent of the approved total costs."

These grants are not available if you are eligible for the Scottish Executive Environment and Rural Affairs Department's Building Grant and Loans scheme; if you already benefit from another form of grant from Communities Scotland; or if you intend buying a property built by a developer who has already received a grant from Communities Scotland towards the cost of providing that property.


Last year Communities Scotland paid out almost £2 million in Rural Home Ownership Grants in the Highlands and Islands. This support allowed 69 families to realise home ownership for the first time.

If after reading this article you think you may qualify for a Rural Home Ownership Grant please get in touch with the housing association in the area where you wish to set up home, as housing associations manage grant applications for Communities Scotland. Otherwise contact Steven Paterson at the Communities Scotland office in Inverness on 01463 711272 or email: patersons@communitiesscotland.gov.uk



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THE WONDERS OF TECHNOLOGY

(A WORD FROM THE EDITOR)

You probably didn't know it, but the last issue of The Crofter had a new editor. Fiona Mandeville returned temporarily from her sailing adventure and HQ asked her to edit your newspaper.

I was pleased to be asked by Patrick to help them out at SCF HQ when I was back home for Christmas. I had often enough produced The Crofter before, so it was no problem to do it again. It was good to be involved with crofting once more, to get back in touch with issues old and new. The new staff members made me welcome in the new office at Balmacara, though I actually worked from home. But I have to say I missed our old premises at the Old Mill. And now I'm working from my real home these days, our sailing boat Widgeon, as we sail around the seas of Greece, then westwards back to Italy and homewards.

Thanks to modern technology it is just as easy to receive the newspaper articles by email to our laptop computer on the boat as it was to the computer on the kitchen table in Skye. Our mobile phone connects by infrared link to the laptop, and the articles appear, sent by Becky back in croftedom. I edit them and finally off they go to the printers. The printers put the material together in newspaper format, email it back to me and I print out a smaller version of the finished newspaper. I then go over the words and presentation again for a final scrutiny. Once they get the go-ahead, the printers reel off the thousands of copies of The Crofter and these are sent out to all SCF members, still using the membership database that my husband Geoff wrote years ago.

The first articles winged their way to me when we were stopped at the tiny Island of Trizonia in the Gulf of Corinth. We spent a winter here two years ago on this lovely wee island where there are no cars, only donkeys to do the work. The main crop is olives, though some grapes and almonds, as well as citrus fruit are also grown. On the mainland nearby hill farmers have milking sheep and goats. Not far away on the mainland coast there are cows and pigs.

Most agriculture in Greece, as far as I can see, consists of small-scale holdings often high on the hills and steep mountain sides. Milk sheep are very common in most areas, and cheeses and yoghurt are produced. On the coastal plains citrus fruit is prevalent, and in some areas tobacco is an important crop. In the drier islands only olives are produced, and indeed olives must be the main crop from Greece. In most places, the farming population is elderly, and donkeys

and hand-driven tractors are the norm. Our first "tractor" on the family croft many years ago was this type. We called it the "iron horse". On some better land farmers bought new big tractors and equipment with government loans. Now, however, a decline in the agricultural economy has made them unable to make their loan repayments.

As we sailed on, more Crofter material beamed down while we were in Messolongi where Lord Byron is buried, after his involvement in the Greek War of Independence. Yet more arrived to us while we were on another small island in the Ionian Sea, Kastos. Here the ground is more fertile and greener, and there are a few cows, as well as the usual goats. A fishing boat brought over four lamb carcasses for the traditional Easter fare, so there are obviously no sheep on this island.

Storm-bound in Levkas, yet another island in the Ionian, I received further articles, and worked on them while we waited for a gale to abate. We had sailed up the Levkas canal in the gale using only our smallest sail, the mizzen. This gave us a speed of over 5 knots, above the speed limit on the canal, but we were the only ones out and about in that weather, so it was no problem. We were glad to find a corner in the new marina to shelter, though normally we prefer to anchor or go to a fisherman's quay. A great advantage of the Mediterranean is that there are no tides, which makes life much easier. Boats usually tie up by the stern to the quay, having set the anchor from the bows while reversing back to the quay. This manoeuvre takes some practice. I usually drop then anchor while Geoff steers, then rush to the stern to jump off and tie our lines securely. More boats fit in to smaller harbours this way, and it is easier to leave, even in bad weather. It's called Mediterranean mooring.

Now we are in Corfu, moored stern-to in a yacht club harbour immediately below the old castle. A beautiful location. I've been working on The Crofter all morning, with the laptop powered by the sun and the wind. We have solar panels and a wind generator, and between them they keep our ship's batteries charged when we're not using the engine. Corfu seems very beautiful, though I've been too busy editing your conference speakers' addresses so far to go out and explore.

After here we set off back to Italy. It's likely that The Crofter will be completed from there. I'm having fun doing this, and I think the SCF should be credited for having the vision of remote working to involve me from so far away. I am encouraged by the good work that the current staff and office-bearers are doing. It is very good to see new faces on the board and at branch and area level. Also I've been quite inspired by the ability and enthusiasm of some of the contributors to this issue. The SCF is fortunate to have these able new members - new to me, anyway, as I don't recognise their names from my time, when I used to know most of the members' names and addresses off by heart. I wish you all well in your campaigns.

Yassas (best wishes)
Fiona



Fiona at the gates of the castle in Corfu.

SHEEP HEALTH

SCF Director Neil MacLeod of Stornoway describes a recent sheep health conference.

Complacency having set in after the rigours of foot and mouth had passed, I was shaken out of my lethargy when I represented the SCF at a conference held in Perth on 11th March, on the theme of "The Emerging Disease Threat To Scottish Sheep Health".

The purpose of the conference was to outline the key strategies that organisations and individuals need to develop, adopt and promote in order to maintain and improve the health status of Scotland's flock and control the threat of emerging new diseases.

A number of informative presentations were made on various health problems, as follows:

Contagious Ovine Digital dermatitis (CODD). Foot-rot is well known to shepherds, but few will be aware of CODD which will not respond to an ordinary foot bath, i.e. formaldehyde or copper sulphate. The only remedy is an antibiotic footbath. The downside of this debilitating condition is that it can reduce the breeding value of a ewe by as much as £5.00 per head.

Anthelmintic resistance. Of particular concern is that a quarantine and drenching policy is enacted for all bought-in livestock and adherence to manufacturers' introductions for each product.

Sheep scab, probably the most contagious disease of sheep in Britain, has a huge economic impact on conditions of ewes and growth rate of lambs. Scab was previously evident in autumn and winter but can now be prevalent all year round.

Caseous Lymphadenitis (CLA), which is a wasting condition, invariably fatal. Other sessions were held on biosecurity and flock health planning. We then broke into groups to discuss and promote responses.

My group's theme was the industry response to emerging disease. Our consensus was as follows:

The emerging disease threats to the Scottish sheep flock had been clearly identified in the morning session - CLA, CODD and wormer resistance. The group would have added maedi visna and fluke. Further discussions suggested that disease threats could be categorised into existing or endemic diseases (enzootic abortion, footrot, Johnnes, orf, scab, lice etc.) and the emerging diseases listed above. It was pointed out that endemic diseases could fall into both categories with incidence of MV, lice, EAE and tick fever rising. In terms of priority, the group listed disease problems in the following order - ectoparasites (scab, lice), CLA, endoparasites (worms/fluke).

Any action arising on the above priorities would require a programme of education and awareness, endorsed in a consistent manner by the key stakeholders - BVA, SVS, NFUS, SCF, SEERAD etc. SAC would have a central role in educating both the veterinary and farming professions. Improving surveillance would assist the whole process, by more accurately establishing disease prevalence.

Other than direct contact with farmers and vets, actions suggested included the following:

- Creation of monitor/demonstration farms which could physically demonstrate the benefits of action on key diseases. These would be particularly effective in delivering messages on ecto- and endo-parasite control.

- Benchmarking to enable farmers to assess how their own disease status compares with fellow producers in the same region and nationally.
- Generation of cost-benefit-analysis that would more accurately illustrate to producers the benefits of disease control.
- Encouragement of strategic approaches, for example organic monitor farms, and the Caithness programme on worm counts.
- Significantly improve abattoir surveillance and reporting. This has lapsed in recent years.
- More relevant active monitoring of diseases and improving forecasting.

The group felt that there is a role for health planning, but in order to gain farmer buy-in to the concept a tiered approach should be taken. Tier one would deal with flock security and policies to avoid buying in disease, and isolation of bought in stock. Tier two would deal with health planning taken in conjunction with local vets. Tier three would be membership of health schemes.

The group believed that in order to tackle these disease threats effectively, action must be taken immediately. The relatively short chains of communication in Scotland present an opportunity to take rapid action without need for significant consultation as this can be carried out at stakeholder level. It was felt that any message to local vets could be delivered quickly and effectively with only 70 large animal vet practices in Scotland - approximately 150 large-animal vets looking after 90 percent of the farm animals.

Responsibility for action should lie with stakeholders including SEERAD.

Funding should be provided from within SEERAD's existing animal health and welfare budget with requirement for SEERAD to consult with stakeholders on how to prioritise that budget. Support for action on diseases with zoonotic element - Johnnes, CLA etc - should be sought from health departments. Animal health and welfare should be a suitable recipient of modulated funding and should be considered when the RDR is reviewed in 2006/07.

Information should be disseminated quickly to vets and farmers via meetings with a possible co-ordination role for SAC. SEERAD is also about to roll out its Whole Farm Advice scheme and there should be an animal health and welfare strand to this. These proposals should be incorporated into the Scottish implementation plan for the Animal Health and Welfare Strategy.

Space does not permit us to comment in any detail on the other workshops. The Foundation can furnish those responses and technical data if anyone is interested.

Group 2 was the role of breed societies/health schemes and markets.

Group 3 was strategies for disease-free status for flocks - a place for health plans.

Group 4 was technological development.

It is important that the Foundation is party to the ongoing debate and formulation of the Animal Health and welfare Strategy for Scotland.

Our thanks are due to the organisations who hosted the Conference: NFU Scotland, QMS, the Scottish Executive, SAC and Moredun.

Land Reform ... the Next Stages (Continued from Page 9)

plays an equal role if and when that home is sold. This means it can prevent holiday home sales. It can select the best buyer for the community. What's more, as property prices appreciate the community's ratio of capital value to outstanding debt will rise. Dan says, "That will mean we can then use our share of the houses to buy

out holiday homes on the island as they come on the market."

There are other approaches that could be used too. As part of the Abolition of Feudal Tenure Act 2000 we now have the Title Conditions (Scotland) Act 2003. Whilst I am not a legal expert, I understand that this allows for "rural housing burdens" to be written in to title deeds. These could restrict future sales of a home to conform with community benefit.

A further approach would be to apply the crofting model. In this a distinction is made between ownership of the land and ownership of the improvements upon it (for example, the house). If the community were to gain and retain control of the land - and any outright right-to-buy is removed from the ground itself - then the sale of such a home would require a two-part transaction. The householder would sell his or her house, but the community land trust would need to transfer the land lease. As such, the land trust would function like a local Crofters Commission, but could set its own terms.

Something rather like this has just happened on Eigg. Working with the Crofters Commission, new crofts have been created. The grazings committee and the residents association jointly worked out a points scheme to prioritise allocation.

All these options and more are there to be used. The future is potentially bright. We just need to

live up to its promise, pay heed to the promptings of the Community Spirit, and rise to the dignity of our own humanity.

And what could government do to speed up such process? The present land reform act is only a start. The planning system needs to be made more receptive to approaches that favour community empowerment such as piece-by-piece self-build and the need to distinguish between social housing and the putting up of private "trophy mansions" as they call them in Ireland.

On the public funding front, most government money is presently channelled through Communities Scotland to housing associations. However, these are sometimes remote from local need, and there's always the worry that a future government might undermine original social housing intentions by ill-judged provisions for unfettered rights-to-buy.

"So why not channel some of the money to community housing trusts?" was the question I put it to a number of key movers and shakers on this issue in Scotland today.

Dan Morgan's response summed up many voices. "It's like it was in 1997," he said, "when the Eigg Trust went for funding to the National Heritage Memorial Fund. They declined, basically saying they didn't trust giving it to communities. What we've got to do now is to prove to government that communities really can deliver. The future lies with community control."

I. M. FORESTRY

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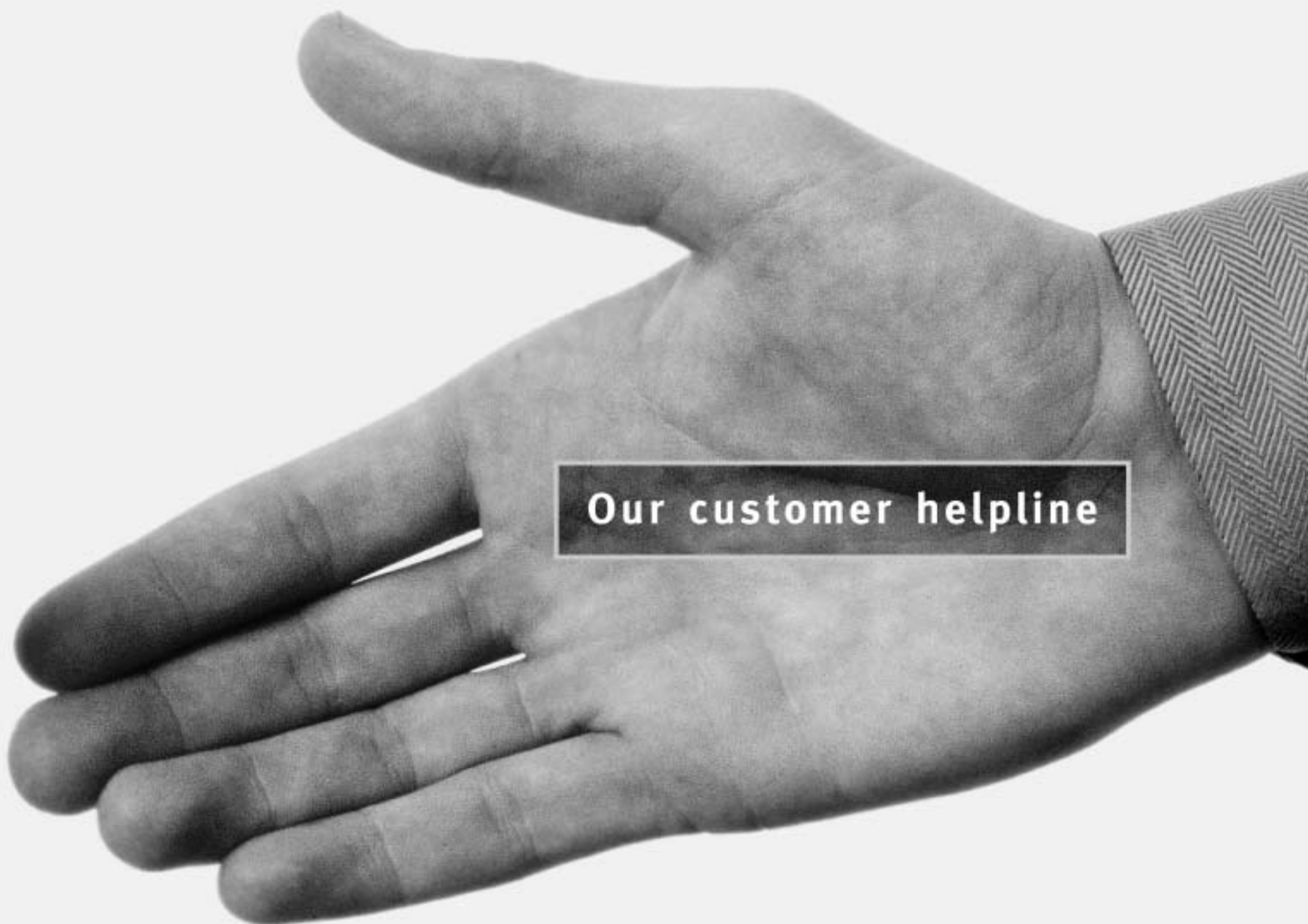
The man who planted trees

Representatives from all over the crofting counties were given the opportunity to see an example of innovation and determination whilst visiting Harris. Murdo Morrison welcomed the SCF group to his croft in Ardvourlie where he has transformed the hillside into woodland for locals and tourists to enjoy for many years to come.

In the year 2000, Mr Morrison started to put in a surfaced path across the 650 Ha of common grazings, of which he is the Clerk, to celebrate the millennium. His vision was to see a natural habitat restored and being made accessible to the public. With the help of the Forestry Commission, he took 110 Ha of bare hillside, on which he formerly grazed sheep and started planting a mixture of native broad-leaf trees. In 3 years he has planted 210,000 trees and has protected them with 5,500 m of deer fence.

It is not easy of course. Set back by a lack of labour, walkways being washed out by the rain, and the frequent inclement weather, the project has none-the-less suffered remarkably low losses. Murdo accepts that he will not see the stand mature, but views this project as not only being for the present, but for future generations.

The visit was organised by the SCF to demonstrate alternative croft use to representatives from all over the crofting areas and was funded by the Carnegie UK Trust. It was certainly inspiring to see what can be done with vision and determination and we extend our warm thanks to Murdo for his hospitality.



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Shared view on use of Beef National Envelope put to the Minister

In discussions over the use and targeting of a beef National Envelope, the SCF has joined forces with many other organisations to call for targeted support for cattle on small units in the north and the west.

The joint position paper agreed by the SCF, HIE, the Crofters Commission, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, the Highland Council, the Shetland Islands Council, the North West Cattle Producers Association, RSPB Scotland, the Scottish Wildlife Trust and Butterfly Conservation Scotland, the National Trust and Plantlife Scotland was sent to Deputy Minister for Rural Affairs, Allan Wilson and discussed also by the Parliament's Environment & Rural Development Committee.

The National Envelope is a new mechanism introduced in this CAP reform to allow money to be moved around within certain sectors "for specific types of farming which are important for the protection of the environment or for improving the quality and marketing of agricultural products". The measure was argued for strongly by the UK government in the European negotiations, in order to mitigate against any effects of decoupling.

In announcing the outline of CAP reform in February Allan Wilson indicated an intention to use a National Envelope in the beef sector to address both short-term market issues and environmental and social issues associated with the potential loss of cows from certain areas.

In the joint paper, the SCF and partner organisations highlighted the two effects of decoupling that are of concern in the beef sector: the first of these is the short-term market distortion effect on producers of store calves (of whom a big percentage are in the crofting area) by the removal of the Beef Special Premium Scheme. The second, and longer-term concern, relates to the predicted movement of suckler cattle out of upland, fragile and peripheral areas.

The paper went on to explain why the environmental element of the beef National Envelope mechanism justified targeting support to address these issues.

"Important non-market goods are being delivered by high-nature-value cattle systems in the remote, peripheral and upland areas. In the crofting area, there is a strong correlation between cattle-keeping and mixed agricultural systems, combining grazing management, with haymaking and forage and arable cropping. This

type of mixed system provides numerous biodiversity benefits and much of the justification for public support to agriculture. These systems will suffer under a decoupled support regime, in the absence of specific measures to retain agricultural systems which contribute to the high environmental value of the area. The use of the National Envelope could address this market failure by supporting the generation of these public goods, which by their intrinsic nature will be underprovided by the free (decoupled) market."

There appears to be some confusion over whether or not the beef National Envelope can be targeted at particular areas and/or particular types of system, with European Commission officials stating that discrimination between producers is not possible. However, there is a very strong argument for why such discrimination



An effective National Envelope is essential to maintain suckler herds in peripheral areas. (Photo: Courtesy of RSPB Images)

should happen – particularly when the legislation states that the additional monies are for supporting 'specific types of farming'. The Foundation believes that Scotland must argue strongly in Europe for appropriate targeting of the envelope, as it appears from our own discussions with European officials that this is not an entirely closed case and that there could be scope to convince the Commission otherwise. In the meantime, however, efforts have concentrated on trying to secure the best deal from the National Envelope, in a working group with very diverse views.

With final decisions on the use and targeting of the National Envelope expected as the Crofter goes to press, the SCF position is that the National Envelope monies should be targeted effectively to the greatest degree possible to deal with the issues identified.

The full text of the joint position paper can be found on the SCF website: www.crofting.org

New Funding for Western Isles Woodlands

Diane MacPherson of Comhairle nan Eilean Siar updates us on support for woodlands in the Western Isles, and introduces a new Woodland officer for the WI.

The Western Isles Woodland Strategy (WIWS) was formally launched in January 2004, coinciding with the Deputy Minister for the Environment's announcement of a locational forestry premium for the Western Isles.

The Locational Premium (LP) is a subsidiary grant payable in addition to the standard grants available under the Scottish Forestry Grants Scheme. The LP is only available in areas of Scotland where the Scottish Executive considers woodland establishment, regeneration, enhancement or management as a priority. Further areas in the north of Scotland that have been awarded LP are Orkney, Shetland and Grampian.

The initial scheme proposed grants totalling £450,000 over three years, but a further year's funding of £150,000 has subsequently been announced, bringing the total additional funding available to the Western Isles to £600,000.

The LP funding is targeted at achieving the local priority objectives as identified in the WIWS, which has been developed through consultation with stakeholders, including the Forestry Commission, Scottish Natural Heritage and Comhairle nan Eilean Siar.

Through discussion between WIWS stakeholders, a series of key criteria have been set

out to assess the LP grant applications. In the first year, grant assistance will be offered specifically for works which will increase the diversity of the landscape; provide shelter; expand native and riparian woodlands and increase opportunities for community participation.

Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, supported by the Forestry Commission, have now employed a Woodland Project Officer to help provide training and practical advice to crofters, communities and individuals who are interested in establishing and managing woodlands throughout the Western Isles.

Steven Liddle took up the post in mid-April and is now based in the Comhairle offices in Tarbert on the Isle of Harris. Steven is currently out and about getting to know locals throughout the Western Isles and will be available to assist those wishing to apply for woodland grants.

Steven is originally from Lewis and was educated at the Nicolson Institute before studying at the University of Aberdeen. Since graduating, he has been working as a forester for an Inverness-based company of chartered surveyors.

It is hoped that with the introduction of the new locational premium, woodland cover in the Western Isles will be increased by approximately 200 hectares over the next four years, adding valuable habitat biodiversity and economic support to the Outer Hebrides.

Anybody who is interested in woodland development can contact Steven on 01859 502367 or by email on s.liddle@cne-siar.gov.uk

Suggested changes to the crofter format – have your say!

The Crofter is a means of circulating information to members and the more often the paper can be produced the better, in order to keep up with current affairs affecting crofting. We are contemplating making changes to the format (not the content) of the Crofter, to enable it to be printed at less cost and to therefore have the potential to produce it more frequently.

Possible changes such as printing on smaller, more universal size paper would enable us to shop around for the printing and therefore get the most competitive deal. We had a lot of positive comments about the format of the newsletter sent out in November, which was cheap to print and which members found easy to read.

No decisions have been made yet and we would like to hear your views. If you would like to comment on what your paper should look like, please complete the quick questionnaire below and send it back to the office. Alternatively, you can write a letter, email or fax, or simply phone to let us know your preferences!

Please tick all of the statements with which you agree.

1. The Crofter format should remain basically as it is;
2. The Crofter should be printed on a smaller, universal size of paper;
3. The Crofter should appear more regularly;
4. The Crofter should look more like the recent newsletter;
5. The print size should be larger;
6. There should be more colour to liven up the pages;
7. The print and pictures should be only in black and white;
8. There should be more photographs;
9. The Crofter should be printed on gloss paper;
10. The Crofter should be printed on recycled paper.

Please let us know of any other views on the format of the Crofter.

LESS FAVOURED AREA SUPPORT – SOME THINGS TO BE AWARE OF

Support under the Less Favoured Area Support Scheme for 2004 will have arrived already or will arrive shortly, after the approval of the Statutory Instrument in Mid-March. The Scottish Crofting Foundation is continuing to call for a fundamental re-targeting of this important scheme and efforts will continue this year.

In the meantime, everyone needs to be aware of the environmental cross-compliance conditions attached to this year's support. All recipients must ensure the protection of rough grazing and other semi-natural areas applicants by not undertaking new drainage works, ploughing, clearing, levelling, re-seeding or cultivating rough grazing and semi-natural habitats. Livestock must be managed to avoid poaching to a level that would destroy the natural vegetation.

Also to ensure the protection of rough grazings and other semi-natural areas, pesticides, lime or fertiliser must not be applied. Exceptions are allowed in the following circumstances; to control weeds covered by the Weeds Act 1959; for the control of bracken with Asulam or other approved herbicides; or exceptionally where the application of lime or fertiliser will not result in conservation damage.

Any of these works or practices may be carried out if approved under the Environmental Impact Assessment (uncultivated and semi-natural areas) Regulations 2002.

Muirburn must comply with the Muirburn Code to protect and manage valuable habitats such as regenerating Scots pine,

blanket bog and moorland juniper. Check with your local SEERAD office if you need more information on the Muirburn Code.

Participants must avoid damage to features of historical or archaeological interest and follow Scottish Executive guidance on the protection of these areas and minimise the risk of pollution through good management of nutrients and effluents and/or by following the Prevention of Environmental Pollution from Agricultural Activity (PEPFAA) code.

THE NEXT EDITION

The next edition of the Crofter will be published in July. We are delighted to accept any articles, stories, or photographs for the next edition at any time prior to the copy deadline. Please send any articles for inclusion in the next edition to the SCF office by **10th July** at the latest.

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