



## NEWS RELEASE

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### **Further retreat from the crofting hills evidence of need for agri-reform say crofters**

The Scottish Crofting Federation say that a new report on the state of upland agriculture in Scotland shows that there is little sign of recovery in livestock numbers for many of the most remote parts of the Highlands and Islands.

The 'Response from the Hills' report was published on Wednesday (14<sup>th</sup> December) by the Scottish Agricultural College as a follow up to their 2008 report 'Retreat from the Hills' which revealed dramatic declines in sheep and cattle numbers in upland areas of Scotland, particularly in crofting areas.

This new research from SAC claims that during the last three years, supported by a surge in prices, "the retreat from the hills has stabilised" at national and regional levels. However, the report adds that in some localities decline has continued and, crucially, it shows that these localities tend to be in crofting areas, such as the Western Isles, Argyll and Lochaber.

**The SCF's parliamentary spokesman Norman Leask** commented: "Although it is important to acknowledge that the SAC report does note slight increases in cattle numbers in some parts of the Highlands and Islands there is precious little in the report to raise the spirits of the crofting community. In parts of the crofting counties decline continues and in others what the SAC calls "stabilised" numbers might be better thought of as 'bottomed out'. In some places the level of 'stability' is nothing at all with hills empty of animals and the land abandoned. This is hardly surprising, given that Scottish agricultural policies have repeatedly been to the benefit of more favoured lowland farmers and at the expense of less favoured upland crofters and farmers.

"The report's author has also acknowledged that the recovery in livestock prices is very fragile and may be threatened by broader economic developments in the Eurozone. Meanwhile the SAC report notes that feed costs have doubled since 2006.

"This report makes the call by the Euro-MP Alyn Smith for a radical change in how agriculture is governed, taking better account of agriculture policies' social and ecological effects, seem more pressing than ever. If the Scottish Government want crofters to continue to supply public goods as part of a healthy Highland agriculture, they have got to do much more to modify the way they deliver support."

### NOTES FOR EDITORS

The SAC report 'Response from the Hills' is available on-line at: <http://www.sac.ac.uk/mainrep/pdfs/responsefromthehills.pdf>

