



NEWS RELEASE

Use: Immediate

Date: 16/10/06

CROFTERS SET TO FIGHT FOR VITAL CATTLE IMPROVEMENT SCHEME

A scheme providing high quality, health-checked bulls to crofting townships appears to again be under threat, only two years after a major political storm broke out over the schemes' future. Currently an interim scheme is running and this year provided 157 bulls to townships right across the crofting counties, with the bulk of these going to Skye and the Uists. Promised restructuring of the scheme to reduce overheads appears to be in limbo, with a suggestion that funding for this vital mechanism be included in the competitive Land Management Contract scheme expected to open in the second half of next year.

SCF John Laing said "In the last few weeks, a couple of events have taken place which have really highlighted the importance of this scheme in crofting areas. The first of these was the 'Skyebeef' event which we held jointly with the SAC in Sleat recently. With a range of industry experts speaking, it was abundantly clear that the way ahead for viable cattle production in the north and west is to concentrate on providing the high quality and healthy animals that the area is known for and the Livestock Improvement Scheme made it possible to do that. An interim scheme is now in it's second year of operation, but there is no sign of the revamping of the scheme that was promised for the future. There was huge concern in the audience that this vital support be lost and the quality and viability of cattle in the north and west declines. In terms of public investment, we are talking about a scheme costing just over £200,000 a year in total – which is a tiny fraction of the support to agriculture in the UK - but which provides a critical and well-targeted support for cattle-keeping in remote areas.

The recent Scottish Crofting Foundation conference in Shetland also saw concern about the future of this scheme raised again. The current interim scheme operates on a full cost recovery basis which means costs for crofting townships are very high. It takes no account of the public goods – good environmental management and public and animal health - that are ensured by this type of assistance. The fear is that the Executive are looking to get rid of this scheme by letting it drift - it is time it was given priority. We will be raising the issue of cattle improvement in the crofting areas with Scottish Executive Ministers in the very near future and demanding action on this vital scheme.”

<u>Ends</u>	<u>Contact:</u>	John Laing, SCF Director	Tel. 01470 521483
			(m) 07732 313726
		Patrick Krause, SCF Chief Executive	Tel. 01599 566365

Notes to editors

1. The Livestock Improvement Scheme was closed in 2004 and an interim scheme put in place awaiting the development of the Crofters Cattle Quality Improvement Scheme.

Picture can be found at: <http://www.croftingfoundation.co.uk/contact.shtml>