



NEWS RELEASE

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CROFTING FOUNDATION SEEKS FOOT AND MOUTH COMPENSATION

The Scottish Crofting Foundation (SCF) was today hoping for a positive result from a meeting between industry leaders, MPs and UK Environment Secretary Hilary Benn held this evening (Tuesday) in London. This meeting was set up by Orkney and Shetland MP Alistair Carmichael in the hope of securing a compensation package from the UK Government to ensure the survival of the livestock industry in Scotland which has been brought to its knees by the Surrey Foot and Mouth outbreak.

SCF Chairman Norman Leask said, "We hope that Mr Benn will shoulder the responsibility of the UK Government's moral and legal duty to compensate Scottish crofters and farmers under these extreme circumstances. I would like to put over strongly to Mr. Benn the principle that the polluter should pay. This is of course the case when the polluter is the farmer or crofter. In this case the polluter is the UK Government. We fear that many of our members, who are the innocent victims of this fiasco, will not be able to get back on their feet again after this severe blow. This might not seem a great consequence when viewed from London, but the loss of sheep from the hills and moors of the Highlands and Islands will have drastic social, economic and environmental consequences in some of the UK's most remote and fragile areas. Once sheep are lost from these areas, the loss would be permanent as sheep are hefted over generations to a piece of land, and if that link is broken it is almost impossible to re-establish."

SCF Vice-chair Neil MacLeod added, "The costs to the industry of this disaster are escalating daily. There has been very little uptake of the light lamb welfare scheme in the Western Isles. But this actually conceals the fact that, before the scheme was announced, a lot of crofters were panicked into selling their lambs while they could, having to accept as little as £2.50 a head. These lambs were not bought, they were stolen. So at least in the case of the Western Isles the light lamb welfare scheme completely missed its target and crofters have born the financial loss, without, at present, any mechanism for compensation."

SCF also urged its members wishing to take advantage of the light lamb scheme to book their lambs in as soon as possible. The scheme is operated by auction marts in the various areas and details are on the Scottish Government website or can be provided by SCF.

Ends.

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Pictures available on www.crofting.org

