



NEWS RELEASE

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CROFTERS' STUDY TOUR RESPONDS TO INCREASING DEMAND FOR SOFT FRUIT

The Scottish Crofting Federation (SCF) has responded to the increasing demand for soft fruit in remote areas of the crofting counties with a two-day study tour designed to help crofter-growers increase their own production.

Under SCF's Crofting Resources Programme, part of which aims to train and mentor food producers, 16 soft fruit growers from crofts mainly in Skye and north-west Sutherland visited fruit farms in Moray and the Black Isle to learn about techniques which could be transferred to their smaller operations.

The group toured farms in Forres, Auldearn and Muir of Ord accompanied by specialist horticulture tutor Dr Audrey Litterick, of Audrey Litterick Consulting.

She said: "The tour visited four very different growers from small organic to hi-tec systems, and offered a range of practical and technical sessions with plenty of space to ask questions.

"By the end of the tour, the growers felt they had thought as hard as they could about the issues they are facing, and had gathered ideas to help them move their own production on."

Ian Brown of Skyeberries, Edinbane has 1ha of open-air blueberry, raspberry and currant production under challenging soil and climatic conditions.

He is chairman of Skye and Lochalsh Horticultural Community Interest Company, and supplies to top-end markets on Skye like the Three Chimneys and Kinloch Lodge.

Mr Brown said: "Although I won't be directly copying any of the production methods I saw on the bigger farms, the tour helped me see more clearly what I need to do to renovate and regenerate my business."

SCF's project co-ordinator Donald Murdie said the tour had left producers feeling optimistic about their prospects. He said: "Most of the people on it were established growers, and they came back enthused, wishing to try out different techniques.

"There is a massive demand for local soft fruit in the islands and west coast which is not currently being met. It's a good paying crop with a guaranteed market."

Ends

Contact: Donald Murdie, Projects Co-ordinator

01470 511295 / 07929 338762