



SCF Contribution to the Scottish Government Food Policy Discussion 'Choosing the Right Ingredients'

1. Introduction

Scottish Crofting Foundation (SCF) is pleased to offer the following contribution to the discussion on the National Food Policy for Scotland. SCF is the only representative and campaigning organisation for crofters and crofting in Scotland. We congratulate the Scottish Government on this policy initiative which has far reaching importance for our members.

Food production in Scotland must concentrate on quality, local provision, provenance and environment. Maintaining food production, especially livestock, in upland, peripheral and island areas is of inestimable social, economic and environmental importance. Small scale agriculture, such as crofting, has been successful in maintaining populations in some of Scotland's most remote areas. By contrast, industrial scale agriculture driven by a commercial UK food policy, whether in the Straths of Sutherland or the arable prairies of the East of England, has cleared rural populations leaving a degraded environment and a countryside that is the preserve of the very rich.

It is an often stated myth that food security requires larger and larger agri-businesses. Britain's self-sufficiency in food is actually less than it was in the 1950s¹ and some of the world's most densely populated countries are fed by very small producers. "Agriculture has long been recognised as 'multifunctional.' The preoccupation of looking at food and trade in food as purely economic issues is of recent vintage."² So we would wish to see production and distribution of food being as diverse as possible, rather than dominated by a few supermarket chains and multinational suppliers. On one hand supermarkets point to the vast diversity of food they offer. On the other, they claim there is no demand for such native Scottish produce as light lamb and young mutton. Odd, when Italian supermarkets sell as much light Shetland lamb as they can get hold of. Broadly speaking, our best food leaves our shores and supermarkets decide what food we are going to eat, cheaper food that does not have the same quality assurances that marks Scottish produce, but provides them with profit.

Tourism is one of Scotland's most important industries with considerable growth potential, and food is a vital part of that. If Scotland is to be a high-quality tourist destination, visitors are entitled to expect to be served the best of local produce, and small producers in the Highlands and Islands have a vital role in meeting those expectations. Small scale, low-intensity food production tends to be associated with High Nature Value farming, and many of Scotland's most valued habitats and landscapes are maintained by crofting agriculture.

Scotland's dietary related health is poor and yet we produce some of the world's finest foods. The challenge for a sustainable Scottish food policy surely is to close that anomaly.

A fresh approach to food - Scotland is placed to lead the UK in a sustainable model of food production. We look forward to having a food policy that makes fresh, healthy, local produce the norm – available and affordable for all of the people of Scotland – with crofters contributing fully to that objective.

¹ DEFRA 2006

² 'Fair Trade in Food' – Church of Scotland 2007

2. Summary of main points

- Crofting, with its huge land resource has a role to play in producing a variety of good, natural, healthy food;
- Most of the High Nature Value areas of the UK are to be found in the crofting areas;
- Crofters have an important role in supplying hardy, healthy store and breeding livestock to mainstream Scottish agriculture;
- There is a growing niche market for native breed, extensively reared, low-input beef, lamb and mutton;
- Scotland's dietary related health is poor and yet we produce some of the world's finest foods;
- Supermarkets, as profit-distributing companies, can not be expected to regulate themselves; it is essential (and widely called for) that we have a supermarket regulator that works with the Sustainability Commission;
- Crofters can supply much-needed fresh produce in some of the most remote areas;
- The '**Scottish Crofting Produce**' Mark will stimulate production, assist marketing of crofting produce and help to meet the demand for niche produce;
- Public sector procurement policies must favour local producers;
- High quality, fresh, local food is an essential ingredient of a successful and sustainable tourist industry;
- Crofting can assist in educating children about where food comes from, how it is produced, and how to cook and eat it;
- The Scotland Rural Development Programme must have appropriate measures to enhance Scottish food production;
- Scotland is placed to lead the UK in a sustainable model of food production.

3. What crofting needs to deliver its food producing potential

- **Stability and equity in appropriate support schemes.** To fulfill its potential in food production, crofting needs firm regulation, stability, equity and continuity in support schemes and opportunities for new entrants. The three support schemes unique to crofting – Cattle Improvement Scheme, Crofting Counties Agricultural Grants Scheme and Croft House Grant Scheme - have been under attack for a number of years and it is a constant struggle to maintain them. The Less Favoured Area Support Scheme (LFASS) has been mis-targeted to provide highest payments to more favourable areas. We need assurance that these schemes will continue and, where a case can be made, will be enhanced. LFASS must be re-targeted to the LFAs. The Scotland Rural Development Programme must have appropriate measures to enhance Scottish food production, to promote small scale production and to develop crofting as a key contributor to rural Scotland.
- **Protection of inbye land.** In some areas there is intense pressure on crofting land for speculative housing. We need regulatory and planning policies that protect this land for food production.
- **Strong regulation.** Consistent policies to deal with disuse, neglect and dereliction of crofting land and that reward food production and non-market goods.
- **Local abattoirs.** We need a secure future for local abattoirs and development of new abattoirs in areas where they are required. There is a particular need identified in Skye and Lochalsh. Shorter supply chains in the meat industry are needed on grounds of animal welfare, product quality and bio-security.
- **Local purchasing by public authorities** to support local producers, reduce food miles and improve freshness and quality.
- **Availability of crofts for new entrants.** Tackling croft absenteeism and creation of new crofts; active assistance to find crofts for suitable new entrants; training and mentoring; financial support.
- **Skills training.** Funding for a rural skills training programme that focuses on crofting, small-scale food production, local producer groups, local and direct marketing.
- **Land use development.** Funding for a 'Growing crofting communities' programme.
- **Promotion of small-scale producers.** Help is need for small-scale producers to meet EC regulations and for small-scale producers to protect their 'Mark'.

4. The land resource of crofting

The 'crofting counties' cover roughly one third of the land mass of Scotland. Within this area approximately 25% of the agricultural land is under crofting tenure. Much of this land is rough grazing, but there is good arable and grassland in crofting tenure in such areas as Easter Ross, Caithness, Orkney, the south end of Shetland, and the machair lands of the Outer Hebrides and the Argyll Islands. This is a resource, potentially, of formidable food production capacity.

Crofting has sustained communities in the remote rural areas of the Highlands and Islands through extensive livestock rearing, growing of traditional crops such as potatoes, vegetables and native cereal varieties, and keeping poultry. This semi-self-sufficiency was traditionally supplemented by income from off-croft work such as fishing, seafaring, weaving/knitting and the construction trades.

As a small-scale food production system, crofting is very efficient, and during WWII food shortages, crofts were contributing significantly to feeding the Scottish cities. However, post-war agricultural policy has threatened crofting practice and culture. The CAP forced crofting into becoming part of the commercially driven industrial agribusiness that the UK adopted. The perceived value of crofting fell, the confidence and pride of crofters dropped, people left the crofting areas, and crofts became abandoned and neglected. The government response was to encourage amalgamation of crofts, to turn them into small farms, but in so doing exacerbated the destruction of what made the crofting system strong. Amalgamation has been seen as the legacy of the many going to the few – driven by national policy and manipulation by subsidy. The result of this policy has been a move away from food production for local consumption in favour of store livestock production, mainly sheep.

5. The traditional crofting diet

Food production for a family, and often for the wider community, was of necessity at the heart of crofting. Although food was always in short supply, once crofters' tenure was made secure the supply of staple commodities became possible, at least for extended families who had sufficient labour resources. This resulted in what is recognised now as a very healthy diet, based on potatoes, vegetables, oatmeal, oily fish, eggs and extensively reared meat. This diet produced strong, hardy and long-lived people, many of whom, for want of decent economic prospects at home, unfortunately had to fulfill their potential abroad, or form part of the crofting counties' disproportionate contribution to military service.

From the 1950s onwards, government pressed for amalgamation of crofts into larger units for reasons of 'efficiency'. Fortunately the spirit of individualism and attachment to the land that characterises traditional crofters largely prevented this enlargement drive from succeeding. However, European agriculture policy and support mechanisms during the thirty years post accession drove crofters into an ever narrower range of activities, ending for many in monocultural production of store lambs which eventually proved economically and environmentally unsustainable.

This provided a short-term income stream, but the ending of mixed cultivation and grazing systems in most crofting areas meant the end of much of the healthy, fresh food that crofters produced for themselves.

In parallel with these trends, a new generation in the crofting areas, influenced by a superficially glamorous urban culture portrayed in the media, began to regard food production as an inferior pursuit associated with poverty and backbreaking labour.

6. Crofting specialisation and diversification

The policy drivers referred to above resulted in a situation where the vast majority of outputs from crofts consisted, by the end of the twentieth century, of store livestock. Much of this was of excellent quality, produced from the better quality crofting land and assisted by the

improvement schemes for sheep and cattle operated by the Crofters Commission/SEERAD. There was, however, an overproduction in some areas of light lambs which were hard to market.

The Scottish interpretation of the CAP reforms resulting from Agenda 2000 which decoupled support from production have reduced grazing pressure in many crofting areas, indeed to the point where hill and moor land is becoming undergrazed or even abandoned. The vagaries of store markets, increasing bureaucracy and the Single Farm Payment have caused many older crofters to give up their stock. Store animals brought forward for autumn sales are of improved quality, but this is not usually rewarded in the sale ring – certainly not for lambs. However, the southern European trade has provided an outlet for light lambs off the hills in the crofting areas. Shetland usually supplies up to nine thousand light lambs to Italian supermarkets, but this business was lost in 2007 due to Foot & Mouth Disease restrictions.

It can be seen from the above that most crofters find themselves at the lowest level of a lengthy food production chain, subject to the costs and margins of all the players at higher levels from auctioneers through hauliers, finishers and processors to supermarkets.

Some crofting facts and figures

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No. of crofts 18,000 • No. of crofters 13,000 • Plus families = 30,000 or 10 per cent of H&I population • 30% of households in mainland H&I • 65% of households in Shetland, Western Isles and Skye • Average crofting household income £21,000 • Crofting provides 30% of that income 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • About 2000 crofters are owner-occupiers, the rest are tenants • About 8000 crofters are agriculturally active • 25% of H&I agricultural land is under crofting tenure • Crofters have 45% of breeding ewes and 20% of beef cattle in H&I
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Sources: - Crofters Commission, Committee of Inquiry on Crofting, SG Agricultural Statistics

7. The role of crofting in Scottish food production

The importance of crofting to mainstream food production has increasingly been in its production of store livestock which now accounts for the vast majority of output from crofts, a situation which will continue for the foreseeable future. Crofters' methods of husbandry, utilizing extensive grazing and natural forage with low artificial inputs, produces hardy store and breeding stock of high health status which is an integral part of mainstream Scottish beef and lamb production. The Scottish NFU recently stated, "It is essential that crofting remains a vibrant and viable sector as it plays a very important part in Scottish agriculture and makes a large contribution in providing good quality breeding stock to the wider industry."³

This position is supported by increasing awareness amongst crofters of the need to maintain the enviable health status of their stock. There has been a good uptake of Land Management Contract options for animal health plans⁴. Cattle producers, for example in Uist and in Shetland have implemented co-operative schemes to safeguard their high health status.

8. Crofters as food producers

³ NFUS Vice President Stewart Wood in statement to Committee of Inquiry on Crofting 03.04.08

⁴ Unfortunately the health plan option is not available in the new Scotland Rural Development Programme

Historically, crofters produced food for extended families and the surrounding community. Loss of population and UK and European agricultural policies led crofters away from food production into a vulnerable position at the lowest level of the agricultural production chain, i.e. as store livestock producers. As such they became subject to the pressures of costs and margins of all those higher up the chain. This situation led to a position where virtually no fresh produce was available in some of the most remote areas of the Highland mainland and islands, apart from home produced mutton and, in some cases, potatoes. Where local shops, and traveling shops, existed their stocks tended to be dominated by national brands of highly processed food.

In the last few years we have started to see signs of welcome change in these areas. This has come about for a number of reasons, including an increasing frustration in some of the most remote areas at the lack of fresh food supplies, changing expectations in these communities brought about, in part, by in-migration, tourist demand, and the generally raised profile of the political, economic and health issues surrounding food production and distribution. Community based food projects have started up in a number of locations in the Highlands and Islands. Groups of crofters, recognising the potential of their land resources, have formed producer and marketing cooperatives aiming to meet the increasing demand for fresh, healthy, local produce.

Some of these developments have been made possible by adoption of new methods, for example the use of polytunnels, which have proved a great success even in some of the most challenging conditions on the western seaboard and islands. Commercial horticulture, which is an unsupported sector of food production, is a relatively new activity in crofting. Following CAP reform and decoupling, and the removal of the need to retain quotas, there has also been a realisation that there is a demand for extensively reared beef, lamb and mutton from native and traditional breeds and that crofters have the land resources to produce such natural, low-input products.

Crofting producer groups

Shetland Organic Producers Caithness Food & Horticulture North West Cattle Producers NW Sutherland Food Link East Sutherland Producers Lochcarron & Applecross Producers Skye & Lochalsh Meat Supply Group Skye & Lochalsh Horticultural Association Lewis & Harris Sheep Producers Lewis & Harris Cattle Producers Lewis & Harris Horticultural Producers Uist Cattle Producers Lochbroom & Ullapool Growers Group Lochaber Larder	All produce All produce Beef All produce All produce Horticultural Beef, lamb Horticultural Lamb, mutton Beef Horticultural Beef Horticultural All produce	Shetland Caithness NW Sutherland, W. Ross NW Sutherland East Sutherland Lochcarron and Applecross Skye and Lochalsh Skye and Lochalsh Lewis and Harris Lewis and Harris Lewis and Harris N & S Uist, Benbecula Lochbroom Lochaber, Ardnamurchan
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LEWIS & HARRIS SHEEP PRODUCERS

For a number of years Lewis and Harris Sheep Producers have supplied lambs to the Co-op supermarket in Stornoway under the Heather Isle Meats brand. The quality of lamb and mutton from the Outer Hebrides has long been recognised, but the market and subsidy regimes had developed in such a way that the vast majority of island produced lambs went to the mainland as stores or into the southern European light lamb trade. At the same time, butchers in the island were buying in supplies from mainland wholesalers. The Co-op contract makes available local lamb for local consumers while assuring a fair-trade return for the producer. It also raises welfare standards by avoiding unnecessary transport of animals, reduces food miles and provides work for the excellent Stornoway Abattoir. Last year the producer group started direct marketing through their website www.heatherislemeats.com and now supplies customers throughout the UK

9. Encouraging production and building confidence

Over the last three years, the Scottish Crofting Foundation (SCF) has been working through its Land Use Programme to convince crofters of the actual and potential value of what they produce. Reliance on store lamb production has, in recent years, been a dispiriting experience for those with poorer land. SCF has actively promoted more use of the huge land resource available to crofters for food production. This has had some encouraging results, such as the formation of producer groups, availability of more locally produced meat and diversification into horticultural production. This comes at a time when there is more demand than ever for fresh, healthy, local produce. In the Highlands and Islands, only 10%⁵ of that demand is currently being met and crofters are in a unique position to fulfil the demand. To encourage production and marketing of crofters' produce, SCF is introducing the **Scottish Crofting Produce** Mark.

10. The 'Scottish Crofting Produce' Mark

The Scottish Crofting Produce Mark is growing out of the potential for crofters to benefit from income generation based on their natural heritage such as niche marketing, land-management, eco-tourism and heritage tourism. The traditional ways in which crofters have managed their livestock, managed the land, produced food, clothes and a myriad of other items is very attractive to a discerning market today. That which was scorned as "anachronistic" is now prized. The Mark will be carried by such products as extensively reared meat from native breeds, game, organic or near-organic vegetables and soft fruit, traditional varieties, machair potatoes, seafood, dairy produce, honey, hand-made garments from local textiles, yarn, and other craft products. The Mark will embrace such concepts as provenance, individuality, tradition, heritage, authenticity, clean environment, natural, healthy "good food", extensive, slow matured, "heather fed", low artificial input or organic, good husbandry and welfare, sustainability, high quality, environmentally friendly, ethical/fair trade, traceability to individual producer.

The Mark will be available to members of SCF who comply with a number of criteria. For example, meat producers will have to have Quality Meat Scotland⁶ certification as a minimum.

⁵ Survey for Highlands & Islands Enterprise

⁶ Unfortunately quality assurance is not an option in the new Scotland Rural Development Programme

11. Local food for local consumers

Scotland's islands and remote areas of the mainland lie at the end of very long and sometimes unreliable supply chains. Ferries are frequently disrupted by bad weather leaving empty shelves in island shops and supermarkets. Fresh fruit and vegetables have usually traveled great distances in chilled transport and deteriorate in nutritional value (as well as in taste, texture, looks and usability) rapidly when exposed to normal temperatures. Local producers have a role to play in reducing these food miles, especially in remote mainland areas and the islands, through import substitution. The economic benefits of this can be startling. One pound spent with a national retailer results in 15p re-circulating in the local economy. That pound spent with a local food business results in, on average, 98p being re-circulated. For example, if everyone in Skye and Lochalsh spends £2.50 per week on local primary produce, that results in an additional £1.35m circulating in the local economy each year.⁷

The Farmers' Market movement provides a growing number of outlets for local producers and crofter-led producer groups have started up a number of produce stalls. In the season these outlets can be found at Lerwick, Wick, Inverness, Stornoway, Fort William, Dornoch, Tarbert (Harris), Portree, Ullapool and Lochcarron/Applecross.

Public sector procurement is another area where local food can provide for local consumption. In 2007 Highlands and Islands Local Food Network tendered to supply local produce for the Highland Council's school meals contract, offering a variety of fresh, local meat, vegetables and dairy products. The bid failed on grounds of cost, although it would have put only 7p per day on the cost of a school meal, and the tender was awarded to the ubiquitous mass-market supplier, Brake Bros. A local procurement pilot scheme by Comhairle nan Eilean Siar is to take place in Autumn 2008.

SMALL ISLAND ABATTOIRS

Isle of Barra

The abattoir at Craigston, Barra is a private business operated by Archie MacLean. His throughput is 20 - 30 cattle and 500 - 600 sheep per year. He does all the work himself. The building consists of a standard agricultural shed which has been fitted out internally to the required standard. Archie has invested this year in a new cutting room and office, complete with new IT facilities for the meat inspector. Sheep are home bred and cattle are bought in, mainly from Uist, and finished on his croft. Private kill is a substantial part of the business. Archie supplies all the beef to the island's three hotels. He has no derogations from EU hygiene standards. Meat inspection is carried out by the Uist-based veterinary practice, and herein lies the one threat to this very successful business model. The Meat Hygiene Service is in process of putting inspection services out to tender on an area basis, possibly with exemption for small and remote premises who may be able to carry on with their present arrangements. Small abattoirs in remote places can only work by having good working relationships with the local vets who currently do their meat inspection.

Isle of Mull

The Mull abattoir is owned and run by Mull and Iona Community Trust. One to five cattle can be accommodated at any one time. Carcasses can be hung for three weeks and there is a small hanging charge for the second two weeks. The abattoir can also offer full butchering, vacuum packing and labelling. There is a small lairage facility. As well as the island, the abattoir serves Ardnamurchan and Morvern via ferry links. A chilled delivery van is operated from the island to the mainland and this can link in with an overnight delivery service to UK destinations. This unique community-owned island facility has been partly funded through EU grants, charitable foundations and to a greater degree by the islanders themselves. Fund raising is on going and the Isle of Mull slaughter house would be very grateful to receive donations from anyone willing to support this initiative. This facility means increased local employment and generally empowers this peripheral rural community to be self sustaining.

12. Tourism and food

⁷ Julie MacLeod, Research for Skye & Lochalsh Food Link, 2006

Scottish tourism is vital to our economy, contributing around £4.2 billion. The Scottish tourism industry cannot compete on price with cheap package deals and low-cost flights, so quality is what will achieve the sector's potential for growth. In the Highlands and Islands, employment in both tourism and agriculture is well above the Scottish average, employing some 15% of the workforce⁸. The two industries are interdependent for a variety of reasons. Crofters in many areas combine agricultural activity with provision of tourist accommodation and services. Some of Scotland's leading hotels and restaurants⁹ source high quality meat, shellfish, vegetables, potatoes and soft fruit from local producers. Seasonality of food, as with the provenance 'story' is something to treasure and to use as a selling point.

Some of Scotland's most valued landscapes and habitats are maintained by traditional crofting land management practices and access to these landscapes is via paths maintained by crofters¹⁰. A growing, high-value tourism industry will depend on expanding the availability of fresh local produce.

13. Food, health and education

Educating children and adults about where their food comes from, how it is produced, and how to prepare and enjoy good food is a vital element of food policy. Crofting can have an important role in education, with crofters in the classroom and kids on crofts¹¹. In 2007, as part of the Highland Year of Culture, the Planting to Plate project connected four Highland and Island schools with crofters in their localities, and the children worked on land- and food-related projects throughout the year culminating in an autumn 'Harvest Celebration' in Inverness. Another event aiming to connect children with food was the 'Fun Day Out with Crofting' at Stornoway Auction Mart in May 2006 organised by the producer groups in Lewis and Harris in conjunction with the Crofters Commission and attended by over 500 primary school children.

'PLANTING TO PLATE'

The principal aim of the Highland Year of Culture 2007 was 'to promote the Highlands as a great place to live and visit by showcasing the unique and special nature of Highland culture in the past, present and future'. By involving schoolchildren and crofters in the Planting to Plate project, an opportunity was created to encourage healthy eating and to celebrate the important role of local food production and traditional cultivation methods as an integral part of that culture. The project encouraged the children to be more active and strongly promotes all four aspects of the Curriculum for Excellence. Drew Ratter, Convener, Crofters Commission, commented on the scope of the project: "I'm delighted that during the Year of Highland Culture this project has enabled schools to teach children about crofting. They've had hands-on experience of growing food, from preparing ground through to tasting the results of their work. These children are developing pride in the history and culture of their communities, as well as becoming discerning consumers of fresh, healthy, locally produced food. This can only be good for the future of crofting."

OBJECTIVES OF THE PROJECT

- Raising awareness of and developing practical skills in growing food through links with local food producers.
- Promoting an understanding of healthy eating and the benefits of locally grown food.
- Encouraging responsible citizenship through a deeper understanding of the local environment, history and culture.
- Celebrating the place of locally produced food in Highland Culture through growing crops and preparing and sampling the food.

From *Scottish Health Promoting Schools Case Study*

13. MAINTAINING SKILLS

⁸ Highlands & Islands Enterprise 2007

⁹ e.g. Gleneagles, Perthshire, Three Chimneys, Skye

¹⁰ Unfortunately the path maintenance option is not available in the new Scotland Rural Development Programme

¹¹ Unfortunately the educational visits option is not available in the new Scotland Rural Development Programme

A potential threat to continued food production in marginal areas is the loss of rural skills such as livestock husbandry, tractor and implement work, working with sheepdogs, shearing, fencing and dyking. Crofters are typically versatile and adaptable, but there is a need to pass on traditional and new skills and to have training and mentoring available for new entrants. Scottish Crofting Foundation has been addressing training needs through its Land Use Programme and has run a number of courses on a variety of subjects including horticultural production, beef cattle, quality lamb, common grazings management and butchery. SCF has worked with LANTRA, the Crofters Commission, Forestry Commission, SNH, Highlands and Islands Enterprise and Scottish Agricultural College to set up the Crofting and Small Landholders Training Programme. This comprehensive and innovative scheme can be found at www.crofters-ocf.co.uk.

14. Conclusion

There is no doubt that the UK industrial profit-led food production experiment has failed the sustainability test. Scotland's land and food assets coupled with our innovative vision place us in the position to lead the UK in a sustainable model of food production, increasing indigenous food self-sufficiency, developing small-scale production, increasing the consumers' connection with production, responding to consumer demand and raising the nation's health status. But this will take a radical fresh approach, a new way of thinking about, supporting and delivering food production. We look forward to having a food policy that makes fresh, healthy, local produce the norm – available and affordable for all of the people of Scotland – with crofters contributing fully to that objective