EVE COME A LONG WAY, but there’s still much to be done.” Those were the words of Scottish Crofters Union president Angus MacRae at the SCU’s second annual conference in Skye in 1988.

Two and a half years after the groundbreaking crofters organisation was inaugurated in November 1985 Angus was able to report a strong membership of 4000 and still growing. The federation of the area-based crofters’ union’s uniting as a single body in the Scottish Crofters Union was an unprecedented success and surpassed all expectations. The need to stand together as one, to have a strong united voice, was recognised. This need is just as valid today with crofting being constantly under threat.

Continued on page 14

Effective solutions to our own problems

Frank Rennie, first SCU president, looks back

IN THE HECTIC WEEKENDS of 1985 as the Scottish Crofters Union took shape there was one remarkable phenomenon that pervaded Highlands and Islands crofting communities – the quietly optimistic anticipation of change.

As the branch and area structures grew, some of the usual community activists came forward to take up elected positions, but also an enormous number of new faces came forward too. People who had never been involved in any organisation before were motivated and excited to throw their efforts behind the SCU.

This resulted in a major revitalisation of the Highlands and Islands. Not just crofting communities in isolation, it provided vigour to discussions on environmental conservation, business development, estate management, local housing, rural transport and a dozen other issues that are vital to a vibrant society. Slowly, some of the establishment bodies came to the surprising conclusion that rather
Message from the chair…

Eleanor Arthur

July and August were quite different this year than usual, in that I went on holiday. There was a belated honeymoon as I got married last year but my wife and I were unable to go away after the wedding. But more on the holiday later.

Early July meant checking our WGB plantation fances and ropes and repairing any areas that were on to the most important job of checking fencing. With the weather mixed for July we were lucky to get finished by the 2nd thanks to Malcolm White and his gang (Brig, Dunc and Nige) and also having heads to keep 500 head under cover. The following night we enjoyed a dance at the Yell social club, in the Community Hall and then had the weekend to pack for our holiday in Nova Scotia and Cape Breton. On Monday we left for Glasgow, flew to Heathrow and on to Halifax, where we picked up a motor home which would be our home for the next three weeks.

We first travelled the eastern shore of Nova Scotia in a heavily wooded with not much scenic fighting, we crossed into New Brunswick and Cape Breton we went up the north west coast where there was lots of evidence of agriculture in the past but little or none today. It is amazing that so much has changed from where the land was cleared by the people who settled there and it is now covered with trees and woods. Some fields I saw were comparable in size to some crofts here on the west coast but were of far better quality. Considering how good the soil was I was surprised at even how little vegetables were grown. We went to a farmers market in Mabou where I saw only one farmer from Nova Scotia and the rest of the stalls sold baking, a small amount of salad and crafts.

I felt that it was such a shame that land use in much of Cape Breton seemed to mean so little to the people who lived there. Despite being descended from the original settlers from the west of Scotland, whilst we still put so much emphasis on christening here. Some people still have their tractors but only with topppers attached to the wheed down.

I have to say I enjoyed driving through the Skye Gien, where there are few dairy farms and the land is being used. Much of our holiday was a combination of trying to listen to as much live music as possible, wildlife watching and visiting places of historical interest, such as the Louisburg Fortress which is still in the parish of Louisburg, now a national historical park.

July and August meant checking for the crofting community mapping programme which SCF is developing and a meeting with Jim Mather MSP, minister for enterprise, energy and tourism, to talk about crofting renewable energy projects.

Perhaps the most important event of this busy trip was the Crofting Connections reception in parliament. This event celebrated the successes of the school crofting project run by SCF in partnership with Soil Association Scotland. It was an exceptionally good night and the young folk were very brave when it came to speaking, singing and playing instruments for the 400 people in attendance; and it was great to hear a set of pipes being played in the parliament hall. Ahuge thank you to the people who made this project possible and to all the children who have participated to date.

Patrick and Derek Flynn came to Scotland to deliver an update on the Crofting Act 2010 and the proposed community mapping programme. We arranged a few meetings which were very well attended and useful discussions took place. The area has some criticism, naturally, but Derek was able to put things in perspective very well.

The mapping programme is being seen with great enthusiasm here and there are a few communities putting themselves forward to participate in the pilot programme. Patrick and Derek also went to Stornoway for a similar meeting and will be in Helmdale on 25th November in other areas over the winter.

Norman has been busy representing the SCF in Brussels and was joined by Patrick to attend a CAP discussion with, amongst others, the commissioner for agriculture Daniele Ciofri. Norman was also joined by the Shetland Islands Council veterinary officer, Hilary Liebeschutz, for the sheep and great meat advisory committee on which he sits. Hilary has written about this in this issue.

We went on holiday and I wonder where the year has gone. Our boys were lying in the sitting room rug writing their Santa lists while I was thinking; this, that, basic, lamb, pork or turkey for the Christmas dinner? Isn’t it sweet to think crofters produce and eat a premium quality product, which fits the glove of slow food without any fuss?

It takes an awful lot of hard work to be recognised for our efforts and it is surprising how many other small producers around the world fight the same battle.

July and August 2010

New SCF director John Giles from the Isle of Lewis contributed this blog for this issue.
A sense of community

While we await recent changes in crofting law to be brought into force, board member Derek Flynn was asked to explore and explain how changes in crofting law might be used to enhance crofting communities.

Since its introduction in 1976, some people have regularly criticised crofters’ right to buy. Others have found it useful. It became the cause of some tension between tenants and owner-occupiers, in a few communities. As nothing could be done, most of us learned to live with it. But now, with the equalisation of the duties of owner-occupiers with those of tenants, both are now to be defined as crofters, with almost identical roles. This disagreement can now be put behind us.

All crofters, both tenants and owner-occupiers, are required to be normally resident on or within 32km (20 miles) of their crofts. Those who cannot meet this requirement must arrange for consent to live elsewhere. There is also adjustment and clarification of every crofter’s duty relating to his or her croft. He or she must cultivate and maintain it or misuse or neglect the croft. S/he must not let the house or barn to another to use it when they see fit. How is it to be put to another purposeful use. It must be normally resident on or within 32km (20 miles) of their crofts. This is also adjustment and clarification of every crofter’s duty relating to his or her croft. He or she must cultivate and maintain it or misuse or neglect the croft. S/he must not let the house or barn to another to use it when they see fit. How is it to be put to another purposeful use.

Decrofting reform

Edith Ross, solicitor, Inverness, outlines issues raised by the new act:

1. **This TPRC** is required to be discussed in light of the impending changes in the law. There may be normally resident on or within 32km (20 miles) of their crofts. The crofters may then request a title deed to be made. The second stage of the process is contained in section 40 of the 2010 Act, which clearly stipulates that only a member of the crofter’s family may be the crofter’s nominee. The Commission’s policy criteria in this regard will be essential in interpreting the new provisions; indeed, little can be predicted about the effect of them until they are in force. The policy criteria are known.

2. **Sale**

The ability of the crofter to request a title deed be granted in the name of his nominee is also to be curtailed. This will have two stages, namely, (1) the closing of the so-called nominee loophole, and (2) the extension of the period during which a former crofting landlord may negotiate a claw-back payment. The first stage is contained in section 40 of the 2010 Act, which clearly stipulates that only a member of the crofter’s family may be the crofter’s nominee. In practice, this is likely to mean that only a transfer to a member of the crofter’s family is without threat of a landlord wishing to claw back some of the development value. There are likely to be transfers to non-family members, but these are likely to require negotiation with the landlord regarding payment for the land.

The second stage of the measure is contained in section 41 of the 2010 Act, which provides that the claw-back period will be ten years (rather than five under the current law).
A fresh look at mutton

A	THE	TIME	of	writing

(early November), a week ago, we were catching around £50 in the sale ring at Portree. Changed industry charged with product supply in the sheepmeat sector?

This message is slowly getting across. Intensive meat production with its heavy demands on resource that exists in crofters’ and islands. The vast land and consumption, that can only be exploited properly if there is a suitably well-developed infrastructure for mutton to be harvested earlier and two of these, Gustav and Vilda, yielded 8.4 t/ha of Waggon (5.8 and 5.7 t/ha, respectively). It is likely the crofters could have been harvested four days earlier than its actual harvest date and its estimated straw yield was slightly higher than that of Waggon.

The range of early-maturing varieties which might be of value to growers in the north of Scotland which would help to widen the harvesting window, enable more crops to be harvested as dry grain and possibly supply specialist local markets like milking or fattening. The trials carried comparisons of barley, four of oats and four of wheat from SW Seeds with the Scottish Crofting Federation (SCP) mark. The campaign, launched in 2004 (www.muttonrenaissance.org.uk) is rightly being questioned for its sustainability. Extensification and slow-maturing, hardy, native breeds grazing natural herbages must surely form a large part of the answer.

The mutton renaissance promotion campaign has been running successfully every year with various crops to be harvested. In the barley trial, the highest grain yield was from Vilde (6.3 t/ha) which was harvested on 8 September (145 days after planting). However, four of the northern varieties were harvested eight days earlier and two of these, Gustav and Vilda, yielded 8.4 t/ha of Waggon (5.8 and 5.7 t/ha, respectively). It is likely the crofters could have been harvested four days earlier than its actual harvest date and its estimated straw yield was slightly higher than that of Waggon.

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ON THE CROFTER

CROFTING CATTLE IMPROVEMENT SCHEME

The Crofter, December 2010

ON THE CROFTER

The Crofting cattle improvement scheme, now evolved into the 12-bull disease improvement scheme, is open to applications for the 2011-12 season.

The scheme is open to groups of at least two crofters within the crofting counties and provides good-quality, high-health bulls in areas where it is impractical to keep bulls and over winter them and where no alternative breeder facility exists.

Breeds supplied include: Linshire, Simmental, Aberdeen Angus, Charolais, Shorthorn, Luig, Sallers and Highlander. If demand for any other breed was demonstrated, we would consider adding to our range, provided it was deemed to be cost-effective and value for money.

Our bulls are selected on a combination of attributes such as correctness, good legs and feet, good locomotion, size, range to suit the variations of herds within the crofting counties and estimated breeding values. We try to select animals which are above the top 40% for the breed, with many being in the top 20%, whilst still ensuring the crofting counties and estimated the many variations of herds within correctness, good legs and feet, combination of attributes such and value for money.

A bull out on hire develops a problem, a replacement is not available from farm staff. If a bull out on hire develops a problem, a replacement is not available from farm staff. This not only protects them whilst the scheme, provides. As always, advice and assistance will be provided at no additional cost.

The scheme should provide information such as anadrome, breeding mean, health status, marketing and details of any agri-environmental and other community schemes and initiatives.

Additional information in the plan will be useful to monitor the scheme, assist with future planning for the study and also to demonstrate the benefits the scheme provides. As always, advice and assistance will be available from farm staff. If you wish to participate in the scheme or require any further information please contact

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Inverness IV2 6AJ
T: 01463 231281 M: 07786 737717
john.cowan@crofterscommission.org.uk

ON THE CROFTER

LIVER FLUKE DISEASE

Liver fluke disease has been estimated to cost the Scottish livestock industry in excess of £50 million per year due to deaths of infected animals and condemnation of infected meat.

The latter is becoming even more important. Latest GIS figures suggest 25% of lamb and cattle liver are condemned as suffering from Scotland. Liver fluke disease is on the increase in Scotland, in both sheep and cattle, so it is therefore important to work with your vet to develop liver fluke control strategies specifically for your croft.

Symptoms

The disease is caused by the parasitic flatworm, Fasciola hepatica. The liver fluke appears to be more prevalent in the area where the number of sheep and cattle is high and where the climate is either very mild or very cool. In addition, the disease is more common in areas where there are large numbers of flies, particularly midges.

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The liver fluke is a problem on your croft and your vet will be able to provide advice on which fluke products to use and when to use them to treat a particular problem on your croft.

ON THE CROFTER

If you would like a free eight page newsheet on liver fluke please contact Maggie Bennett at The Monro Foundation, Penrith Science Park, Batho Loan, Penruch, ER06 0PZ or phone 0131 445 8111 or visit the website www.monro.org.uk

ON THE CROFTER

Prevention

• Your vet can diagnose past or current fluke infections using faecal, blood or milk samples. Your abattoir may also be able to supply information about the fluke status of the cattle of the animals you send for slaughter.

• Avoid grazing livestock on heavy, low-porosity pasture – this is ideal anadrome. Boggy areas should be fenced off if possible and drainage should be considered on crofts with severe fluke problems.

• Adopt a quarantine strategy. Your vet will be able to provide advice on which fluke products to use and when to use them to treat a particular problem on your croft.

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ON THE CROFTER
The CAP towards 2020

The CAP towards 2020: meeting the food, natural resource and territorial challenges of the future.

This is a leaked copy of a policy paper under preparation that officials want to be seen in order to get feedback but that is not an official draft paper. Strange way of behaving and as one official put it, “It is not so much leaked as irrigated.”

The paper lays out the drivers of the CAP: food security, provision of quality and diversity of food produced sustainably in line with our environmental, water and animal welfare ambitions; maintaining viable rural communities. On are two aspects of this report — one that it endorses the public getting a return on its investment through the provision of public goods and the other that small producers have a valuable place in food production.

The commissioner for agriculture and rural development, Dazian Clolog, said in a recent seminar in Romania “I am convinced that as long as small farms are in a position to market their production and contribute to maintaining landscapes and the vitality of rural areas, then they must be supported.”

The final version of this communication will be published as we go to press and will be summarised in the next edition of The Crofter.

Install micro-renewable technology

Crofters are ideally suited to micro-renewable energy technologies such as wind turbines or solar PV units which can be placed onto land and buildings to help crofters diversify and have an additional income stream

Feed in Tariffs were launched in April 2010 by the UK government. Energy suppliers must make regular payments to those generating their own electricity from renewable or low carbon sources. A minimum payment for all electricity generated, as well as a separate payment for the electricity exported to the national grid, is guaranteed.

The recent spending review made two changes to the Feed in Tariff that should encourage crofters to invest in micro-renewables quickly, to ensure they receive the best tariff available.

If there is a higher than expected deployment of micro-renewables, an earlier government review date than 31 March 2012 could be triggered, with tariffs reduced from the current rate of 41.3p per unit of electricity for solar panel owners. The tariff will be cut by 44p, or by 10% in 2014 and 2015.

“Many people don’t realise they are in a position to have their own green power station on their land which can make and save them money,” said Iain Skan, founder of Icon Energy.

“Any property with suitable roof space can have a solar photovoltaic (PV) panel and anyone with a bit of land can introduce a small turbine. The current feed in tariff rate is guaranteed for 25 years, so people should make the switch to micro-renewables now.”
Thinking of starting your own business?

Do you want to develop your existing venture?

The Business Gateway can help

Business Gateway is a free service offering advice on every aspect of starting, developing and running a business, from feasibility to financial planning and market research. We provide free business skills workshops and specialist advice to help you take that next step.

We can also connect you to the Prince’s Scottish Youth Business Trust, the Enterprise Europe Network and to a range of financial support.

For further information, please contact:
Alistair Danter
Regional Development Officer
Business Gateway, PORTREE
Tel: 07921 758451
Email: alistair.danter@highland-opportunity.com

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SCU conference in Thurso

Jim Hunter at his new desk 1990

Lais MacAver, Angus MacRae and Jim Hunter 1990

Crofters securing the future for themselves

NOT LONG AGO it became known that I was to be the first director of the then not-quite-launched Scottish Crofters Union (SCU), I was visiting Skye to which my family and I were about to move.

Driving down the single-track road into Braes, south of Portree, I saw by the roadside one of the crofters I’d interviewed some time before when – on behalf of the Highlands and Islands Development Board (HIDB) – I looked into the feasibility of crofters having their own representative organisation.

I stopped to talk with the crofter in question, an elderly gentleman. “Well,” he greeted me, “you’re a brave man.” Not being aware of having done anything very heroic, I asked what he meant. Soon his meaning was plain enough. While it might be fine in theory for crofters to have their own union, I was told, the thing would never work in practice. There was simply no way that any worthwhile number of crofters would pay the exorbitant annual subscription – £8 was the figure under consideration – likely to be requested by the SCU. The union, as a result, would never get off the ground. And, as a further result, would quickly be out of a job.

Such pessimism about the SCU’s prospects was far from unusual in the run-up to the new union’s launch. It was a pessimism I at times shared myself. But as I told Angus Macleod, the SCU’s founding father and the man who’d persuaded the HIDB to finance that feasibility study, I was personally of the view that crofting and crofters were urgently in need of just the sort of organisation Angus had long been pressing for. Hence the assurance I was granted from the HIDB that starting my month-long commission from December 1984 would be the case. In November 1984, the possibility of establishing a Scottish Crofters Union was put – somewhat tentatively – to a gathering of crofters in Poolewe. Would such a union work? What would it do? What benefits would it bring? There were plenty of such queries. But there was real enthusiasm too. Before the evening ended – and nearly a year in advance of its official launch – the SCU had its first branch, to be known as Gaolich and District, its first branch chairman, Kenny Urquhart, its first branch secretary, Ails Macdonald, its first branch treasurer, George Macleod and, perhaps most significantly, its first subscriptions – of which there were no less than 38.

Much has changed in the 26 years since then. But one thing, I believe and will always believe, has remained the same. Crofting is to have a future, that future will not be secured by Crofters Commissions, Land Courts or government agencies of any kind. It will be secured, and it can only be secured, by crofters themselves – crofters prepared to get together in sufficient numbers to make their collective voice heard in the places where it matters. The 38 crofters who signed up to that proposition in Poolewe in December 1984 were the first of thousands who were to join the SCU. Crofting needed those thousands then. Crofting needs such thousands still.

Jim Hunter

SCU conference in Thurso

Lais MacAver, Angus MacRae and Jim Hunter 1990

Early meeting of the SCU’s Skye and Lochalsh area committee

Jim Hunter at his new desk 1990

Angus and Anne MacAver after Angus received his MBE

THE CROFTER, DECEMBER 2010

DECEMBER

THE CROFTER, DECEMBER 2010 13
Other significant events were the pioneering work the SCU did in conjunction with the RCSB which culminated in the publication in 1992 of the Crofting and The Environment Report. This was a seminal publication which for the first time redefrned the contribution of crofting to society. At a time when mainstream agriculture was moving ever more towards industrialisation, crofting was increasingly being viewed as outdated and anachronistic. The joint report articulated crofting’s social, economic and environmental contribution, and defined these contributions as public goods and argued successfully that they were worth of public support.

We also campaigned on crofter housing, less favoured area support, headage payments, the tup and bull scheme, the crofting counties agricultural grants scheme, land reform and crofting reform – sometimes successfully, sometimes not.

However, what made it altogether worthwhile was the underlying support I got from my colleagues. Fiona Manderville, John Toal, Angus Graham, Neil MacLeod, Drew Ratter and the SCU’s 4,500 members, 57 SCU branches and particularly the SCU’s ruling council.

The elected members of the SCU council were an extraordinary group. They gave freely of their limited time and considerable talents to further the cause of crofting. Whilst some would be more commercial opportunities that were sometimes not.

An interesting event was the first attempt at fundraising in the form of a sale of work. Not only did Angus agree but he brought with him a large group of local artists, such was the commitment of the man.

An example of the changes in support of crofting policy they influenced have long been forgotten, the positive impacts of these changes are still benefiting those crofting today. So whilst the world may have changed, the challenges we face have not – the requirement for an articulate and forceful crofting organisation remains the same.

I count it an enormous privilege to have had a bit part in the first 25 years of the SCU/SCF and I wish you all the very best for the next quarter century and beyond.

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**Celebrating 25 Years**

**Plus ça change, plus c’est la même chose**

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**The big men**

Alastair Maciver, former SCU president, remembers some of the big players in the organisation’s history.

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**Effective solutions to our own problems**

Continued from page 1

to help reduce the apathy that they experienced from these communities. There was a lack of ideas, invention and enthusiasm. The Highlands and Islands Board was a very early supporter of the crofting movement and later, declared that it was the possibility the single best investment that they had ever made in terms of regional development outcomes.

Why was this change so astonishingly successful? Quite simply, it was because people learn about power through having the opportunity to exercise it. We have the collective ability to provide effective solutions to our own problems when we have the opportunity to analyse and explore them – and the confidence to take action on our own.

Much has changed since the launch in 1985 – in political, economic, social and environmental terms we are operating in a very different world. The web had not been born; climbing was a thing that happened between seasons of a year; mobile phones were barely known and there was no Scottish Parliament; and no land reform on the political agenda.

So what’s the future?

We all always suspect of people who make predictions, because they are nearly always wrong, but allow me to share some of my opinions. I think that crofting has a very promising future – but not as we would recognise it 25 years ago! Production margins are tight but, there is also a greater demand for local produce, farmers’ incomes are better, and there is also a growing number of confidence in the ability to achieve the present predicament.

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25 not out and still at the stump

The crofting movement in Shetland

Agnes Leask outlines the history of the crofting movement in Shetland.

In 1958, Davie and I were looking for a croft of our own. The lady who had the croft at Cott was retiring and kindly offered the tenancy to me. The trustees of the estate, which was bankrupt, decided not to re-let so they refused the assignation and it was put on the market and we had to buy.

The house was habitable but was a very small but n’ ben, with no mod cons.

We applied to the Crofters Commission for a grant and loan to build a new house. But because I was deemed to be the laird this was a vacant croft and they refused to accept Davie as a tenant because he wasn’t the laird. I couldn’t get grants for anything, either farming, draining or re-seeding.

Soon after, about 1960 or 1961, I heard about the Crofters Federation. The president for Shetland at that time was Jim Johnson. I contacted him and he came to the house with all the information. I joined and have been a member ever since. During the last 15 to 20 years, thanks to the SCF, crofters throughout the country are beginning to see their say. A comment which jarred with me when I first joined.

The SCF is serving well by all its members. I believe we will soon be asked for a lot of money, getting dirty, cost and frustrated, but if we can be mechanically minded, can spray paint and you don’t mind being banned from the kitchen for getting grease on the floor and staying half the night in the shed, you can overcome all these problems. Where there is a will, there is a way. Crofters across the country are finding that out.

Hughe Donaldson, former SCU director, Strontian.

The crofting movement in Shetland

Agnes Leask, at which time I was appointed as vice-president. About 1996 Jim Johnson retired and I was appointed president. In 2002 the presidency became a joint position and I was joined by Peter Dudgeon, Alth, Cummingsburgh.

The Shetland branch of the Federation is served well by all its office-bearers who spend many hours doing their best to make sure that crofters throughout the Highlands and Islands are treated with the respect they deserve as the original environmentalists.

Shetland was honoured in 2006 when Norman Leask was elected national chair of the SCF and then this year Shetland was again honoured by the election of Eleanor Arthur.

I am completely confident that the present SCF is still carrying on the fight for crofters and long may they continue.

Hughe Donaldson, former SCU director, Strontian.

CELEBRATING 25 YEARS

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Banned from the kitchen

Eddie Green, who describes himself as an old enthusiast, sets the scene.

My interest in tractors was born when I started my working life during the war years, when the transition from horses to tractors was making big changes to the way in which farming was carried out.

Because money was short during that period, the tractor manufacturer had to learn how things worked and to make repairs to keep the tractors on the move. It was natural that after a working life in another occupation, I should go back to my roots amongst tractors – and so began my interest in restoration.

Firstly I would point out that this is not for the faint-hearted as it requires a lot of money, getting dirty, cost and frustrated. But if you are mechanically minded, can spray paint and you don’t mind being banned from the kitchen for getting grease on the floor and staying half the night in the shed, you can overcome all these problems. Where there is a will, there is a way. Crofters across the country are finding that out.

Good Luck!

My address for tractor collection is Achnaisharach, Pluckton.

Eddie collection: 11 tractors in his shed as a 1947 T70 semi, a 1954 Ferguson TEF diesel, a 357 Ferguson TE20 green/gold diesel and a 1957 Massey Ferguson 130.
Actions from the membership survey

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erlier this year a survey was sent round members of The Crofter to find out their views on the priorities for the SCF.

The results were very clear that the most important issues facing crofting today are to do with legislation, grants and subsidies and the lobbying of various levels of government that goes with these regulations.

However, when the survey asked, “What should SCF be doing differently?” a separate set of concerns surfaced to do with local branches and training.

Encouragingly, the third biggest category was expressions of general support such as “Keep up the good work”, “More of the same” and “Doing a good job. Just under half of the respondents answered this question.

Of the 146 responses to the question, getting on for a quarter were with local activities, more meetings, more activities, more info on contacts and meetings. The next biggest category was training (10%). This pattern holds for most of the breakers we looked at in the survey.

The only exception was for the respondents who thought training was the most important. Training can overlap with local meetings since many talks have an element of training or updating skills and knowledge, depending on the topic.

The traditional structure for SCF is local branches run by local members. A number of branches have already found a way to form an area and the area elects a delegate to sit on the SCF council, which consists of area reps and the board. The council sets the strategy and priorities for SCF.

Thus the branches and areas depend on local members to organise meetings and are driven from the grass roots. However, the survey did show we need to help with this.

According to the 146 respondents to the survey, the next few steps are –

- HO could do more to help members
- and maybe the next steps are –

- The Crofter or a mail shot to advertise any vacancies.

- HO could then help with organising meetings by arranging speakers, doing advertising or whatever to get branches up and running again.

Our crofting resources programme and our new skills training programme (see below) can set up training sessions around the areas.

- There might even be a case for an SCF roadshow to tour areas, provide assistance, boost membership and generally raise the profile.

- Continue with providing an SCF presence at agricultural shows around the Highlands and Islands, as it does every year.

- If you don’t know who your branch reps are then get in touch with your local member for their contact details or ask for help in reviving your own branch.

Russel Smith

Crofting skills for the 21st century

The SCFs Crofters and Small Landholders Skills programme for the 21st Century was launched in 2008 and provides a structured system conforming to a range of national occupational standards, which have been specifically designed by LANTRA in consultation with crofters and smallholders.

The project is to provide a career progression route for people who may already have skills or a background in agriculture or horticulture.

The programme is therefore intended to provide crofters, smallholders and rural contractors in the Highlands and Islands area with the skills and knowledge to take advantage of opportunities in the future. It is hoped that the skills and knowledge gained will be transferable into areas of new development.

The programme is available to everyone with a background or interest in agriculture or horticulture and the main aim is that everyone is qualified in food production skills and secondly to provide appropriate skills for crofters, smallholders and rural contractors in the Highlands and Islands area. The skills programme will be delivered through a structured system conforming to a range of national occupational standards, which have been specifically designed by LANTRA in consultation with crofters and smallholders.

Scottish Government funding for the programmes of £990,000 was confirmed by environment minister Roseanna Cunningham in her keynote address to the SCFs annual gathering in Oban. It is hoped to be matched by contributions from Highlands and Islands Enterprise, LANTRA, Scottish Natural Heritage, Scottish Agricultural College and Forestry Commission Scotland.

Information about the courses is available from SCF on 01959 530 005 and at www.crofting.org

Also from Su Cooper on 01463 790 856 and at training@crofting.org

The only exception was for the respondents who thought training was the most important. Training can overlap with local meetings since many talks have an element of training or updating skills and knowledge, depending on the area.

To build capacity and improve the SCFs governance, the scheme has been designed to work with various partners including colleges and universities and other training providers to deliver the skills programme.

The entry level and practical skills courses will be delivered in 25 areas across the Highlands and Islands; Inverness and East Ross, Ross and Cromarty, Highland, Western Isles, Skye, Wester Ross, Caithness and Sutherland; Caithness and Sutherland; Caithness and Sutherland; Caithness and Sutherland.

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Two day plans to visit crofts of all types to get an understanding of the range of activities that can be done with croft land and also have a look at financial aspects.

If you have any ideas of what you would like to see included, please get in touch.

Young crofters group

At the annual gathering in Oban Karen talked about the aims for the young crofters group she is in the process of setting up.

A study tour has been put on hold till the spring. If you are interested in coming on this tour, or alternatively if you think you have something to offer to the young crofters group please do contact us.

We will be doing the tour over two days and plan to visit crofts of all types to get an understanding of the range of activities that can be done with croft land and also have a look at financial aspects.

If you have any ideas of what you would like to see included, please get in touch.
MEMBERSHIP PAGES

John retiring – surely not!

JOHN BANNISTER, until recently SCF manager, says he is retiring and handing over to Su Cooper. Whilst the handover has taken place and Su is our new training manager, the ‘retiring’ bit doesn’t ring true.

John left the Highlands Police force and moved to Kylerhea in Skye in the early 1990s to retire. Since then this remarkable man has established a successful business from scratch and was instrumental in the forming of the Skye and Lochalsh Horticultural Development Association, has served as a grazings clerk in his township and currently serves on the Sleat and Strath Bracadale branch of the SCU; was significantly involved in the establishment of the Glenelg ferry company; designed and managed the SCU/SCF crofting induction courses that have grown in popularity and geographical spread year by year; compiled and administered the Highlands and Islands crofters and smallholders training panel and recently established the new SCF training programme, which now employs Su. That’s an interesting way to retire! But John says that he is going to take things a bit easier now. As I write, he is in Africa doing a stint as a conservation volunteer on a brown hyena survival programme – so we will see what that means.

The SCF owes John a huge vote of thanks, not only for the amount of voluntary time and expertise he has given – crofting which was deservedly recognised with the award of an MBE a couple of years ago – but perhaps more importantly for his support and friendship to us all through thick and thin.

Our very best wishes to you and Beryl in your ‘retirement’, John.

New face for SCF training

JOHN BANNISTER, retiring SCF training manager, has been replaced by Su Cooper, a lassie who hails from the Inverness area. John said, “Su impressed the selection panel members at her interview in early November. She is a qualified and experienced ecologist, having an MSc and a BSc in environment, economics and ecology. She also has a considerable background in teaching and training in formal, informal and community learning.

‘Su is well suited to this field of work and I’m sure she will be a worthy asset whilst working with us in the Federation. Su will be a part-time contractor for the initial 18 months of the project, starting in November. Her remit is to ensure that the induction courses (now called entry level induction courses) and a whole bunch of other relevant practical courses are delivered to as wide a crofting and smallholding audience as possible.”

Su is a busy lady, undertaking voluntary work as a science ambassador, involved with nation-wide surveys including bird ring and butterflies as well as the Highland cycle campaign. In her spare time she is studying for maths and IT with the open university.

Our very best wishes to you and Su, to the SCF.

Karen attends young Scotland and Northern Ireland programme

THERE young UK and Ireland Programme exists to develop the communication skills of people in the early stages of their working lives or who are performing voluntary work in the community.

It does so through an annual series of residential courses and competitions of between two and four day’s duration. The programme aims to encourage the research, writing and presentation skills of delegates, helping to build confidence where it is fragile as well as enhancing the talents of more experienced participants.

Karen Campbell, SCF membership administrator and young crofters’ group contact attended the course at the end of October. The judges noted that her paper on Necton’s super dairy and intensive agriculture had the power to shock with her facts and statistics.

Karen commented: “It was a very useful and insightful programme covering many topics. We had very interesting discussions and overall I would say that it has helped to boost my confidence when speaking to large groups of people and also for working in groups.”

Visit us online at www.crofting.org

The Land Settlement Association

JUST OVER 75 years ago the London government started an experiment to re-settle unemployed miners, engineers and others from heavy industries in the depressed coalfields onto agricultural small holdings.

This resettlement was to go on until the outbreak of war in September 1939. But this was an outgrowth of the Land Settlement Association (LSA). It continued until 1983 to give men with agricultural experience the chance to get onto the first rung of the farming ladder.

There were a number of different agencies engaged in delivering the scheme for the unemployed, but the biggest was the Land Settlement Association which operated in England. Scotland had its own much smaller scheme, which did not involve the creation of new holdings and resettled only 72 men.

The LSA’s first estate was set up at Potton in Bedfordshire and this provided the model for development elsewhere. At Potton 30 full-time holdings were created (average size five acres), each with a newly-built dwelling, clustered around an estate service depot. The holdings were equipped for dairy rearing in the form of a cow shed and chicken huts.

Everything on the holding had to be done by the men. They were not permitted to own tractor. They also had to provide their own services such as packing, grading and marketing. The propagation of plants, incubation of chicks and breeding of pigs were supplied by the estate service depot. The men were bound by contract to co-operate via the LSA. They could be evicted for selling – that is selling independently locally – and pocketing the money.

The men received about two years training, during which time they continued to receive their unemployment assistance benefit. They were then joined by their families after three to six months.

By March 1939 the LSA held 11,063 acres allowing for 1,479 holdings, of which 1,150 were developed. Twenty six estates had been created. 3,809 people had been transferred but not all remained. About half of the 1,728 men transferred had given up. At the outbreak of war there were 853 smallholders in occupation, 408 as tenants and 448 as trainees. 692 families were at the estates including about 2,069 children.

The LSA also ran a scheme of group holdings. This scheme pre-dated the LSA by a couple of years but under the LSA it expanded rapidly. These were quarter-acre holdings devoted to poultry keeping and allotment cultivation in the form of a plot of land or twenty birds and a communal hut. A few had pigs or a glasshouse instead of poultry. By 1939 2,519 men were working in 161 groups throughout England.

Starting in 1937 the LSA also established 201 cottage homesteads on five estates. This was a half-acre equipped holding with a detached house grouped together with a small number of cage homesteads on the outskirts of an industrial town in the Midlands or South of England. They were designed to give unemployed married men over the age of 50 a means of subsistence whilst their adolescent children found employment in the nearby towns.

There is much to learn from the experience of the LSA and its tenants about how to organise and not organise economically viable smallholdings which is directly relevant to crofting today. But two things predominantly: survival was determined by the degree of social cohesion and cooperation.

Peter Clarke spent his youth in the village of Potton. He is currently working on a book about the return of the unemployed to the land, based on his PhD thesis.

Scotland and Northern Ireland Programme

WANTED

short-term local course directors - in seven Highlands and Islands areas

Suitable persons with use of telephone and IT skills are required to undertake part-time (home-office based), self-employed work organising local delivery of the Federation’s Entry Level Crofting Induction Courses

Courses are part-time over ten weeks and are typically undertaken as winter vocational evening classes of two hours per week.

The work is over an average of 16 weeks at average of three hours per week, commencing December 2010.

Further details, including fees and allowances from: SCF Training Manager – Su Cooper email: training@crofting.org tel: 01463 796836

www.crofting.org

Visit us online at www.crofting.org

DECEMBER 2010
The implementation and impact of sheep EID

Hilary Liebeschuetz reports on a presentation which she delivered at the recent Scottish Agricultural College (SAC) Conference, which took place in October in Edinburgh. The visit was facilitated by the European Forum for Nature Conservation and Pastoralism. Hilary, who is Chair of the SAC Agriculture & Rural Development Advisory Group, reviewed the success of the Scottish EID pilot in the implementation and impact of sheep EID regulation. We would be very grateful for them indicated there are no problems with this reduction and animal welfare improved. The sheep's ears would stand more chance of being fit to hold the tags and the electronic chip in the tag more likely to be in place and functional when they move off the holding of birth and need to be traced.

Mr Povon’s response was largely a repeat of his previous statements, which so angered the committee that the discussion had to be brought to a rapid conclusion. The German representative then stated that four German farmers, with the support of their union and a collection to raise funds, are setting up with the remains of ears and we still have to identify how the cross-compliance burden on farm is reduced and animal welfare improved. The sheep’s ears would stand more chance of being fit to hold the tags and the electronic chip in the tag more likely to be in place and functional when they move off the holding of birth and need to be traced.

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Interested in generating your own electricity?

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Blackland project

Grimsay is an island in the Uists associated with a progressive, dynamic yet sustainable fishing industry, but rooted firmly in its culture and traditions, including seafaring, boatbuilding and crofting.

It is appropriate that it is now the base for the Shetland cattle herd book society centenary celebrations a few months ago. The Cunninghame show afforded an ideal opportunity to meet Shetland breeders, assess their exhibits and study the comprehensive display of information in the society marquee which also hosted Pearl Young’s captivating presentation of traditional dairying. This popular demonstration attracted a fascinated crowd to view the ancient skill of butter-making.

A seminar embraced a bevy of experts from bovine genetics, niche beef production, animal health and sustainable land management to regional strategy issues. Collectively these experts pointed a constructive way forward for the industry and well as for the society in its second century. Shetland breed was the key component in the ensuing dinner, a fitting conclusion to a stimulating day.

Local breeders on their home soil were featured, a chance for guests to contrast and compare individual herd policies in productive exchange with their owners.

Ronnie Eunson, mid-90s president of the SCHBS, expanded on his grass-roots philosophies from the scenic vistas of his Uistala farm, whilst his routine dog-handling won universal acclaim from appreciative bystanders.

Tommy and Mary Labbans’ Burland croft trail was an impelling contrast with its impressing selection of native breeds, indigenous flora and historic artefacts.

Fortified by Mary’s lavish home produce we veered south to admire two attractive hafler calves displaying ancient dun and white markings, pride of the new Baalsett herd. This theme was further highlighted at Hillwell where a spectrum of colour from a selective breeding programme was on show. Owner Magnus Budge also demonstrated the breed’s commercial potential by an impressive multi-suckling regime producing thriving store stock.

At Northmavine the group visited Adelle Doull, current SCHBS president, who professed the traditional Shetland hospitality against the backdrop of her Islesburgh herd in its picturesque setting of tradtional red granite.

The ultimate stop was the vintage Collafirth herd of Robert Ramsay, SCHBS past president, his grandfather William Ramsay being a founder member of the SCHBS. Robert also bears the distinction of being past president, his grandfather William of trademark red granite.

Islesburgh herd in its picturesque setting and historic artefacts.

Of the east coast of the islands which, until the 1980s, could these crofts be returned to better produce and environmental protection. Crofting communities, he said, could again become self-sustaining.

A questions and discussion session was followed by tours of the croft led by the experts and a demonstration of the impressive array of small-scale machinery that the CEIA project has assembled. There were demonstrations and a display by the Uist Wool Development Group, which is working to establish a commercial wool mill for the islands. In the evening, dinner was served in CEIA new sheath at Scovitain, consisting of Uist version and, most appropriately, wild goose! This was followed by a showing of archive film of the islands, including footage of a youthful Kenny MacLeod conducting an open air cattle sale in the 1970s. He hasn’t changed a bit! The evening concluded with entertainment from a very talented group of the island’s young musicians.

Congratulations are due to CEIA for this inspiring project and especially to Mary Eunson, Diana MacPhee as well as Fiona Mckay who organised the very informative and enjoyable conference. For more information contact The Blackland Project, S Scovitain, Grimsay, North Uist HS8 5JA, 01870 602954.

The project has received “Crofting Agriculture” from Fraser Darling which speaks of the project published in 1946, contains a wealth of information relevant to crofters today who are seeking to raise crops and livestock on the black soils of the west. The book is now on sale from the above address.
The gold standard

Looking through my folder of past issues of The Crofter it is clear that quality stock breeding and food production have a prominent place, including related animal health issues.

In a wider context this was supported by the 2006 Scottish Executive initiative, “A forward Strategy for Scottish Agriculture: Next Steps”.

In addition to diet being affected by what produce is available, health and general wellbeing can be affected, in particular, by the built environment.

Crofter housing initiatives through the department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland (DAFS) encouraged post-war space standards to be adopted where generous living and sleeping space was adopted in house design, all against a national background to improve the living environment.

With the desire to move forward there was the downside of dampness and condensation associated with little understanding of vapour levels in confined spaces and moisture migration within the building fabric and how to manage it – aspects to be addressed again with the October 1st increase in insulation levels required by the revised Scottish building standards. Within outbuildings, similar issues have to be addressed when keeping animals warm and dry – and feeding free from mould.

The launch on October 5th of the Outer Hebrides Design Guide by the Comhairle’s design champion, councillor Angus McCormack, is a welcome step on the road to improving design standards.

http://www.cne-siar.gov.uk/planningservice/designguide

The accompanying images are influenced by that important development; with the underlying theme being local context, through the use of an existing poured concrete gable wall and modern building attached with echoes of the local traditional house or steading form.

It is the right time to have our very own crofting design guide to draw together all that is best throughout our crofting communities. In harsh economic times we have to reflect on our lives, the way we live, and our livelihoods and gear up for change.

With skills programmes, local hydro schemes, wind power, stone work, Chelsea gold for a Shetland croft house garden, woodland crofts and timber harvesting and Marina’s eco-house to name but a few features in this magazine, is it not time to have a gold standard for design innovation and a skills register to bring together and harness this vast resource of local skills and developing expertise—reconnecting our young people with the resourcefulness of our forbearers.

At a rural design Seminar at the Comhairle in Stornoway in October, 1999, Arni Winther spoke of his work as an architect in the Faeroes and stated, “I’m convinced that we are to work hard to ensure better design quality in our surroundings to attract and keep an active local population in rural areas. This will play an important role in developing our identity and self-understanding, and also to avoid feelings of remoteness ... the task made easier by demonstrating that better design is more economical...”

Let us gear up for change and start to move forward.

Leis gach deagh dhurachd agus le h-uile bheannachd.

Niall Ferguson
**Nickie May, 1958 – 2010**

SCF's ORKNEY representative, Nickie May, died on Friday November 12th 2010 at home on the island of Shapinsay, after a short fight against cancer. Nickie is survived by her husband Stewart, father and younger brother.

An enthusiastic student, Nickie gained a masters degree in economics from Cambridge university and later went on to become a registered chartered accountant.

While living at Tankennie Farm in Shropshire, Nickie developed a keen interest in keeping and breeding Shetland cattle. In August 1999 Nickie and Stewart moved to the small island of Shapinsay in Orkney. Nickie, a keen environmentalist, turned Farm of Garth into an organic unit where she bred Heriduean sheep along with her Shetland cattle. Also a keen horsewoman, she always kept a few horses as well.

Nickie was an enthusiastic member of her community and was always willing to help with any local or heritage issues. As well as serving as a community development officer she also worked as the community powerdown officer, stepping down only when the initial planning and financial issues had been addressed. As president of the local agricultural society she helped organise the annual Orkney county show. She was also involved in setting up the Orkney branch of the organisation.

Nickie joined the Scottish Crofting Federation in 2006 and was actively involved in setting up the SCF’s Orkney branch of the organisation. She served initially as the branch secretary and later became an Orkney area representative on the SCF council. A passionate supporter of crofting, her contribution to the work of the SCF was much appreciated.

Nickie’s good friend Evelyn Leask commented: “Nickie was bursting with enterprise both at a personal level and in her commitment to the many projects with which she was involved. Although her boundless vitality will be missed, we must also rejoice in her lifetime of enthusiasm and dedication. I feel privileged to have known so well this lovely lady.”

**Eigg crofter’s innovative crop**

A CROFTER on the island of Eigg is helping to save one of Scotland’s most threatened and iconic wild flowers.

The delicate native bluebells which carpet woods in colour are under severe threat from cross breeding with imported Spanish bluebells.

Eigg is a stronghold of the Scottish bluebell, which transform swathes of the island into a sea of deep, rich blue each spring.

Now Irishman Eddie Scott is harvesting wild seeds to help secure the native bluebell’s future on the mainland. “The bluebells on Eigg have never been exposed to the Spanish variety so have not cross bred to become hybrids,” he explained.

“In a lot of places the hybrids and Spanish bluebells have driven the native ones to the brink of extinction. Planting more pure Scottish bluebells will help strengthen their foothold once again. It’ll be great to see their beautiful colour and gorgeous, subtle fragrance returning to woods and gardens throughout the country.”

Eddie was head gardener at Ardross Castle Estate in Easter Ross, before moving to Eigg in 2004. “I’d been visiting Eigg for many years before moving here, playing at ceilidhs and gradually getting to know the place and the people.”

Eddie grows fruit and vegetables in a polytunnel on the croft, supplying surplus produce to the shop and tea room, and is a volunteer on a range of community projects, such as helping to establish an orchard on the island.

The plan to diversity into seed gathering came when Eddie realised his croft was a sanctuary for the threatened wild flowers. “I was trying to think what I could produce on the croft that would be light and easy to export off the island.”

“My idea was to grow plants for making herbal teas; but when spring came I realised the croft was awash with bluebells, which I knew were becoming rare in many places.”

Staff from the botanic gardens in Edinburgh verified the purity of the seeds, and Eddie obtained a licence from the Scottish Government to harvest a strictly limited number of them from the croft each year.

Artist Saira Renny and graphic designer Ben Cormack are among the growing number of young people who have moved to Eigg or returned to make the island their home. They worked with Eddie to create distinctive packaging for the seeds, which are sold in the island craft shop and online.

Seeds can be sown from September to March and take two to four years to mature. For more information and to buy them online go to www.eddieseiggcroft.com.

*Pictures by Megan Frey*