Sort your croft succession

Picture the following situation: you are a crofter, or at least you think you are. Why should you think otherwise as you’ve worked your croft for twenty years and you have the security of crofting tenure?

There’s just one snag. The croft is still in the name of your elderly mother who lives in the croft house. Time goes by and your mother has to go into residential care, which has to be paid for. Along comes a council official who informs you that your mother’s assets will be assessed and she will be charged care home fees on the basis of the value of her savings and property and that property includes her croft tenancy.

But hang on, you say, that’s my croft. It’s been in the family for four generations, and it’s my livelihood. Tough, says the council, it’s in your mother’s name so it’s her asset and it has a value. It will have to be sold.

That’s bad enough, but it gets even worse. If an elderly person sells or assigns an asset, including, apparently, a croft tenancy, within five years of going into residential care, it is open to the local authority to claim that the person has deliberately disposed of the asset in order to avoid care home charges.

We are only aware of one local authority taking this exceptionally harsh line over croft tenancies. They say they are only following Scottish Government instructions. We disagree. There is nothing in government guidelines to say that a croft tenancy must be treated as an asset for the purpose of assessing care home charges. Someone within that local authority has decided to interpret the guidelines in such a way.

If members have had similar experiences, please let us know. Meantime, anyone who could get into this situation should get their croft succession sorted out without delay, as the alternative could be losing their croft.

Do it now!

To him who hath shall be given...

The latest Common Agricultural Policy reform, even at this fairly early stage in the process, seems set yet again to follow that Biblical dictum.

The establishment of the Single Farm Payment Scheme (SFP) in the last reform in 2003 is generally regarded as a disaster. It was designed to decouple support from production, a measure that has emptied the hills of sheep and created a highly successful new breed, the so-called slipper farmer, generously supported by the taxpayer for doing precisely nothing.

The 2003 reform was designed to cut production and in that regard it certainly succeeded. A whole series of reports commissioned by the government and its agencies over the last few years has documented the economic, social and environmental damage caused to Scotland’s hills and islands through loss of livestock.

The global political economy of food has drastically changed over the ten years since the last reform and the need for production and food security is back on the agenda. The post-2013 CAP proposals at least move towards a link between direct payments and production, but in other important respects will continue and compound the errors and anomalies of SFP.

Given the age profile of farmers and crofters and the Scottish Government’s stated commitment to new entrants to the industry, we expected positive moves in this CAP reform to encourage and support the new blood we need. The historic basis of SFP since its inception has deliberately excluded new entrants from the scheme – and that exclusion looks set to continue as the post-2013 scheme will use 2011 as the reference year. If you had no entitlements in 2003, you therefore had no entitlements in 2011 unless you purchased them in the preposterous artificial market that trades in these things to further the profits of dealers and speculators.

The post-2013 proposals offer a one-off application window to a national reserve of entitlements open exclusively to those under 40, who will also receive a 25 per cent uplift in entitlement value for five years. Undoubtedly, up-market land agents and lawyers will be busy working out ways for their clients to exploit that situation, while those who really need the support will continue to be denied it.

Is there a genuine desire to have new people in agriculture or is the real agenda of government and agri-business one of consolidation and intensification? Will there again be an artificial market created in which entitlements will be traded for profit rather than allocated on a basis of need?

A superficially-attractive small farmers’ scheme is proposed that would offer crofters a flat-rate annual payment of between €500 and €1000 and a lower requirement of cross-compliance, as an alternative to area-based direct payments. However, the rate as proposed is far too low to be of interest to many and would in any case not be available to those

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- SCF Horticulture handbook
- Crofting Connections
- Community mapping
- Food sovereignty
- Access on croft land
- and much more

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Message from the chair...

Derek Flyn

I N ADDITION to other seasonal events, this summer finds us busy with a number of consultations. Some of us have met with and are responding to the Registers of Scotland in their preparations for the new Crofting Register. Others are considering the draft plan of the new Crofting Commission.

In recent years the Scottish Parliament has invested a considerable amount of time reforming the law that applies to crofts. The next step is to invest public monies in making the system work. There are changes taking place that will be costly and they will not please everybody. The SCF is committed to understanding these changes, to being able to explain them to our members and to working with government to implement them. We believe we owe it to the taxpayer to capitalise on the investment wisely.

The Crofting Register will collect map-based information on every croft and every common grazing. But we at SCF are hoping for more. When crofters map their land it can be the starting point for community asset-planning, working towards a brighter future. We are encouraging crofting communities to see the multiple benefits that can be had from mapping the croft assets as a group.

Meanwhile, we shall become aware of the impact of the Commission’s new powers to tackle absenteeism and to deal with neglect and misuse of crofts. This will affect many crofting communities, hopefully for the better.

Previously, I asked members to get more involved with SCF activities. The time is ripe. At our AGM in June, we announced changes to the board. Marina Dennis and Alasdair MacMhaoin retired after giving good service and I wish to record our thanks for the time and effort they have devoted to the organisation. I am pleased to report that they have both agreed to continue in valued roles and their enthusiasm for crofting will not be lost to us.

The present board of myself, Fiona Mandeville, Paddy Zakaria and Norman Leask invited possible candidates to attend the AGM and we are hopeful that we shall shortly be joined by them as fellow directors of SCF.

Look for the announcement in the next edition of The Crofter.

Our man in Brussels

Norman Leask reports

MY RECENT TRIP to Brussels was like the curate’s egg, good in parts.

A delayed flight turned into a bonus as I happened to meet Struan Stevenson MEP in the airport, which afforded the opportunity to put to him some of the issues of concern to crofters. So the time was not wasted.

Arriving in Brussels, I had a very worthwhile meeting with the adviser to the transport, agriculture and energy working group of the European Parliament. Many topics of interest were discussed and the specific circumstances of crofting were of great interest to him.

Passing through the office of the European Coordination Via Campesina, I was as usual given some very useful information to prepare for my meetings in the European Commission. The first of these was the sheep and goat meat advisory group. The main issues here are with the individual electronic identification of sheep (EID) and with the commission’s strange views of permanent pasture in their CAP proposals.

I do not understand why they call this committee an advisory group, when they refuse to discuss in a conciliatory or compromising fashion on these two issues. In fact they stopped to terminological inexactitudes, when explaining why individual identification was introduced. They were so angry that they closed the meeting without completing the agenda or allowing fair discussion on the critical word ‘herbaceous’.

Later, through my contacts with Shepherd Net, I was invited to take part in a discussion with German shepherds, who are taking the EC over the individual sheep tagging legislation. So this is why the EC officials are so up-tight. A record of the meeting follows on page 3.

I completed my trip by attending the agricultural committee of the European Parliament to observe their deliberations. While there I was able to meet with several researchers for the MEPs that I know and also with MEPs Alan Smith and Martin Hausling who are still leading on CAP and EID problems. A suitable opportunity to get over the message about our views on EID and CAP.

The crofting law conference

THE CROFTING Law Group and the WS Society’s annual crofting law conference will take place in Skye on 21 September.

The theme of the conference this year will be the new crofting register and the event will be chaired by Sir Crispin Agnew of Lochnaw Bt QC.

Deputy chairman of the Scottish Land Court, Sheriff MacLeod, will keynote the conference, looking at 100 years of the Scottish Land Court without a map-based register. Representatives from the Scottish Government, Registers of Scotland and the Crofting Commission will support a workshop session to work through how the new registration process might operate in practice. There will also be question panel sessions and workshops.

SCF chair Derek Flyn will give an update on community mapping. Eric Willis, Registers of Scotland, will explain the mapping requirements of the Crofting Register.

With afternoon presentations on:

• effective title risk management for crofting lands by Reema Mannah, of First Title;
• the Crofting Register – thoughts from a solicitor by Brian Inker, Inksters Solicitors; and
• recent case law by Scott Blair, advocate.

The event offers a very thorough and informed overview of significant aspects of current crofting legislation.

There is an optional dinner in the evening and an optional tour the following morning to a wind farm and the site of the Battle of the Braes.

The conference is open to anyone, not just members of the legal profession.

For full details and to book contact Heather Dodds at the WS Society: hdodds@wssociety.co.uk; 0131 220 3249.
German EID court case against EU

More from Norman Leask

If we can help the German shepherds to prove their case against the commission in the European Court of Justice, it will make it possible to continue sheep farming in the uplands and periphery of Europe.

Whilst in Brussels as a founder member of Shepherd Net, the European Shepherds Network, I was invited to meet the shepherds of Germany. They explained the case they are taking to the European Courts of Justice concerning the European Commission imposition of electronic identification devices (EID). According to extensive organisations and at least four MEPs attended. They are not asking for money at this time, although no doubt extra funds would be helpful. They just urgently require any evidence that any individuals or organisations have to back their case.

They assert that:

- Flock identification is all that is required. If the legislation in 2001 had been properly enforced, the foot and mouth outbreak would have been easily controlled. The 2007 outbreak proves this.
- There is no logical reason that the poorest sector of European farming need be burdened with the most expensive system of tracing. My Irish friend suggested that the cattle system proposed by the EU would cost around three euros per hectare. The sheep system forced on us costs around 18 euros per hectare. Pigs just need a form of traceability. An Irish friend suggested that the cattle system proposed by the EU would cost around 18 euros per hectare.
- Proportionality would indicate that until an animal leaves the jurisdiction of the keeper at birth, EID and individual number recording should be voluntary.
- EID only works when machinery and tags work. 92-94% seem to be reading successfully. A study of machinery and tags at 600 days has proved that a considerable reduction of success occurs.
- Cross-compliance issues on individual identification is driving some people bankrupt or out of the industry, especially those managing extensive systems in the hills, thus increasing abandonment.
- No impact assessment was carried out before the imposition of individual identification or electronic tagging.

If anyone has been affected by any of these issues, please contact s.voell@baurenverband.net as the German shepherds need you urgently.

The meeting accepted that traceability was essential, but the system imposed on us is not fit for purpose.

In Shetland, led by vet Hilary Burges, we are in the process of putting forward an alternative scheme. Hopefully this can be presented to the next sheep and goat meat advisory committee meeting in Brussels.

The Crofting Commission – now the work begins

April 2012 saw the start of a new era for crofting, with the establishment of the Crofting Commission.

Taking over the role as regulator of crofting from the Crofters Commission, the new body has had an extremely busy first six months, with a major focus on the production of a draft plan setting out the organisation’s vision for a well-regulated crofting system.

Once approved by Scottish Ministers, the plan will provide the focus of the Commission’s work for the next five years. The task of developing and consulting on a plan is laid down in the Crofting Reform Act 2010, which established the new Commission. Timescales were tight, with the plan needing to be submitted to Scottish Ministers after a six-week consultation period. But commissioners were up to the challenge, seeing the plan as an opportunity to set out the priorities for the organisation clearly.

Speaking at the launch of the consultation earlier this summer, interim chair Sandy Cross emphasised the wider benefits to be gained from a comprehensive plan for the regulation of crofting. “The next five years are a critical period for crofting. We will have to work hard, alongside other agencies and organisations, to ensure crofting is able to play a significant role in supporting and growing many remote rural communities in Scotland. The purpose of the plan is to explain to crofters, organisations and agencies how the Commission makes its decisions, in line with legislation. We need to get across to these key groups why we must be consistent and fair in the way we regulate crofting. Effective regulation brings with it many pluses for crofting areas and Scotland as a whole.”

During this key period, the new body has been without a convener. But with Sandy Cross (who declared he would not be standing for the convener post) acting as interim chair, there has been no delay to the day-to-day business of the organisation. This was reflected in the determination of new commissioners to carry through the work begun under the Crofters Commission, taking action on absentee crofters – action aimed at ensuring crofters and owner-occupier crofters comply with their legal duty to occupy their crofts.

The focus of this action so far has been on cases where crofters have been absent from their crofts for over ten years and now extends to owner-occupiers as well as croft tenants. June saw the first batch of decisions under the new Commission, ordering the termination of tenancies. This work continues, with cases being decided each month, following a lengthy process aimed at finding a resolution to the individual’s absentee status.

Speaking on this issue, Sandy Cross explained, “We would far prefer crofters to find a solution to their absentee status. Every opportunity is given to absentee crofters to resolve these situations within a reasonable timescale – but if this does not happen, we must take the ultimate step and free up crofts so that they may be let to new tenants who will be active and play a part in sustaining crofting communities.”

As highlighted in the June edition of The Crofter, the new Commission acknowledges the important link to crofting communities played by grazings committees and the assessors’ network and confirmed its intention to recruit a new assessors’ panel this summer. The new panel, due to be appointed in September for a five year period, will for the first time cover the new crofting areas of Moray, Arran and the Cumbraes, as well as areas where new crofts have been created.

All in all, a challenging but rewarding first six-months!

Commissioners with Stewart Stevenson, minister for environment and climate change, at the first meeting of the board on 2nd April at Great Glen House.

From left to right: Arnold Pitie, Kathleen Sinclair, Colin Kennedy, Stewart Stevenson MSP, Sandy Cross, William Swann, Murdo MacLennan, Susan Walker, Donald Ross, IG Macdonald
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Crofting Connections phase one draws to a close

Crofting Connections is now almost at the end of its three years of exciting and productive study of crofting past, present and future by over 2,500 pupils in 59 schools across the Highlands and Islands. The project is a testimony to the hard work and real enthusiasm of teachers, pupils, parents and other members of the local community in a range of nurseries, primary and secondary schools of all sizes throughout the crofting counties.

An independent evaluation of the project was commissioned by HIE early this year. The report, published in May 2012, gave a huge endorsement to the project, from teachers, pupils, crofters, local authority education directorates and Education Scotland. It is available from the project website www.croftingconnections.com.

Phase two is set to start this autumn, working with an even wider range of schools in the crofting counties, including the new areas in Moray and Arran and focussing on developing better networks between schools across the project to showcase the good work which you will have been following in The Crofter since autumn 2009.

Crofting Connections would like to thank crofters from Argyll to Shetland and all of you who have supported this well-loved project in its three pioneering years, helping to nurture our next generation of crofters who will keep crofting alive and thriving in the 21st century.

Pam Rodway
Project Coordinator

Crofting environment fun days – Broadford primary school

In May, 230 primary school children from eleven schools across Skye and Lochalsh explored aspects of their crofting heritage as they took part in an event to celebrate this unique culture and environment.

The organisers of the two-day event represented organisations working with schools in Skye and Lochalsh – Karen MacRae from Crofting Connections, Jenny Grant and crofter John Phillips from the Highland Council countryside ranger service, Gavin Skipper and Rule Anderson from National Trust for Scotland Balmacara Estate and Judith Bullivant from Skye and Lochalsh Environment Forum.

Both days began with a welcome from Highland councillor, Audrey Sinclair, who as well as opening the event was present as an activity provider in another role – as a beekeeper.

The pupils participated in workshops under the four themes of crofting culture; food from the croft; croft wildlife; and crofting craft and skills.

Anne Martin and Mairi Sine Campbell provided highly-entertaining workshops on crofting culture as they sang songs and told stories in Gaelic and English.

Pupils learned about food production on the croft with Audrey Sinclair, who ran a workshop on bees and honey. The delights of dairying were discovered with crofter-cheesemaker Kathy Biss from West Highland Dairy, Achmore.

Meanwhile, Rag Tag ‘n’ Textile were on hand to teach the children to weave and Judith Bullivant of Skye and Lochalsh Environment Forum ran a workshop on drystane dyking. Shelagh Parlane and Sarah Stephenson from RSPB held a workshop about birds on the croft, focussing on corncrakes – Scotland’s only globally-endangered bird, which flies all the way from Africa to breed on island crofts.

Croft biodiversity was the subject of another wildlife workshop as the Highland Council and National Trust for Scotland rangers helped pupils discover everything from moths to newts in the school grounds.

Gordon Wyness, head teacher of Broadford primary school, said “The crofting environment fun days were well organised and a considerable challenge, considering the number of children involved. I was impressed by the number of local providers involved and the range of activities on offer. It gave excellent opportunities to all of our upper-primary children to engage with Curriculum for Excellence in a very practical hands-on way. It complemented what we are doing in the school in terms of ecoschools and environmental education in general.”

The event wouldn’t have been possible without funding from Skye and Lochalsh Renewables Cooperative Limited and sponsorship from Crofting Connections and the National Trust for Scotland at Balmacara Estate.

The organisers would also like to thank Broadford primary school, the workshop providers, the Forestry Commission, Catriona Bullivant and all the teachers and pupils who helped to celebrate the important contribution of crofting to our environment and culture in Skye and Lochalsh.

Learning to weave
To him who hath shall be given...

Continued from page 1

not already in possession of entitlements, so would be of no benefit to new entrants. CAP reform is still at a relatively early stage and there is still time for a change of emphasis. SCF has a seat at high-level negotiations and will continue to campaign for targeting of support where it is needed and for a system that will open the doors to the new crofters and farmers the country needs. With maximum support per business set at €300,000 per year there is ample scope for top-slicing of high end payments to fund those at the bottom of the pile. The alternative is business as usual.

“To him who hath shall be given.”
(Mark 4:25)

Study of options for Skye and Lochalsh abattoir

READERS OF The Crofter will be aware that SCF formed a working group last year to look at ways of providing an abattoir service for Skye and Lochalsh after a gap of over twenty years.

We reported in the last issue on the results of a survey into potential use of such a facility. Currently crofters and farmers in the region have to transport animals for slaughter to Dingwall, a journey of up to three and a half hours, or even take them by ferry to Lochmaddy.

The Scottish Government has now agreed to fund a study into options for funding, building and operating a small-scale slaughtering and processing facility which would be co-operatively owned and operated. The study will be carried out by a Scottish Agricultural College (SAC) team led by Portree-based senior consultant Siobhan Macdonald.

SCF’s Crofting Resources Programme manager Donald Murdie said, “We are delighted that the Scottish Government is to fund this work and that we will have the expertise of SAC to deliver it. Previous feasibility studies have envisaged a full-time, industrial-scale meat plant, which clearly would not be viable. The aim of this study is to produce costed plans for a facility appropriate in scale and ownership structure, with a flexible operating strategy able to respond to seasonal demand. The resulting report will be made freely available to other groups of producers wishing to develop their own small-scale abattoir facilities.”

SAC’s Siobhan Macdonald said, “SAC is delighted to work with SCF to investigate a model for a micro-abattoir. Such a venture needs careful consideration, but could provide opportunities for crofters and farmers to reach new markets and add value to stock reared in this area of high nature value farming.”

Wake-up call on potential loss of payments on common grazings

A T THE LAST Scottish Government cross-party group on crofting, chaired by Jamie McGrigor MSP and administered by SCF, the main subject of discussion was common grazings.

As well as a presentation on mapping the common grazings by Simon Allison of the Crofting Commission and an update on mapping the in-bye by SFC’s Russell Smith, Gwyn Jones of the European Forum for Nature Conservation and Pastoralism gave a presentation – and a wake-up call – on the danger of lost financial support looming for common grazings under the new CAP regime.

A paper outlining the issue can be found on the SCF website, and in summary:

Why are common grazings important?

Though covering only 10% of Scottish forage, common grazings are declared in 20% of Scottish IACS claims. They are particularly important in socio-economically vulnerable regions of the country, with 69% of both grazings area and claimants with grazings located in the HIE fragile areas, where they can account for 80% or more of all forage. They are of disproportionate significance for the delivery of a range of public goods, from biodiversity to carbon storage. Financial rewards for delivering these services, by definition, cannot be delivered.

Why active common graziers are likely to lose out from 2014.

Direct payments (SPS) are the main source of support for most grazings in marginal areas, accounting for around 2/3 of area-based payments and a very high proportion of the gross margin. On common grazings, they are usually claimed by the individual shareholder. Sheepstock clubs are an exception.

Forage allocations in IACS are on the basis of share of rights (souming), not according to the share of land actually claimed, let alone the proportion of grazings actually used. Thus on a common grazings with three shareholders, each can claim only one third of the forage, even if only two make a claim or if only one is actively grazing the whole area.

However, the historically-based payment is effectively independent of forage area, since the rate per hectare is determined by a combination of reference period payments and payment period forage claim, so that claimants with restricted areas have higher payments per hectare. The inability of active shareholders to split between their claims all the available forage only affects LFASS payments and has to date not been a political issue.

Post-2013, current EC proposals are for payment rates for the new basic payment to be set regionally or nationally. Since payment rates will not vary between neighbours, the eligible forage area available to the claimant becomes very important.

Assuming the rules can distinguish between active and inactive claimants (to avoid freeloading by inactive claimants on the back of the active), the main issue for the common grazings claimants is the area and shares which they use but cannot claim – possibly in breach of the judgement of the European Court of Justice in the Niedermair-Schiemann case C-61/09.

Scottish Government data from IACS 2009 shows that only 360,360 ha were claimed on common grazings parcels whose total area is in fact 537,615 hectares. 33% (177,255 hectares) was unclaimed, but by implication...
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Are predators out of control?

Most readers will not be unaware of the issues that have been highlighted again recently in the media regarding sea eagles and their predation on lambs.

There are many anecdotes about eagles taking lambs; but for the SCF to lobby the Scottish Government we need to know how big a problem this is perceived to be by our members.

Do you think that there are significant livestock (including poultry) losses to predators?

If so, which predators are the main problem?

Are predators out of control?

Is Scottish legislation sufficient to control predation?

If not, how should legislation be changed to make it workable?

Wildlife crime

Charles Everitt outlines the work of the National Wildlife Crime Unit

Wildlife crime is an area of policing that continues to gain momentum in Scotland.

All police forces have wildlife crime officers (WCO) specially trained to undertake investigations and with an understanding of complex wildlife legislation.

They are supported by the UK national wildlife crime unit, which collates intelligence about wildlife crime from a wide variety of sources. Their analysts process this intelligence, which then assists in directing police action by the WCOs. The unit employs a full-time police officer to help forces in Scotland with investigations and to provide additional expertise.

Certain areas of wildlife crime are prioritised, based on either the volume of offending or by conservation status. They include persecution against bats, badgers, raptors, all forms of poaching (salmon, deer and hare), freshwater pearl mussels and the trade in endangered species. These are regularly reviewed to reflect emerging trends.

WCOs investigate wildlife crime in an impartial and unbiased manner. As they are only trained in the application of law, other organisations may be approached to provide a deeper knowledge on specific species, equipment or techniques.

Specialist procurators fiscal working full-time on wildlife and environmental casework now prosecute all wildlife crimes and continue to build a wealth of expertise in this field.

The police are supported by the Partnership for Action against Wildlife Crime (PAW). Chaired by the minister for the environment, PAW consists of a wide variety of organisations committed to assisting in the fight against wildlife crime. Their influence in raising the profile of and addressing specific issues of wildlife crime is extremely valuable. There are also several PAW groups consisting of interested partner organisations looking at priority crime areas and considering appropriate measures to prevent further offending.

Several successful, high-profile prosecutions in recent years demonstrate the success of this approach. The Scottish police also contributed to two worldwide operations managed by Interpol on traditional medicine and reptile trades.

The recent Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2011 further strengthened wildlife crime legislation. As a result, sentencing powers are now more consistent, hares are afforded greater protection, new conditions apply for non-native species, snaring is soon to become registered and vicarious liability becomes a real threat. It all points to Scotland’s commitment to tackling wildlife crime and to protecting the species that make up its countryside.

Wildlife crime can be reported at any police station or anonymously through Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111.

Rural worker resource

Crofters throughout the Highlands and Islands have an outstanding resource available to them if they are looking for help at busy times.

Trained young adults with a learning disability, living in our communities, are looking for work experience in agriculture, horticulture and general croft work on either a voluntary, part-time or full-time arrangement. They have all been trained at Cantraybridge College, near Inverness.

Cantraybridge, established in Croy in 1995, is a rural skills training college for young adults with a learning disability. Students are selected from within the age group 16-30 and their training lasts approximately six years. The college provides rural-based vocational training in agriculture, horticulture, estate maintenance, woodwork and poultry rearing, including small animal care, plus basic adult education and computer IT skills. The college is an approved SVQ training centre and students can achieve a qualification in one or more subjects.

Cantraybridge gives the opportunity to acquire skills and competencies in rural skills which help hugely in the development of confidence, self esteem, social and independent living. The aim is to enable students to realise their potential in living, working and contributing to the community. The college is also mindful of the need for education in health and social issues.

Students can live at the college, which provides housing with support for 19 people and there they are taught independent living skills to prepare them for life after Cantraybridge. All this builds up their confidence and helps them to enter the world of employment in some form or another. Some students are capable of gaining full time paid employment. For others it will assist them in finding satisfying part-time jobs or engaging in voluntary work.

The students have a strong work ethic and have had considerable experience in work which would sit well in the day-to-day tasks of crofting. Horticulture is one of the sectors in which they excel and considering the increase in polytunnels and general horticulture on crofts, this should be an ideal opportunity for crofters to access some of the expertise gained by these students.

You can find out how to do this by contacting Cantraybridge College, Croy, Inverness IV2 5PP, 01667 493500, or look at their website www.cantraybridge.co.uk.

Marina Dennis
Kids’ colouring competition – colour in this page and send it to HQ for the chance to win a copy of the book and a pair of kids’ snazzy gardening gloves. Entries by the end of September, please.

Scottish Crofting Federation gratefully acknowledges financial support received from:
Horticulture – a handbook for crofters

LAUNCHED BY minister for environment Stewart Stevenson at the Black Isle show in August, this new publication by the SCF presents a fresh, authoritative and practical guide to growing and selling produce in the crofting areas.

Written by a panel of experienced growers, three of them practicing crofters, the handbook is a thorough, hands-on, well-organised presentation of all the information required by new and experienced growers. Beautifully illustrated, the book comes in a convenient loose-leaf style in a ring binder with space for you to add your own pages of notes, cropping plans etc.

As SCF’s Donald Murdie, one of the authors, explains in the introduction, “The handbook seeks to provide a guide for actual and aspiring growers in the challenging conditions of the islands and the northern and western seaboard of the mainland, as well as central highland areas with their high altitudes and long, bitter winters. We will try to make it relevant to soil and climatic conditions from the Mull of Kintyre to Muckle Flugga and advise on sowing and planting times to suit.

We will offer ways of building and maintaining soil fertility and methods to control pests and diseases. In doing so, we will inevitably favour low-input and sustainable, if not actually organic, methods. We will look at available machinery; polytunnels and other structures for protected growing; marketing and adding value; availability of grant schemes; and forming groups for mutual support. There is guidance on specific crops and case studies on established growers.

“So we hope to prove beyond doubt the case for crofting horticulture and help to bring about a step change in local food production. In the economic and environmental circumstances we face, the sustainability of island and remote mainland communities will more and more depend on self-sufficiency in goods and services, especially food. Supermarket domination of the entire food chain means that most of our food is trucked from warehouses in the central belt supplied in turn from global sources, which is entirely contrary to governments’ aspirations for a low-carbon economy. That supermarket domination has undoubtedly extended choice in some areas, but has restricted it in others. It has caused the demise of many hundreds of family-run UK dairy farms while creating the dismal spectre of factory-farm milk production. It has brought about a dull uniformity in English apple production, extinguishing diversity in varieties and taste and it continues to ignore much of the superb food produced in our own region. It creates mountains of food waste every day at every stage of the production and distribution process. We have, in the formidable food production capacity of our land, the ability to make a difference.

“We should do so because we can: the fight back starts here!”

Available to SCF members for £10 and non-members for £15, plus postage if necessary. Please contact SCF HQ to order your copy.

“Horticulture – a handbook for crofters” forms a major part of the SCF’s Crofting Resources Programme, funded by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, The Scottish Government, The European Union and Highlands and Islands Enterprise.
Community mapping

The small Wester Ross township of Badrallach has been the location for a recent community mapping pilot study sponsored by the SCF. Seoras Burnett, the crofter leading the study, explains the process.

PEOPLE make maps, maps empower those who make them and community mapping reinforces a sense of community.

Fine words, but why should we be delivering community maps, how can it be achieved and what can the process deliver? While there are over 18,000 crofts in the highlands and islands with crofters managing 750,000 hectares of land, most of this huge asset is unmapped. Clearly something needed to change so the Crofting Reform (Scotland) Act 2010 highlighted a new map-based register as one of its key agendas. Although maps would not be obligatory without key triggers such as a change in tenancy, the government indicated there could be financial subsidies for communities which acted together to map their townships. SCF highlighted potential challenges in producing the register whilst promoting the benefits of pre-emptive community mapping. A map-based register, reliant on agreed triggers to build a database, might take forever, could be costly and prone to legal disputes. Pre-emptive community mapping could strengthen communities, build social capital, prove more economical and facilitate earlier completion of the register. A pilot study to develop this approach was launched.

On selecting Badrallach, a facilitator was appointed and the process began. Badrallach, although small with 14 crofts, had an ideal cross-section of active crofters, sub-lets, absentees, decrofted areas, apportionments and common grazings. Just as important was that the grazings committee could carry out business harmoniously, allowing good progress and demonstrable outcomes.

SCF devised a process to guide the mapping from inception to a final product for submission to the Register of Scotland (via the Crofting Commission). This ensured proper consultation. Opportunities for involvement from all parties were held through progressive versions of the map, culminating in an accurate 2D representation of boundaries suitable for the register.

We started off with an open invitation to all parties with an interest in Badrallach and guided by our facilitator, Charlotte Flower, brainstormed our way to developing a viable methodology as well as distilling our wider aspirations.

It became clear early on that a community map could be much more than a demarcation of boundaries. Our map could hold layers of information and become a narrative of our community. We could describe our history, future developments, land use, pathways, rights and responsibilities – anything we saw fit.

Our basic map is almost complete and more information has been gathered for future use. What we learned can be used to enable crofters across the country to produce their own bespoke area document. Firstly, a facilitator is vital, as s/he unites disparate elements, enabling progress with an unbiased third party view. Secondly the process should be informal and inclusive to encourage buy-in from everyone. Finally, a map can be an essential tool for a sustainable community.
**HomeStay**

Boost your income and share your life with friendly visitors

Many crofters have considered boosting their income through hosting visitors, but are also wary of the hassle and fear they won’t have the space or the mod cons that they feel visitors expect. Fortunately, these aren’t an issue if you offer HomeStay accommodation.

HomeStay is more like having friends come to stay. Instead of booking in to an anonymous hotel, your visitors enjoy the relaxed informality of sharing a real home and gaining a genuine insight into the crofting life. And you can earn some extra income without turning your home into a hotel.

“People are looking for experiences that are authentic,” says Peter Lederer of Visit Scotland. “They are weary of package holidays; and the environment has become one of the most important criteria for today’s traveller. The growing popularity of eco-tourism means that Scotland – with its abundance of beautiful landscapes, natural attractions and wildlife – has everything to offer.”

Working crofts are an ideal place for the kind of visitor who wants to experience the outdoor lifestyle and the natural environment of those who work the land and maintain traditions, land and culture.

A recent poll ranked Scotland as the top European eco-destination and ninth in the world. 72% of people polled said they would consider staying on a farm as part of a holiday in rural Scotland.

But how do you go about attracting the right kind of visitor? The way HomeStay works is simple. The HomeStay International website connects people with space to spare in their homes with visitors looking for a place to stay.

You start a conversation with your visitors before they arrive so that both you and they get a good idea of how it’s going to work. You decide who comes to stay – and when – and you decide how much to charge.

“Visitors love staying with real people and our hosts really enjoy meeting interesting guests,” says Eileen Inglis, one of the founders of HomeStay International. “HomeStay guests are genuinely interested in sharing their hosts’ lives. They’re looking for the conviviality of staying with a family, getting a taste of how local people live and an understanding of what it actually means to work a croft. You might even find yourself taking a break to stay with some of your guests in their homes!”

It’s free to register as a host on the HomeStay website, making it a simple way to attract visitors interested in sharing and learning about the beauty of Scotland, its environment and traditions.

Food and craft markets – coming to a village near you

Food and craft markets are to be found in many towns and villages in the Highlands and Islands.

It is estimated that there are now around fifty food and craft markets operating in Scotland with a total estimated turnover of around £1M per annum. Sometimes known as community, village, country or food and craft markets, these markets offer a wide range of produce generally from within the local area. Community markets can include food, drink, clothes, plants, crafts and other items bought in to sell.

Mostly these types of market are run by local volunteers, hall committees, community councils or others. They are very often held in community venues with tables available for stallholders. Community markets are by and large cheaper to run than the larger farmers’ markets and this is reflected in lower cost to stallholders. Similarly, however, the return from sales for stallholders at a community market is generally less than at the bigger farmers’ markets. The cost of a table is often between five and twenty pounds, with the proceeds of sales going directly to the stallholder.

Community markets provide a great opportunity for people from the local area to meet up and purchase goods and produce from within the community. They form and strengthen relationships amongst people and provide an ideal opportunity for producers to earn some additional income from the sale of their produce.

Community markets that are run for the benefit of the community do not generally need a market operator’s licence but it is important to check with your local authority if you are considering setting one up. They are subject to all legal obligations regarding environmental health and food safety.

In the Highlands and Islands, there are regular community markets in Strathpeffer, Ullapool, Ferintosh, Cromarty, North Kessock, Applecross, Benderloch and many other small rural communities.

Douglas Watson, national development officer for farmers’ markets in Scotland, is keen to find out if there is any interest amongst representatives of community markets in the Highlands and Islands in meeting up to discuss issues that affect the markets and to share ideas and tips.

Please email douglas.watson@saos.coop if you are interested.
Shetland lamb success

Richard Briggs reports on a recent success for his native Shetland lamb.

In late May I travelled to London for the Good Housekeeping Food Awards ceremony. I was advised in March that I had been nominated, followed by a “maybe you've won” invitation in April, but it was not to be. Even though there were only two producers shortlisted for the independent meat producer section, as soon as Pru Leith started talking about happy animals in orchards I knew it was not me.

The big surprise came when my name was one of the three read out in the local food hero category. I had no idea that I had been nominated. This is the first time I have been recognised for my role as an ambassador for Scottish Crofting Produce in general and native Shetland lamb in particular.

The terrace at Lancaster House across the road from Buckingham Palace was a grand setting on a fine summer evening. A bit daunting at first when I recognised several faces off the telly and everybody seeming to know each other. However, the Good Housekeeping team soon spotted a fish out of water and introduced me around.

With the assembly of industry insiders. Many of the awards were collected by the PR department of multinationals and there was a good contingent from the Masterchef TV show to collect their award. I was introduced to most of them. I sensed good interest in the handful of products that Good Housekeeping was endorsing in the artisan categories.

A great opportunity to spread the good word about Briggs’ Shetland lamb and Scottish Crofting Produce.

Blackland conference

15 September, Grimsay

The 2012 MICHAELMAS open day will be held on Saturday 15 September at Kenary on Grimsay, North Uist. As usual, it will include the Blackland conference and Uist Wool workshops and AGM, a good mix of land-based activities with plenty to hear, see and do.

The theme is “Using Blackland”, presenting the Blackland Index as a simple, do-it-yourself way of figuring out what a particular blackland field could be used for: arable? improved grass? rough grazing? hopeless? Ken Davies and Bruce Ball will discuss the index as a means of evaluating the potential of disused blackland.

Oliver Knox (SAC Edinburgh) will give a talk on traditional rotations and crops such as tares, beans and buckwheat. These old rotational crops are now being looked at again as fertiliser prices increase, as ways of restoring soils and keeping them productive.

After the discussion, conference participants can join small groups to try out the index on the croft at Kenary and take away guidelines for use at home. All interested in better uses of their blackland are welcome.

With a grant from LEADER, Uist Wool is now ready to begin construction of the new mill on Grimsay. After many years of planning, the Uist Wool Mill will design and spin yarns from west coast sheep of all breeds, for artisan, tourism and Harris Tweed markets. Details of the project plus a workshop on wool grading will be part of the open day.

Blackland mentors

We are delighted to announce that Bruce Ball and Ken Davies have accepted the role of mentor to the Blackland Project. Bruce is a soil scientist who has researched soil structure and gases, as well as ploughing, since his teens; he is based at SAC Edinburgh. Ken is a vegetation specialist, now retired from the SAC, with long experience in crops and weed management and a particular interest in the use of herbs such as chicory in grass mixes, to accumulate micro-nutrients and so improve animal health. Bruce and Ken say that blackland has its own set of rules and presents many surprises to mainstream agronomy.

Blackland improvement

Some of the theory presented by scientists at the first two Blackland conferences is now being put into practice by the Crofting Environment Improvement Association on the croft at Kenary. Two small fields have been mowed and baled for silage, reclamation to remove rush/moss/bracken has begun on five fields and one has been reseeded – a total of nearly two acres now being managed.

These are all formerly-arable fields showing distinct traces of past cultivation, confirmed by aerial and ground photography from the 1950s. Big changes came to the croft at Kenary, as to many others on the east-side, from the 1960s onwards. Headage payments meant increasing need of grazing for sheep; completion of the causeways made fresh milk available and reduced the need to keep a cow. Such external factors changed how the land was managed. Kenary was last ploughed about 1963. So these formerly-useful fields have had 50 years to deteriorate, losing fertility and gaining plenty of unproductive vegetation.

Blackland Project, 5 Scotein, Grimsay, North Uist HS6 5HY tel/fax 01870 602954

© Susanna Robson
Extending the growing season

Anne-Clare Landolt asks for input into her innovative research project

For the last two years I’ve been undertaking an MSc in renewable energy in the built environment through the Centre for Alternative Energy. The final part of this requires a piece of original research on a technical subject related to renewable energy.

I moved to a small farm on the Isle of Mull earlier this year, so I wanted to choose an area of research that was of relevance to my new environment, particularly the problems of small-scale growing in the Scottish climate; and to put my skills as a civil engineer to use.

I am planning to set up an experiment which looks at combining a simple underground heat storage system with a Keder greenhouse to see whether this could viably extend the growing season beyond that already achievable, when cost and effort in installation are considered.

I’ve chosen a Keder greenhouse as these are eligible for CCAGS grant funding and have better insulating properties than standard poly tunnels. The system would essentially mean using the mass of soil and subsoil under the greenhouse to store any additional solar heat generated during the day, which can then be released at night.

I’ve chosen this topic as I hope it could be applicable to the wider crofting community, were it shown to be viable.

I would really welcome any ideas or thoughts that any crofters and small-scale growers might have and would be very happy to provide further information about the research to anyone who is interested. Although I will be starting the research in the coming months with plans to have trial greenhouses in place in time for the 2013/14 growing season, there is no reason why the basis of the idea cannot be modified, added to or even changed.

I would also welcome any feedback on the types of crops commonly grown under cover and the types of practices employed within the crofting community with particular reference to extending the growing season. My research has a focus on the technical renewable side but I want to ensure the horticultural aspects are appropriate and relevant as well.

Please contact me at aclandolt@yahoo.o.uk.

Sample | PH | Phosphorus (mg/l) | Potassium (mg/l) | Magnesium (mg/l)
---|---|---|---|---
Sample 1 Croft | 5.1 | Low 2.2 | Mod 105 | Mod 72.2
Sample 2 Garden | 5.5 | Low 3.0 | Mod 139 | High 224

Look after your soil

SOIL CAN BE taken for granted too often, as we neglect management and continue the same routine year after year.

Concentrate on soil management and your soil will repay you with improved yields and growth, as the soil is important in providing support, water, nutrients, air, space for root growth and warmth for the plant.

Maintaining good soil fertility and supply of nutrients to crops depends on:

- nutrient return via organic matter (inorganic) decomposition from crop residues
- other inputs such as fertilisers, manures, etc
- availability of nutrients to plants, influenced by pH, soil structure and compaction, drainage, etc.

It is hard to believe that a well-structured, fertile soil can have about 7t/ha of life in the top 15cm. This includes 800kg of worms, 120kg of nematodes, 1.61 of bacteria, and 2t of fungi, with the living creatures important in carrying out the decomposition and mixing the organic matter with the mineral (inorganic) matter. So if you take a spade and dig an inspection hole and see low amounts of worms or living activity, this is an indication that the soil fertility is low and more investigation is needed.

Having your soil analysed will show how your soil is performing and what, if any, inputs are needed to help improve performance and also keep costs down.

This analysis shows you which areas need improvement, allowing you to choose the correct fertiliser and apply it at the correct rate. Your local SAC office can help you with soil analysis and advise you on which tests are best; and then recommend what fertiliser to use. Getting the pH correct and improving your P and K levels are very important, though are often neglected. It is much easier and cheaper to maintain good levels, rather than improve low levels, which takes time and costs.

Having a good soil structure allows the plant to establish a good root structure which is dense and deep and allows air to the roots and soil organisms. You will find the soil easy to dig and water is also able to hold and supply the roots, though excess water can drain away. This will allow the plant to grow well, with yield and bulk not being restricted.

A poor soil structure does not allow roots to grow deep; they are shallow and can grow sideways. Digging the soil is also difficult and when you examine the layers, they are of a blocky or prismatic structure. The soil can also waterlog, with compaction the main reason the water cannot disperse. Your plants will be stunted and with poor yields, so improving the structure should be your aim, especially allowing air into the soil and to break any compacted areas.

The aim for production of high-value horticultural crops should always be to build soil P and K status until they are high (according to the SAC scales, which go from very low to excessively high). This is simple with non-organic production by using artificial fertilisers. The easiest way to do this without using artificial fertilisers is by using regular applications of bulky organic fertilisers (such as seaweeds, garden composts, commercially produced composts, straw cattle manures etc).

The application of fertilisers to the soil is to help increase bulk and yield, though if this is not a major concern and not the main reason for growing, you can of course grow them in the present soil as it is, though bulk and yields will be significantly lower.

So whatever your aim, I wish you well, and hope your growing season has been a success.

Ross Mackenzie SAC Portree

On the Croft

Sample PH Phosphorus (mg/l) Potassium (mg/l) Magnesium (mg/l)
Sample 1 Croft 5.1 Low 2.2 Mod 105 Mod 72.2
Sample 2 Garden 5.5 Low 3.0 Mod 139 High 224

Compact soil

Good root depth
ON THE CROFT

CAP beyond 2013

Anna Gamble of SAC in Inverness gives an update

NOTHING IS AGREED until everything is agreed – a quote from Danish agriculture minister Mette Gjerskov as she prepared to hand the presidency of the agriculture council over to Cyprus.

As a summary, this statement is depressingly accurate; while there has been much debate since the proposals were published last October, there is little concrete to report on at this stage.

What we do know about the Commission’s proposals on CAP reform is that a new basic payment scheme for direct payments will apply after 2013, with an obligatory move towards a uniform payment per hectare at a national or regional level by the start of 2019. Like the current scheme, these payments will be subject to cross compliance. However there are various simplifications to the current requirements, with the number of rules under statutory management rules and good agricultural and environmental condition being reduced, to exclude elements that are not relevant to the farmer. In addition to cross compliance, payments will be targeted to active farmers in a bid to exclude payments to applicants who have no real or tangible agricultural activity.

Each holding will receive a payment per hectare for respecting certain agricultural practices beneficial to the climate and the environment, in addition to the basic payment. This greening payment will be compulsory and the proposed measures include maintaining permanent pasture, cultivating at least three crops on arable land and maintaining an ecological focus area of at least 7% of farmland. The requirement to grow at least three crops should not be too much of a challenge for larger arable farmers. However in livestock areas, where farmers might grow only a couple of fields of spring barley or maize, this requirement will prove difficult to meet.

The proposals could also offer additional support for areas with natural constraints; this would not affect the LFA payments.

New entrant young farmers (under 40) are also likely to be supported under the proposals, with the basic payment topped up by an additional 25% for the first five years. This payment is likely to be limited to the maximum of the average farm size in that member state. The basic payment is also to be capped at €300,000 per year per farm.

A positive change for crofters in the Commission’s proposals on CAP comes in the form of the small farmers scheme. Any farmer eligible to claim support in 2014 may decide by 15 October 2014 to participate in the small farmers scheme and receive an annual fixed payment of between €500 and €1000, regardless of the farm’s size. This will offer an enormous simplification of the current scheme, with participants facing less stringent cross-compliance requirements and exempt from greening.

Whilst the support payments offer a lifeline to those operating in remote areas, which can drive up the cost of production, it is important to the long-term success of any business that the business enterprises are performing to their optimum. SAC agricultural consultants can help crofters and farmers to understand the implications of the CAP post 2013 and can assist with completing the relevant paperwork. In addition SAC can provide business advice on technical issues including enterprise costings and planning, grant applications to support business improvement and diversifications to introduce new income streams. However, as the final details of CAP post 2013 are yet to be decided, there is no need to make changes until details of the new support schemes are finalised.

The devil will be in the detail and SAC will endeavour to keep our subscribers updated.

Knowledge-share events

DO YOU want to get involved in woodland crofting? Are you a potential crofter or a community or landowner wanting to convert land to woodland? These events are for you.

The Community Woodland Association (CWA), SCF and Highlands Small Communities Housing Trust (HSCHT) will hold three events between September and December (dates tbc) aimed at those interested in woodland crofts and becoming woodland crofters/landlords or making land available for this use.

Each event will focus on one of the three main components of the scheme and how each interacts with the others, with CWT looking at woodland enterprises, SCF on crofting and HSCHT on housing options. The seminars will be spread geographically from Kilfinnan to Gairloch and Tain.

Representatives from the three organisations will be in attendance to give advice. Further details from HSCHT: info@hscht.co.uk or www.hscht.co.uk.

Cattle in woodland, Dunbeath

Threshing at Daviot – see page 22
Ram management and health

The use of unsound rams can reduce the lambing percentage and may result in a protracted lambing period.

It is therefore important that rams are in good body condition and free of disease before the breeding season begins.

Sourcing replacement rams

Replacement rams should be acquired at least eight weeks before the start of the breeding season, to allow them to adapt to their new environment and diet. Ideally, introduced rams should be separated from the main flock for at least four weeks, during which period they should receive standard quarantine treatments as detailed in your sheep health plan.

General health and common disorders of rams

Sperm production and maturation takes approximately eight weeks, during which period the spermatozoa in the testes — sperm cells “in production” — are highly sensitive to changes in testicular temperature and will be easily damaged by any general disease or management conditions that cause a significant or prolonged increase in testicular temperature. Spermatozoa already stored in the epididymis can also be damaged, but are less sensitive to heat stress than those in production. This can lead to rams appearing physically normal, and even producing a good quality ejaculate during a breeding soundness examination, which may then be followed by a period of 6-8 weeks of infertility as the sperm cells damaged in production come through the system.

There are a number of conditions of the reproductive tract which can adversely affect ram fertility, sometimes permanently. Common disorders of breeding rams include:

- epididymitis (inflammation of the epididymis)
- inguinal hernia
- testicular degeneration and testicular hypoplasia (small or shrunkten testicles)
- cryptorchidism (rig)
- scrotal mange
- traumatic injury to the scrotal contents
- scrotal abscesses
- urolithiasis (bladder stones or gravel)
- balanoposthitis (pizzle rot)

Assessing breeding soundness

Rams should be checked for breeding soundness well in advance (at least 6-8 weeks) of the mating season to allow time for the purchase of replacements if necessary.

Ram soundness investigations should include:

- a relevant history of each ram
- a full clinical examination
- a thorough genital examination and, if required
- a semen examination.

Moredun has produced two technical guides for farmers on the subject of preparing rams for breeding and general ram health. If you would like a free copy of these newsheets please contact Maggie Bennett at The Moredun Foundation, phone 0131 445 5111 or email info@moredun.org.uk

Food sovereignty: what are we talking about?

Food sovereignty is a set of principles developed by La Via Campesina, the movement which brings together 200 million small and medium-scale farmers and agricultural workers from 70 countries.

The concept of food sovereignty evolved through the experience and analysis of the people who produce most of the world’s food. At its heart it puts the very people who produce, distribute and consume the food at the centre of food systems and policies, rather than the demands of markets and corporations that have come to dominate the global food system.

The principles of food sovereignty can be summarised as:

- Food as a right, not a commodity. Food sovereignty upholds the right of individuals and communities to define their own food and agriculture systems to provide healthy and culturally-appropriate food.
- Valuing food providers. Small farms and crofting are not valued and are being lost at an alarming rate. In Europe, for example, three family farms disappear every minute. Food sovereignty asserts food providers’ rights to live and work in dignity.
- Prioritising local and regional provision over distant markets. Food is first and foremost sustenance for the community and secondarily a commodity to be traded. Food sovereignty means that local and regional provision takes precedence over supplying distant markets and export-oriented agriculture is rejected. Food sovereignty works to bring food producers and consumers closer together.
- Control of land and resources being in the hands of food producers rather than privatised by corporations. It also means that resources can be used in more socially- and environmentally-sustainable ways.
- Building knowledge and skills. Food sovereignty calls for valuing and support for producers’ knowledge and skills, as this local expertise can often be undermined by modern technologies, such as genetic modification.
- Protecting natural resources. Food sovereignty principles advocate working with nature and avoiding environmentally-damaging industrial methods that rely on non-renewable resources.

Superficially, the food system seems to be working well in the UK. Supermarkets appear to offer convenience, choice and efficiency, with people having to spend much less of their income on food than just a few decades ago.

This food system imposes many hidden costs on the public. These include clean-up costs for pollution from industrial agricultural systems, tax credits to top up food workers’ low wages, and the burden on the NHS from diet-related diseases. Supermarkets also funnel money out of local communities to management and shareholders, unlike local food businesses and projects which tend to recycle money within the economy of the local area.

Local produce in Italy

A handful of multinational corporations are increasingly dominating the production, processing, distribution, marketing and retailing of food. This concentration of power enables them to wipe out competition or dictate tough terms to their suppliers on everything from prices to standardised products. Sixty years ago, European and US farmers received 45-60 per cent of the money that consumers spent on food. By 2002, that had dropped to seven per cent in the UK.

A huge number of livelihoods in farming and independent shops have been destroyed, with pressure for low prices encouraging exploitation of agricultural workers in the UK and abroad.

Food sovereignty is concerned with the power imbalances inherent in the current global food system and who controls how food is produced and distributed. It is about people’s democratic right to decide and take control of their own food and agricultural systems.

Another food system is possible. Let’s make it happen!
**LANDMAPS**

Landmaps provide accurate maps that are suitable for all aspects of land management from buying or selling land, to farm and forestry management. We can define croft boundaries for land registry purposes and provide Ordnance Survey maps, aerial photos and land use maps.

- All types of area measurements
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- Land use surveys
- De-crofting plans
- Property sale plans and land registry maps
- Croft, farm and estate management maps
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- Maps for planning applications

**INKSTERS**

Inksters can provide you with specialist advice on all aspects of crofting law throughout the Crofting Counties from our offices in Inverness and Glasgow.

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Simon Fraser is accredited by the Law Society of Scotland as a specialist in Crofting Law.

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Every Thursday
Croft access problems

Elidh Ross from Inksters Solicitors, Inverness, looks at a common problem on croft land.

ACCESS PROBLEMS are not peculiar to crofts.

Most of us will know somebody who has been unfortunate enough to become involved in one at one time or another. The thing to bear in mind is that croft access is a very different animal to servitude right of access. Unlike a servitude right of access, a croft access exists once it is used as such and cannot disappear through non-use. Once established, a croft access stays in place and a crofter is entitled to rely upon it.

Despite the strength of a croft access, landlocked crofts do exist but are, thankfully, a rare phenomenon. They arise due to a variety of reasons and can be troublesome to remedy. If a tenant crofter considers his (or, of course, her) croft to be landlocked, he would usually look to his landlord to assist him to access the land for which he pays rent. If the landlord does not cooperate (or does not respond), the crofter may compel him to do so by using one of two mechanisms provided by the crofting acts.

There may, of course, be situations in which a landlord is simply unable to assist, rather than unwilling.

The first mechanism is to begin negotiations with the croft landlord to acquire the croft land and or croft house and garden ground. As part of those negotiations, the crofter will wish to ensure that he obtains the necessary rights to enable access to the land. If the crofter cannot reach agreement with his landlord, he may apply to the Scottish Land Court for an order authorising him to acquire his croft, on such terms and conditions as the court thinks fit – including conditions as to access, for example.

The second mechanism is for the crofter to apply to the Scottish Land Court for an order specifying an access route. This mechanism would only be of assistance where the land over which the crofter seeks access is owned by the same person as the crofter’s own croft; and the court must consider the request to be reasonable. Access problems seldom have easy solutions and even if one of the aforementioned possibilities is open to you, there is no guarantee that the land court will grant the order you apply for.

If you are having access problems (whether your land is a croft or not) get in touch with Inksters and we will be happy to discuss things with you. We regularly visit different parts of the Highlands (we are in Skye and Wester Ross on a monthly basis, in the Western Isles in early September 2012 and in Shetland on a regular basis) and would be happy to meet with you to discuss things in person. Depending on the location of your land (ie whether it is close to where you live), this may also allow us to see the layout of the land, which will assist us in advising you.

The position regarding access for owner-occupier crofters is different and will be addressed in a future article in The Crofter.

Susan Pettie from Glenelg reports

Via Campesina (VC) is the international peasant farmers’ movement. Started in 1993, now with 150 member organisations in 70 countries, it represents about two million farmers. Working with small and medium-sized agriculture from the global north and south, VC campaigns for agrarian reform and food sovereignty – small-scale sustainable production benefiting communities and their environment, with gender equality central to that struggle. SCF is the UK member.

VC is a decentralised and grassroots movement organised into nine regions. Here in Scotland we are part of the European Coordination Via Campesina (ECVC). ECVC was formed with the express aim to influence the current reform of the Common Agriculture Policy, so that its policies support food sovereignty in Europe and across the world.

At the international level VC has had youth representation since 2004 and in 2007 ECVC started a youth group. As part of the young crofters project, Karen MacRae and I travelled to Strasbourg last November to take part in a YECVC study session in the youth centre of the Council of Europe.

Linking into the European youth network and mailing list meant spotting an opportunity this year to go as a YECVC representative to the people’s summit for social and environmental justice (Cúpula dos Povos) in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. This was the civil society and social movements’ parallel conference to the official United Nations Rio+20 conference on sustainable development.

I joined Alexander from Germany and Javier from Spain as the ECVC reps, staying for a week in a primary school downtown Rio with international VC members from all over the world including Palestine, Peru, India, Indonesia, America, Canada, Chile, Mali, South Africa and Zimbabwe. We all gave voice to the essential messages of VC – food sovereignty, • agrarian reform, • support for peasant and family farm agriculture and • a different energy model – in the participatory assembly process at the people summit.

While the official UN process disappointed many people, having spent this time with people who are doing it for themselves and making sustainable development a reality, I am energised and positive. I came home with 7kg of new ideas and connections, plans for Scotland/ Brazil partnerships connected to the landless peoples’ movement. Scotland has much to offer in the way of hope for the world – our parliament’s ambitious carbon reduction targets; community land ownership; community energy ownership; urban growing and local food movements with crofting a core part of that; as well as the hunger for more equity and environmental care demonstrated by people across the country.

This is a crunch time for the future of our species on the planet, fulfilling our food and energy needs in a way which sustains rather than degrades our environment is essential. Crofting is a central part of that, and we need more young crofters to secure this sustainable future.

http://viacampesina.org/en
http://www.eurovia.org

Young crofters – global solutions

Susan Garde Pettie with Alex Kawakami, agroecologist from Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra (the landless people’s movement).
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Cecil believes strongly in the capability of west-coast crofting areas to produce hardy, healthy stock utilising native and traditional breeds on hill grazings. He is very keen to work with a group of crofters or a township to establish a high quality nucleus herd of suckler cows of uniform breeding and would like to hear from anyone interested in working with him.

Cecil always has customers waiting for good quality, hardy breeding stock and can advise on marketing. He also sees a need for local abattoirs and local branding of meat as a means of getting recognition for the quality of west coast stock and achieving added value for the producer.

Cecil’s services are as individual as his customers so he invites you to get in touch for a friendly, informative chat to discuss your livestock requirements.  
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He is available from 8am to 7pm, or visit his website.  
www.stock-man.co.uk
A’ meomhrachadh air feur

An Deidh

Putting Gaelic to work with Úlpán

“IT’s a good way for crofters to supplement their income, once you’re in that classroom, you’re flying!”

SCF member Donald MacSween is 28 and from Ness, a district in the north end of the Isle of Lewis. As with most crofters, he works the land in addition to his day job.

Donald says, “I’ve been involved with crofting from a very early age. My family have always been crofters and most of the early memories of my life involve sheep in one form or another and other crofting activities. I started to get more and more involved up until my parents gave me a croft for my 21st birthday – money well spent! Since then I have got myself a flock of 50 ewes, along with pigs and chickens. I’ve also started working the land a lot more and I don’t think there are many things more enjoyable than being out ploughing on a nice day in the MF 135!”

Donald recently left his post as a journalist at the BBC to work for the local authority in a community development role. He is probably best known for presenting Farpaisean Chonnachtaich since 2008. However, he also puts his Gaelic skills to use as an Úlpán tutor.

Úlpán is a fast and effective way to learn Gaelic. It originated in Israel over 50 years ago to teach modern Hebrew and has been used in Wales, where Úlpán has brought thousands of adult learners to fluency in Welsh. There are regular training weekends for Gaelic speakers wishing to train as tutors.

Donald did his Úlpán training in 2007, through Lewis Castle College in Stornoway. “I was self-employed for nearly four years and Úlpán was a big, big part of the work I was doing. The training itself was quite straightforward. I have met so many different people through Úlpán – that is probably one of the most enjoyable aspects, along with the pay! The majority of the classes I was involved with were taught over the winter months, which meant they didn’t really impact on crofting and fortunately they all stopped for lambing at Easter! I think it’s a good way for crofters to supplement their income; it’s much more relaxed than traditional teaching methods and once you’re in that classroom, you’re flying.”

There is more information available for people interested in both learning and teaching Gaelic at www.ulpán.co.uk, or by emailing fion@ulpán.co.uk, or phone 0845 557 6322.

Donald’s blog, about life on Lewis is available at airainlot.wordpress.com.

Gabhan Mac a’ Phearsain
**WIND CROFTING**

Wind crofting has been successfully established for Kingspan in a number of places in Scotland.

Usually four to six of our KW6 turbines are installed and the crofter or land owner benefits from free electricity produced from the turbines. A community trust or third-party financer collects the Feed in Tariff (FIT) payments, firstly to pay for the wind croft – and after payback (usually in five years) the community trust or financer benefits from the income stream from the generation payments for a further 15 years.

A crofter or land owner who himself has capital funds available at the outset collects the FIT payments and owns the wind croft outright. In the Highlands and Islands, where average wind speeds are typically 7 m/s per second or above, four KW6 turbines will produce approximately 76,000 kWh per year – an annual income of £21,000 on generation and £2,432 on export, both paid to the owner every year for 20 years. The crofter will off-set most if not all electricity needs as s/he will mostly not have to use electricity from the grid.

A number of community loan schemes could allow crofters to benefit from a wind croft as a community project. Funding is also available for private land owners. Wind crofts are popular on Orkney and the Western Isles, where local communities support sustainable developments and have environmental or renewable energy policies. A wind croft for a community project on Westray, Orkney provides income for an energy co-operative which re-invests FIT into further renewable energy projects in fuel poverty initiatives – one of the many ways wind crofts can benefit land owners, crofters and communities with a guaranteed income stream for 20 years. www.kingspanwind.co.uk/news/helping-to-eradicate-fuel-poverty

Kingspan Wind is working with accredited installers and energy working groups on identifying, surveying and project managing the wind crofting concept. Our objective is small-scale and shouldn’t be confused with large-scale wind turbines or wind farms. The KW6 wind turbine can be installed from 9m in height to 15m, whichever is in keeping with its surroundings and offers the greatest benefit to the crofter.

Any land used for wind crofting can still be used for grazing and farming activities – eligible sites require an annual mean average wind speed of 6 m/s and above. If you are unsure of your wind speed, a member of our team can assess the viability on your behalf.

To register your site, please contact windcroft@kingspan.com

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MEMBERS PAGES

Membership matters

What the SCF can do for you

We support individuals and families throughout the crofting counties and even further afield.

We offer support, advice and advocacy; representation at local, national and European level; community participation and mediation; skills development and training; and many more services. We are also reintroducing a product discount scheme as a way of rewarding our members. We will have more announcements on this scheme in the coming months. A mentoring scheme has also been developed which you can read more about in this edition. If you would like to receive updates on the schemes please check our website or sign up to our monthly e-newsletters by emailing hq@crofting.org.

We also offer a vacant croft register to our members so they can receive up-to-date information about crofts for sale or ones which have been made available through the Crofting Commission’s occupancy initiative.

What you can do for the SCF

In the grass-roots article our company secretary is highlighting the importance of the membership driving the organisation forward. Having this grass-roots structure ensures that we are properly representing members’ views as well as creating an active organisation meeting the needs of our members.

By your involvement you are helping to safeguard the future of the SCF as well as crofting in general. You don’t even have to be a board or council member to contribute to our activities.

If there is an issue that you would like more information on, or would like to see a meeting happen on a particular topic, then just get in touch with HQ or rally a few local members to make it happen.

There are always government consultations going on, such as the new Crofting Commission plan, planning regulations, the community empowerment bill – and most recently submitted, a response to the BVd Commission’s consultation.

What do we now do to follow up on these matters and can put forward individuals for a directorship on the SCF’s board.

Do we need to change this arrangement? There is no intention at present to change the process. What is proposed is changing the operational locale from a basis of parishes or townships to one based on post-code sectors. In some cases this may mean increasing the size of the geographical zone of each branch. This would not be done arbitrarily, or without consultation and the cooperation of the members within existing branches.

This was the proposal put by the board to members attending this year’s AGM, asking for approval to go ahead with this restructuring programme, prompted by a survey of members who want greater branch activity. Some existing branches and areas also want the means to do this but question how it can be done. The board is prepared to put its energy and resources into this proposed change along with a suite of measures to stimulate an increase in SCF membership and rejuvenate branch activity, augmenting the important role this network provides for the organisation as a whole.

After some general discussion on the possible effects of these proposals, the AGM overwhelmingly approved the motion.

This decision now puts the Federation in the driving seat for changes to branches and areas but does not change the fundamental role of the board which is to ensure the company/charity continues to operate within its rules and economic resources. From this point onwards the board will be drafting and consulting – and would be pleased to receive members’ suggestions on the best way to achieve this aim.

The SCF needs its local volunteers and activists to support and ultimately progress this suggestion, so that we remain the only organisation specifically founded to represent crofters and crofting communities. Enthusiasm and imagination, rather than organisational skill, are of course most welcome and are primary requisites for branch officials. Self-nomination as office bearers will be greatly appreciated – please telephone or email offers and/or suggestions to HQ.

John Bannister
SCF company secretary

Grass roots and branches – cultivating our areas and branches

This year’s AGM considered a proposed restructuring of the SCF’s areas and branches.

You may think this a normal function of the board, not needing AGM approval. In fact the board has no specific powers to intrude on branch and area affairs. Branches and areas are autonomous units of members, raised locally and operating under a mutually-agreed constitution which can in due course affiliate them to the Federation.

Why do we need branches and areas? Branches and area networks are vital to this organisation. Through a democratic process, they provide a commitment from grass roots membership on all crofting matters and, most importantly, identify members who can guide and drive the organisation forward. Branches elect or nominate individuals to sit on the area committee – set up from branches in a particular region of the Highlands and Islands – and an area committee elects or nominates a member to represent it on the area representatives’ council. The council meets with the board to discuss policy matters and can put forward individuals for a directorship on the SCF’s board.

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John Bannister
SCF company secretary

Pastures new – Su moves on

The SCF has always been outstandingly successful in recruiting project leaders. No more so than with training manager Su Cooper, who has been with SCF since late 2010.

Funding of the training programme, and Su’s contract, came to an end in June. Su successfully obtained a grant for continuation and extension of the Crofters and Small Landholders Training Programme for a further three years. At the time of writing the result of her matched funding application is expected by the end of August.

Su has also been successful in another direction. She has accepted a permanent, full-time post with Highlands and Islands Enterprise. From her career point of view this was undoubtedly the right decision, since the SCF could never have been able to provide the permanency of work that she wanted and deserved.

SCF members will recognise that this is a setback that we must overcome. The training programme that Su has so capably managed for SCF has been hugely successful and a great benefit to crofters and small landholders. Her reports to the board and the Highlands and Island training panel show consistently excellent results. As a person she will be missed. Her quiet, steadfast and efficient approach to her role and the working relationships she has shaped make her a hard act to follow.

Su – well done from all of us!
Help for members

SCF NOW HAS a panel of crofting mentors, experienced crofters who have kindly agreed to provide advice and guidance to members.

The mentoring scheme will cover practical crofting matters such as livestock husbandry, horticulture, poultry, bees, forestry and tourism. Members in need of advice on such subjects should firstly contact head office and they will be put in touch with the appropriate expert. Thank you to the many members who have volunteered to be crofting mentors.

The mentoring scheme does not cover matters of crofting law, regulation and dispute but we will continue to offer a layperson’s opinion on these things if we can, bearing in mind that we are not legally qualified. We do keep a list of accredited crofting lawyers at head office.

We continue to be very busy with members’ casework. Below are two anonymous examples of the kind of cases referred to us recently where our intervention has assisted our members.

Public access and the township bull

We were contacted by a township on the west coast. The bull was running with cows on the common grazing and they had put a Beware of the Bull sign on the gate to the hill. This had resulted in a walker making a complaint to the local authority access officer, who had informed the township that, not only was their sign illegal, but that they should not be keeping a bull where there was a public access.

This, of course, is utter nonsense. Restrictions do apply to bulls of dairy breeds (not many of these on the west coast!), bulls grazing without females present and bulls known to be of a dangerous temperament. Other than in these circumstances it is entirely permissible to run a bull with cattle, although we do recommend that cattle keepers have public liability insurance and take reasonable care to ensure the safety of the public.

The council’s access officer was correct in one small point. Signs that could be interpreted as deterring access are contrary to the Scottish Outdoor Access Code. Therefore Bull in Park or Bull on Hill would be acceptable as these are only giving information, while Beware of the Bull suggests a danger.

A phone call to the council access officer – which should not have been necessary – put him right on this matter. The best guidance on bulls and public access can be found in this Health and Safety Executive publication:

http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/a17s.pdf

Another housing grant case

We get quite a few cases from members who are being refused Croft House Grant Scheme assistance. Usually a letter of appeal succeeds in getting the grant.

In the latest case, our members – a young couple of crofting entrants – had been refused grant because their croft “was not a viable unit”. This we found alarming. Admittedly the croft is small, just one hectare, but there are of course a great many crofts that size or smaller, for example all around the town of Stornoway.

Our members also had a five-year business plan and their intended use of the land, poultry, bees, horticulture and breeding game birds, was entirely achievable within the area of the croft. They had fenced the land and built an agricultural shed entirely at their own expense. The croft had been newly created and, if it had not been considered viable, it surely would not have had the consent of the Crofters Commission. They had planning permission subject to a Section 75 agreement tying the proposed house to the croft, which recognised their operational need to reside on the land.

The Scottish Government website states, “The purpose of the scheme is to improve and maintain the standards of crofter housing with the aim of attracting and retaining people in the more remote areas of the Highlands and Islands.” Our members are precisely the kind of people the government should wish to attract and retain in a very remote area. They have a sound agricultural background and skills, one is a qualified nurse and they have a young child.

We drafted a letter of appeal and were prepared to take up the case politically as a matter of principle. However the CHGS officials reviewed our members’ business plan and, eventually, granted them housing assistance.

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Donnie MacLennan

DONALD MACLENNAN, a past president of the SCU and chairman of the SCF board, passed away recently as a result of a health problem which had troubled him for some time.

Donnie, as he was always known, trained as an electrician in a Glasgow shipyard before returning to his native Stornoway to employment with the then North of Scotland Hydro Electric Board, a job from which he took early retirement to allow him to devote more time to his many other interests, chief of which was, of course, crofting.

He joined the Scottish Crofters Union when it was set up in 1986 and served as branch and area chair, council member, vice-president and president. As chairman of the board of the Scottish Crofting Foundation, Donnie oversaw the transition from SCU to SCF, which was followed by a troubled period in the history of the organisation.

Donnie stood down as chairman of the board at the end of his term in 2003.

Donnie was also a director of Heather Isle Meats and Lewis and Harris Auction Mart, president of the West Side Agricultural Show and chairman of two local grazing committees – truly a man of many talents.

I first got to know Donnie when he joined the SCU council and we became close friends, a friendship which lasted over the years. Donnie and I were closely involved during my own spell in office with the union and then the foundation and I enjoyed the hospitality of his home on many occasions when visiting the Western Isles on official duties. I benefited greatly from his generous and valuable support as my vice-president during this time.

Donnie was at all times a gentleman and friend and his passing will be mourned by all those who had the good fortune to know him; indeed the wider crofting community will be all the poorer for his passing.

Alistair MacIver

Visitors from Papua

GOVERNMENT officials from the Indonesian province of Papua visited crofting townships on Eigg and on Skye this summer to learn more about community development and land reform in a devolved Scotland.

The twelve delegates, led by Alex Rumaseb, head of Papua’s provincial planning office, were taken to Eigg and Camuscross in Sleat by Alastair McIntosh and colleagues at the Centre for Human Ecology to look at the way bottom-up development can empower communities.

Papua, on the Indonesian side of New Guinea island, is one of the last great frontier wildernesses. Its vast rainforests and coral-rich waters are home to more than 250 indigenous tribes, the most linguistically diverse population on Earth. Yet standards of health and education for indigenous Papuans are often below the national average. Rampant logging, legal and illegal, has decimated swathes of primary forest and many communities are now selling their land to palm oil companies – sometimes at a very low price – leaving them bereft of the ecosystems that sustain them.

Papuan provincial government planners are concerned about the implications of people losing their connection to the land and their culture through development of the cash economy. They wanted to understand how people in the Scottish Highlands are keeping or reclaiming that connection. Alex Rumaseb said: “We like the idea of soil, soul and society working together. We want this to inform our 100 year plan for a healthy, happy Papua province.”

Papua province faces a situation where two-thirds of the population are made up of incomers, many of whom were sent over when Indonesia was a military dictatorship. Alastair McIntosh said: “This delegation was made up of both incomers and indigenous Papuans. They especially valued seeing on Eigg and in Camuscross on Skye how different communities can come to respect each other and make a common future. The Scots also learned a lot from their experience as they strive to develop a more democratic system than the one they have had.”

The Papua delegation reported that they are seeing growing signs of climate change in Indonesia. They therefore wanted to understand more about climate change. They were very impressed by Eigg’s award-winning green electrical grid, and were particularly interested in the solar and hydro components of the system.

As much of Papua’s rainforest is actually owned by the indigenous population in a system based on ancient customs of ancestral tenure, the delegation also wanted to know how crofting and community trusts benefit the local community. On Eigg they met Isle of Eigg Heritage Trust secretary Maggie Fyffe, local grazings clerk Neil Robertson and Camille Dressler, local historian and social enterprise tutor.

On Skye they met Susan Walker, from the Crofting Commission and members of Iomairt Chamas Chros is Duidseil – the Camuscross and Duidseil Initiative. Best of all, they watched a communal potato planting at Camuscross and could not get over the fact that the tractor was driven by SCF member Gavin Parsons, who is a lecturer at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig.

On the last day of their trip to the west Highlands they visited the SCF team in Kyle and met Neil Gerrard, development manager at Highlands and Islands Enterprise’s Growing Community Assets team (what used to be called the Community Land Unit), before travelling to Govan in Glasgow. There they were studying urban poverty and the work of the GalGael Trust which was started by the late Colin Macleod, whose father is from Gravir on Lewis.

The Papua group with some Eigg residents: Iain Mackinnon SCF and Alastair McIntosh on front row second and third from the left.
A new book investigating the cultural background to ongoing maritime conflict in the Sound of Barra in the Western Isles has been published.

The book, called Dùthchas na Mara (Belonging to the Sea), shows how traditional knowledge of the sea is playing a vital role in maintaining Gaelic-speaking island fishing communities in Scotland and Ireland.

The book is a product of the Connecting Coastal Communities project, supported by the Colmáin Partnership that seeks to forge connections between the Gaeil of Ireland and Scotland. Dùthchas na Mara has been written by Iain MacKinnon, on behalf of the SCF, and Ruth Brennan, a social ecologist at the Scottish Association for Marine Science. The book also features photographs from the Glasgow-based visual artist Stephen Hurrel who himself has Barra connections. It was launched on Barra in August.

Iain and Ruth’s research suggests that there are important cultural roots to the campaign on Barra against the Scottish Government’s proposals for two European marine conservation areas in the waters around the island.

In particular, their book shows similarities in practices and beliefs that exist between traditional knowledge holders on Barra and on Arranmore, a Gaelic-speaking island off the west coast of Donegal in Ireland where fishermen have been campaigning for the last five years against what they say are crippling restrictions on their ability to fish. Drawing examples from both islands, the work describes some key aspects of the fishermen’s close and enduring relationship with their local waters and the role that this sense of belonging to the sea plays in the life of island communities.

Among the topics explored are: how place-names are formed and evolve in order to represent the nature and dangers of the marine environment; how technology has changed fishing as a way of life; and how customary behaviour among fishermen helps to maintain strong social relations among them.

SCF director Fiona Mandeville said: “This new perspective on the common culture of communities that has kept elements of traditional knowledge is long overdue. “In most Highlands and Islands coastal communities fishermen are also crofters, or belong to crofting families. While it is true that many traditional practices have been neglected or eroded, this book shows that there are crofters and fishermen who, because of the way they are choosing to work on land and at sea, are helping to keep alive an important body of place-based knowledge. It has been by utilising this knowledge that they, and those that went before them, maintain themselves — both physically and in terms of retaining a distinct indigenous cultural identity.

“The book takes a small part of what remains of that traditional knowledge and puts it into its primary context as working knowledge. It also shows how government has the opportunity to support this globally significant knowledge through a raft of international legislation, such as the Convention on Biodiversity and the Convention on Intangible Cultural Heritage, which exist to protect it. “As warnings grow from institutions of global governance, such as the United Nations, suggesting we may need to prepare for an age of scarcity and for the diminishing availability of the resources on which our modern technologies and lifestyles depend, so it may be that in the future the traditional knowledge of crofting communities will, once again, need to be put to much greater use. This puts a responsibility on us to maintain it."

The work begun by the Connecting Coastal Communities research is now being taken forward by Sgeulachdan na Mara (Sea Stories), a project that the researchers are carrying out in collaboration with Voluntary Action Barra and Vatersay. The aim of Sgeulachdan na Mara is to develop a dynamic digital map of Barra containing images, sounds and stories related to the sea.
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SCF chair Derek Flyn and Karen MacRae SCF membership administrator enjoy a well-deserved cuppa in a quiet moment at the Royal Highland Show.

Leader of the Scottish Conservatives, Ruth Davidson witnesses legendary SCF Caithness representative Jim McPherson’s rendition of his sonnet to the Scottish strawberry.

Minister for the environment Stewart Stevenson launches the new SCF horticulture handbook at the Black Isle Show with vice-chair Fiona Mandeville and Patrick Krause.

I-r Alan Boulton, Cecil Pirie and Donald Murdie

After the deluge

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