



NEWS RELEASE

Use: Immediate

Date: 20/11/2018

Crofters wary about the future

A survey of crofters' attitudes taken this month by the Scottish Crofting Federation shows that crofters are wary of the future of the livestock industry in the Highlands and Islands.

Only 14% of respondents are confident about the future, as compared to more than twice that number who are despondent (31%). Fifty five per cent said they were uncertain, citing Brexit and the knock-on effect that might have on prices and support payments.

Crofters and farmers are having to make decisions on stock numbers without knowing what sort of market they are going to be selling animals into. With both sheep and cattle producers, more people are reducing stock numbers than increasing them. For cattle the figures are 24% reducing stock and 13% increasing; for sheep the numbers are 26% reducing stock and 19% increasing. Most people are maintaining numbers while waiting to see what happens. But the drift of livestock from the hills is set to continue.

Russell Smith, chair of the Scottish Crofting Federation, said, "Those who are confident about the future base their views on the fact that there will always be a need for food – and crofters produce quality, environmentally friendly meat. Some comment that Brexit gives opportunity for better support for the industry, for example by placing tariffs on imports. A few are developing local markets for their meat.

Mr Smith continued: "Those who are despondent cite the possible reduction in subsidies when we are out of the Common Agricultural Policy and the risk of a no-deal Brexit leading to a drop in prices. In general there is great uncertainty; so crofters can't plan for the future. Overall, there doesn't seem too much joy around, with lots of respondents marking time and fearful of what the future might bring – reduced prices, increased costs and reductions in support payments. And if there is no economic return then crofters will stop crofting, they say in their comments.

"But the opportunity is there to strengthen the market for top quality, environmentally responsible, local lamb and beef while developing a support system that helps crofters and hill farmers continue to look after the land and support our remote rural communities."

END

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Notes to editors

- A picture can be found at: <http://www.crofting.org>