

Call for new crofts and new crofters

IN ITS Crofting Policy Proposal the SCF calls for the creation of 10,000 new crofts.

Some have remarked on the ambitiousness of this proposal; and some have even called it over-ambitious. Put it in context though – there are nearly 18,000 existing crofts so the proposal is to increase the number by 55%, just over half.

SCF is asking for this over the term of two governments. This is not unrealistic and is deliberately challenging the government to look beyond this term of office. SCF has also proposed that one quarter of land in Scotland should be under crofting tenure by 2030.

It is important to have a long-term ambition. The rolling out of crofting tenure across Scotland as the appropriate model of land management and food production for Scotland is something SCF has promoted for years.

A fair question was asked by a crofters commissioner in the last issue of *The Crofter*. How can SCF, having the stated ambition to create 10,000 new crofts, criticise the creation of new crofts on Skye?

When creating new crofts it is essential to listen to and take into account the views of the existing community – in this case a crofting community. Furthermore it should be essential that clear criteria

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Clear consequences of livestock decline

DO ANY of the following sound familiar?

A decline in the number of active crofters; absenteeism and abandonment of crofts; increasing numbers of red deer; housing development on crofts; loss of skills and traditional practices and lack of experienced labour; lack of help for new entrants; nearest slaughterhouse in Dingwall; crofts and housing inaccessible; increasing average age of crofters; increased bureaucracy, regulatory burden, cross-compliance and paperwork?

In the opinion of crofters in the parishes of Sleat and Strath in Skye, surveyed for the Scottish Natural Heritage report *An Analysis of the Impact on the Natural Heritage of the Decline in Hill Farming in Scotland*, these are some of the causes and effects of livestock reduction in their

area. As well as the Skye parishes, the report studied the parishes of Lairg, Kincardine and Creich in Sutherland and an area of the Borders.

Much of the report's content will come as no surprise. The decline in hill livestock in Scotland continued between 2004 and 2009 with the steepest decline in the north and west. The loss of a hefted sheep flock from a hill is very hard indeed to reverse and sheep from other hefts take over the vacated ground, eventually making gathering difficult or impossible.

A general degradation of habitats, spread of bracken and increased fire risk are predicted, especially in the Skye parishes. As well as the natural heritage effects, the report highlights the well-known socio-economic outcomes – de-population, the closure of schools and shops and the disintegration

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A future for crofting support?

It's nine months now since the much-anticipated Pack report was released. On page 4 David Smith analyses how the debate surrounding future support to agriculture has developed and offers some opinion on its future direction.

Message from the chair...

Eleanor Arthur



IN JUNE I was present for the Royal Highland Show which was especially good this year.

Every year does seem to be busier than the last. But was it my imagination or were there really a lot more people there?

Leastways, we had a very good turnout at our stand for all the four days, visitors being drawn in by a very attractive display and the chance to taste the latest crofters mutton pies taken with crofters ale and guid craic! And the weather was fine. I say that as it was a good temperature for all the animals competing and for standing in the show ring.

The weather turned very cold

with wind and heavy rain, which was not unexpected in this neck of the woods but such a shame for all the visitors to Shetland for the tall ships. But the Shetland knitwear shops did a very good trade on sweaters, hats, gloves and scarves, so every cloud has a silver lining!

I noticed at the tall ships event that there were a variety of different trade stalls with food and gifts from far and wide. But a lot of profiteering too unfortunately, which is sad for locals and visitors alike – for example a cheeseburger roll consisting of a rather thin manufactured burger with plastic cheese at £3.50, and a German hot dog costing £4.50.

It was such a shame Shetland produce was not showcased in some way, so that everyone could have benefited from the exposure created by such an event. When will we get our tourist trade sorted out? Not only in Shetland, but all over Scotland, we are not providing enough local food to satisfy the demand, or are simply not making it available to our visitors.

As I wrote this article we received very good news about two important issues SCF has

been making a noise about, the Scottish Beef Calf Scheme (SBCS) and renewables.

Cabinet secretary for the environment Richard Lochhead announced on Tuesday that a new Scottish Beef Scheme will replace the SBCS in January.

SCF has been struggling to get the amount paid on the first ten calves increased in order to specifically target support to the smaller producer. Mr Lochhead agreed with this and has increased the payments on the first ten to three times that on subsequent calves.

This is very good for crofters

and for our mission to get more cattle back on the hills.

Mr Lochhead then announced on Thursday that he is setting up a process to form a Scottish agri-renewables strategy.

Members will know that the SCF has been very active in promoting crofting renewables and lobbying for better support in overcoming hurdles preventing crofters from benefitting from this opportunity. Hopefully this agri-renewables strategy will facilitate more crofters in using the land and energy resources they manage.

So, a good week for crofting. Thanks, Mr Lochhead.



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Director's blog...

Norman Leask

SINCE THE LAST Crofter deadline I have been busy on your behalf with meetings in various parts of Scotland, Belgium and Holland.

In late May I was in Brussels for a sheep and goat meat advisory group meeting. I was also able to attend several other seminars. As you know, we are part of European Coordination Via Campesina (ECVC), the organisation which represents the family farmers' unions. It is brilliant to have a base now in Brussels and to have someone like Gerard Choplin monitoring what EU bureaucrats are doing to protect their jobs and destroy our cultures. Consequently I am delighted to take an active part in any conference I possibly can.

The most enlightening yet worrying meeting I had in my May visit to Brussels was a conference on permanent pasture. We saw the importance of a single word that means different things when translated into various European languages. One such word is 'herbaceous'. This word is the

reason why many hectares of the Highlands, and more especially, the islands, are no longer eligible for support.

I explained to commission officials that my sheep would die if they did not have access to seaweed. A photo of sheep grazing on seaweed in the book A Dander Trowe Shetland's Crofting Culture emphasized the point. I encouraged them to drop the offending word as this would not alter the expression 'forage grazed by farm animals'.

I still await their reply, but in the meantime I have explained my concerns to everyone who may have the power to do something, including members of the Worshipful Company of Woolmen on their summer jaunt to Shetland, when one official advised me that a derogation had been granted to one Scottish island for this same purpose.

The last three weeks in June I spent outwith Shetland – meetings in the Scottish Parliament; twice in Brussels attending both beef meat and sheep meat advisory groups;

meeting with the agriculture committee in the EU Parliament; and spending a weekend in Holland at a sheep conference.

At the conclusion of this conference, as we sheep farmers had been told terminological inexactitudes in the case of EID, we decided to initiate a European shepherds' network to allow shepherds with problems from any area to explain their difficulties to the industry Europe-wide rather than to depend on the advice of Brussels bureaucrats and their stooges.

The Highland Show fell in the middle of my wanderings. The SCF stand was excellent and the visitors were of the highest quality, especially our own members. I spoke till I had lost my voice with MPs, MSPs and MEPs, but the most pleasurable experience was renewing acquaintanceship with our own members.

Before coming north to SCF HQ on 1st July for the day and speaking at our renewables conference at Strathpeffer the following day, I was in Hawick where a design

for an SCF scarf was completed and a design for a cape, using the SCF rug as its foundation, is on the drawing board.

We in Shetland are still very much involved in David Smith's idea based on the Pack Report of gaining **Vulnerable Area classification** under LFASS for the Highlands and Islands.

I do hope you feel confident to back us as this vulnerable area classification will release streams of funding not currently available to the crofting counties.



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are established for the creation of new crofts. The SCF criticism was focussed on these two points.

The proposed sites were in a rank, wet and dark corner of an estate that has plenty of good land, so it was no surprise that the existing community suggested that new crofts could be better placed.

The crofting community asked SCF to speak up as they felt they were being ignored. Furthermore, the Commission did not appear to have clear criteria on which to base its decision.

It is unfortunate that the Commission chose to use the argument that crofts have always been unviable, as this was a construct deliberately used by unscrupulous landlords to force crofters to have to work for them – not something the Crofters Commission should be advocating.

We can have the ambition that new crofts will be created and that they will be of a standard fit for purpose. The SCF is putting together guidance on what criteria should be used for the creation of new crofts, so if readers have views on this please contact the SCF.

NEW CROFTERS – IMPORTANT NOTICE

The 2007 Act allowed for the creation of new crofts and the 2010 Act is designed to free up unused crofts. There are likely therefore, to be crofts becoming available over the next few years. The Crofters Commission no longer keeps a register of people interested in becoming a crofter so the SCF will do this and will gather information on crofts as they become available – and will then connect the two.

This project is in development but should you wish to be entered on the database as someone looking for a croft, please contact SCF for a data form.

Clear consequences of livestock decline

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of community life. The continuation of farming is seen as vital to maintaining thriving local communities.

We know all this of course, but it is good to see it clearly and unambiguously stated in a SNH-commissioned report, which is only the latest in a stream of work on the same topic, all of which has reached similar conclusions. In the last few years we have seen the Royal Society of Edinburgh's *Hills and Islands Inquiry*, SAC's *Farming's Retreat from the Hills* and, recently, Gwyn Jones's *Trends in Common Grazing*. The issue is identified too in the final report of Brian Pack's *Inquiry into Future Agricultural Support in Scotland*.

There's no doubt about the problem, but what about the solution? The SNH report states, "The decline in livestock numbers is unlikely to stop without economic support for hill farmers and crofters through some form of policy change. If the decline continues then the impacts highlighted in the report are likely to become greater and even more widespread, with wider social issues implicated."

Brian Pack recommends a degree of recoupling in the sheep sector: "Coupled payments are the only way to ensure certain desirable outcomes are achieved and that some very undesirable consequences are avoided, for example, the disappearance of crofting." Very undesirable indeed; and while

crofting itself will not disappear the risk is the loss of a set of skills and a culture of hill stock management that are probably irreplaceable, as well as permanent damage to valued habitats and landscapes. What Pack proposes is a lamb headage payment, provided a sufficiently robust scheme can be devised.

SCF's *Taking Stock* survey of crofters' stock clubs has confirmed that this long-standing model of hill grazing management has succeeded in retaining stock on the hills in certain areas through a handed-down set of skills and a knowledge of the land and its capabilities. This skill and knowledge continues to produce hardy, healthy stock which is in strong demand in the sale ring, with very low external inputs. Surely this model, along with the Pack proposals, offers a way forward from the present crisis situation. A good start would be to introduce a measure within Land Managers' Options to give incentives to setting up and maintaining stock clubs on hill and moorland grazings.

We now have the unanimity of evidence provided by a series of reports commissioned by the Scottish Government or its agencies. Is there the will within government to take action on the clear conclusions?

The SNH report can be seen at www.crofting.org/publications



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A future for crofting support?

It's nine months since the much anticipated Pack report was released. SCF member David Smith from Shetland analyses how the debate surrounding future support to agriculture has developed and offers some opinion on its future direction.

THE FUNDAMENTAL principle of Pack is that direct support through the Single Farm Payment (SFP) is and always should be for food production.

It also asserts that wider public goods, demanded by the taxpayer, will be delivered as a consequence of this principle. Macaulay maps would be used and payments would be delivered on a 'better the ground, the higher the payment' principle. Some distribution of funds may take place, but all in all the natural order of things would persist.

Unfortunately for supporters of this model, Europe has other ideas. Standard labour units and payments linked to the ability of land to produce, as proposed by Pack, are not acceptable. The CAP will have to be greener with a proportion of direct payments, perhaps 30%, targeted at environmental measures and no more than 10% of a country's direct support to be coupled to production. They are also insisting on a link to activity. The trick will be defining what counts as activity without making the link to production. Certainly Scottish Government officials will have to engage more imagination than has been seen in the past. Pretty much the only measure of activity used at the moment is grazing by a female animal of a certain age.

The latest, unacceptable, proposal from NFUS suggests that Scotland should use all of its 10% coupled allocation as the mechanism to fund the fragile and very fragile areas. The rest of the country will receive a flat rate payment with freedom from the inevitable rules which come with coupling. The same proposal advocates regionalising funding based on present geographical distribution, yet another cunning plan to prevent any movement of funds.

Regionalisation is a concept which is also being touted as a better means of delivering

pillar 2 support. This would, theoretically, allow more local decision-making over how money was targeted. However there is such a need at government level to maintain control that I doubt this will happen to any meaningful degree. The crofting counties, perhaps with the exception of Orkney, have done particularly poorly out of rural development funding, including agri-environment. This situation is acknowledged in the SRDP mid-term review and yet no specific recommendations are made as to how to rectify it. In fact the Scottish Government is actually proposing to remove or restrict a number of the rural priority options which crofters are dependent on for successful applications.

The UK, and Scotland in particular, ranks very low on the European league table of funding to agriculture, both pillars 1 and 2. It is clear we need a fairer share of the budget, a concept which NFUS and Scottish Government ministers are quick to argue for at European or UK level and yet struggle to deliver when they return to their desks in Edinburgh.

If we are to prosper, in what is by European definition a vulnerable area, we need more financial resources and less stifling rules. If the policy suggested by NFUS – adopting a historical budget share as the basis for future funding – manages to gain credence and is then used to divvy up pillar 2 support, our past inability to access those funds would put future rural development, financial growth and the environment at serious risk.

Surprisingly, at this stage of the debate capping of payments is still on the agenda. Normally big business interests are effective, very early in the negotiations, at kicking that one into touch. Recent assertions by NFUS president Nigel Miller, that capping is simply a tax on efficiency aimed at those who seek the economies of scale which come with expansion, is at least a welcome recognition that larger businesses do have lower costs. Their previous nonsense, and Pack's, was that their costs were greater and therefore they deserved higher levels of support.

Europe is certainly making all the right noises about supporting small farms and with the

CAP budget set to remain at a similar level for the next financial period, capping could have the potential to free up significant amounts of money which would hopefully then be distributed to smaller units. The newly-defined vulnerable area maintains 20% of Scotland's breeding flock and 27% of its breeding cattle and yet receives a disproportionately small amount of support.

This needs to change. While I accept that it can be difficult to adjust to having a lower level of income, crofters have on regular occasions had to get used to exactly that scenario. Even the latest adjustments to LFASS have seen a lot of crofters lose out. While it is difficult to argue that crofters should receive payment on unused hill shares, levels of support are so low within the crofting counties it's equally hard to conceive that these people are, somehow, being over-compensated compared to those on better ground who receive far more.

The rotating European presidency is set to pass to Poland, Denmark and Cyprus over the next 18 months. These countries have average farm sizes ranging from 60 hectares in Denmark to just 2.5 hectares in Poland, and I feel recent press coverage about the possibility of restricting support to those who get more than 50% of their income from agriculture is highly unlikely. Even the east coast barley barons who work in the oil industry and have contractors to do all their work might suffer under that proposal.

Looking forward, there are sure to be many twists and turns in the debate before 2013. We need to continue our work with partners in the vulnerable area coalition and concentrate on developing a comprehensive case for support.

The first step, identifying the geographical boundary, has just been completed. We need to now quantify the level of resources required, through pillars 1 and 2, to allow our agricultural sector to flourish. We should be bold enough to develop our own payment system – one which is rooted in sound environmental principles and present this to the Scottish Government as a means of support which really could deliver a future for crofting.

Welcome announcements on renewables and beef calf scheme

THE Scottish Crofting Federation has welcomed the announcement, by cabinet secretary Richard Lochhead of a strategy to assist crofters and farmers to benefit from renewable energy development.

SCF Chair Eleanor Arthur said, "Undoubtedly there are great opportunities for individual crofters, and for crofting communities, in renewables development. However the picture is fragmented and confusing with many pitfalls to be overcome. We hope the agri-renewables strategy will bring assistance with finance, simplified

planning procedures and access to the electricity grid for small-scale projects. As Mr Lochhead says, this is a steep learning curve for all of us. What we need above all is impartial advice on the options."

SCF recently held its second renewable energy seminar which was attended by over sixty crofters and is working towards producing a guide to renewables projects for crofters and townships.

The cabinet secretary also announced a new Scottish Beef Scheme with effect from 2012. The new scheme gives more support to

small producers, substantially increasing the bias in the payment rate for the first ten calves.

Ms Arthur said, "This is very good news for crofters with cattle and it is something we have campaigned for over many years. SCF was successful in securing the original Beef Calf Scheme in 2004 which has helped to retain cattle in some of our most remote and fragile areas. The new scheme acknowledges that success and recognises the social, economic and environmental benefits delivered by small herds of beef cattle in the hills and islands."

Look online at www.crofting.org

CROFTING CONNECTIONS

Voices of the island crofts

VOICES OF the Island Crofts is a unique opportunity in the Year of Island Culture for pupils from Crofting Connections schools to meet crofters at the SCF gathering on the Isle of Skye on October 3rd and 4th, 2011.

Crofters from all over the crofting counties will have the opportunity to hear children present the poetry and songs of their own communities in Scots, Gaelic and the dialects of Orkney and Shetland.

- A number of schools will perform on Monday 3rd before the chair's reception at Sabhal Mor Ostaig.
- There will be two performances of Voices of the Island Crofts on October 4th. The first will be in the afternoon at Sabhal Mor Ostaig for crofters and other delegates attending the SCF gathering.
- The second performance is in the evening at Portree High School for a wider audience of local people and visitors to Skye.
- Voices of the Island Crofts is funded by Scotland's Islands, the Scottish Government and Bord na Gaidhlig.
- Please contact info@croftingconnections.com or phone 01599 530 006 for more information.



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1. Pupils from Acharacle primary harvesting carrots 2. Pupils from Taynault primary school weaving 3. Pupils from Deshar in the school garden 4. Pupils from Furnace primary schools planting in their school garden 5. Burravoe pupils making bread 6. Whalsay pupils helping with hoof clipping 7. Sgoil Lionacleit pupils out on the croft

Important notice

Election of crofting commissioners consultation

THE CROFTING REFORM (Scotland) Act 2010 makes provision to elect commissioners to the Crofting Commission, to make it more democratic and accountable.

The Crofters Commission is to be renamed Crofting Commission in April 2012, when the new commission will be formed. The Act states that the Crofting Commission must consist of no fewer than five and no more than nine members. Of those members, no fewer than two people are to be appointed by Scottish Ministers and no more than six people elected. These six members will be elected by crofters, ensuring the majority of the commission are elected members.

The Scottish Government has launched a consultation on the draft election regulations, which also covers the constituency boundaries for the elections and who should be eligible to vote.

The consultation runs to 5th October 2011 and can be accessed online at <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2011/07/13090620/0>, or by contacting the land tenure branch on 0131 244 9847, or writing to:

**Scottish Government
Agriculture and Rural Development
Division, D Spur, Saughton House,
Broomhouse Drive, Edinburgh EH11 3XD**

SCF will prepare a response, so please let us know your thoughts as well as sending in your response.

Community mapping update

THE CROFTING (Scotland) Act 2010 provides for the mapping of crofts.

This will become compulsory when requiring any Crofting Commission administrative procedures. The SCF is developing a community mapping programme to help crofting communities prepare their maps as a group, making the whole process easier and more beneficial to the community.

Crofting community meetings have been held by SCF throughout the crofting counties to explain the Crofting Act 2010 and the crofting community mapping project. The most recent were in Husabost (North Skye), Badrallach and Rogart.

There is a great deal of enthusiasm for the community mapping idea and plenty of communities wanting to participate. Initially a small pilot will be prepared to take place in Badrallach and Rogart to test the methodology.

Benefiting from this learning exercise, a full proposal will then be prepared to put to funders. We are also preparing rules of procedure and guidance to ensure that the process is sound, rigorous and repeatable.

Crofters penalised by new local plan

THE PROPOSED Argyll and Bute local development plan will penalise genuine crofters and prevent the creation of new and woodland crofts in the county.

This is the SCF's concern in its response to the council's consultation on the plan. Patrick Krause said, "We are dismayed by the proposal to restrict the development of new croft houses within designated scenic areas and within 16km of main towns. The effect of this policy would be to prevent the building of any new croft house in the vast majority of the county, which in turn would kill off the prospects for new and woodland crofts and hinder young people hoping to take over the family croft."

The council's proposed plan refers to loss of population especially in the county's remote and fragile areas, but points out the risk of crofts being created which are in effect house sites, as a means of circumventing planning policy. SCF's response points to the creation of new crofts in Jura which has succeeded in attracting young families back to the island.

"That could not have happened had the

proposed narrow and restrictive policy been in place," the SCF response claimed. "Creation of crofts, properly regulated, is one way of retaining and attracting economically active people to remote, rural areas and islands, by providing land, homes and jobs. The proposed local development plan would remove the homes element and would effectively exclude most of mainland Argyll, many of the islands and the whole of Bute from new croft creation. This could well be seen as seeking to reverse the will of parliament."

"It is understandable if the council wishes to prevent croft creation being used as a means of getting around planning policy, but there are ways of doing that without preventing genuine crofters from being housed on their crofts. We hope that the council will adopt a policy that will allow crofting to develop within Argyll and Bute and fulfill its potential to regenerate the county's remote and fragile areas."

The consultative document can be viewed at www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/ldp.

A' cur fàilte air na croitearan òga

BHA E NA bhrosnachadh leughadh mun bhuidheann Croitearan Òga sa Chrofter mu dheireadh.

Mar a tha fhios againn uile, tha a' mhòr chuid de croitearan caran suas ann am bliadhnaichean, agus ged a tha sin a' ciallachadh gu bheil eòlas mòr aca agus 's dòcha gliocas cuideachd, dè thachras nuair a bhios iad tuilleadh is sean airson obair a dhèanamh. Cò thig as an dèidh? Chan eil mòran earbsa ga chur sna daoine òga nas motha, le cuid. Cluinnidh sinn a leithid "O chan eil ùidh aig òigridh ann a bhith ag obrachadh croit, chan eil iad ag iarraidh ach làrach-taighe"

Uill tha mi toilichte innse, de na trìur chàraidean òga ('s e sin fo 40 bliadhna, òg sa latha a th' ann) a fhuair croitearan sa bhaile againn sna beagan bhliadhnaichean mu dheireadh, tha iad uile an sàs ann an obair croitearachd. Tha crodh aig dithis dhiubh agus bha e na thlachd a bhith faicinn cho dèileas 's a chaidh sùil a chumail air na màirt aig àm breith agus as a dhèidh nuair a bha duilgheadas aig aon mhàr le sine a bha ro mhòr don laogh a bha feuchainn ri deoghal as. Tha na sgilean a dh'fheumas croitear gan togail beag air

bheag agus le deòin. Mar eisimpleir, rùsgadh chaorach. Tha dithis no trìur am-bliadhna a tha comasach air sin a dhèanamh seach dà bhliadhna air ais. Tha mucan air a bhith a' nochdadh air croitean sa bhaile cuideachd, agus sgilean buidsearachd gan ionnsachadh bhon fheadhainn aig a bheil iad. Bha feansaichean ri ùrachadh air a' mhonadh agus 's iad an fheadhainn òga a theann ris an obair sin, agus a chuir crìoch air.

Chan eil na croitean sa bhaile seo ach beag agus mar sin chan eil duine gu bhith dèanamh mòran prothaid asta, ach nì toradh nan croitean feum mòr ann a bhith cur biadh math, blasta air truinnsearan muinntir a' bhaile. Agus, tha e toirt daoine nas dlùithe ri chèile, togail chàirdeasan, a tha feumail ann an àite far a bheil a' mhòr chuid a' falbh gu obair gach madainn agus a' tilleadh air an oidhche gun a bhith bruidhinn ris na nàbaidhean.

Agus, aon rud eile, tha na croitearan òga sa bhaile seo an dàrna cuid air taigh ùrachadh no a tha a-nis a' togail thaighean dhaibh fhèin. 'S iad a tha airidh orra!

Gabhan Mac a' Phearsain

Young crofters meeting success

THE FIRST MEETING of young crofters from Lewis and Harris was held in Stornoway at the end of May, just after the last edition of the Crofter went to print.

We are very pleased to report a successful event. Neil MacLeod was important in instigating Karen Campbell's visit and helped to insure this good attendance.

During the meeting it was stressed that this would be a unique opportunity to be involved in a movement of young crofters. The young folk present could see the strengths of being part of a group and discussed what they would like to achieve collectively as well as issues faced by young people individually.

Some ideas that came out of the meeting included looking at sharing machinery, renewable energy, training groups and new outlets for produce as well as tackling problems such as neglect, croft viability and ensuring that young people have a voice for the future of crofting.

A second meeting took place in Stornoway, plus one in Lairg, just as we went to press. We will report on these in the next issue.

If you would like more information about the young crofters group please get in touch with Karen on 01599530005 or email Karen@crofting.org.

Adding value

LIKE THE REST OF US, the SCF needs to generate more income so that it can continue to support the basic aims of supporting crofters and the development of crofting.

We are currently doing two things to help this – setting up a trading subsidiary and considering trademarking our logo and name.

Having a trading company will allow us to do things to earn money without endangering our charitable status. These might be: earning income from carrying out or managing projects and research; promoting crofting produce from individual members; selling goods such



as books and crafts; promoting croft holidays – or whatever opportunities arise.

The new company will be wholly owned by SCF and all the surplus profits will go back to SCF to support its charitable aims. We must be careful to take on only things that will be profitable so



that the new company, Scottish Crofting Enterprises, won't be a drain on SCF resources. Directors will be appointed by SCF and we hope to attract people with proven commercial expertise. All this is with the aim of providing more funds for SCF to provide services to members.

Registering a trademark for Scottish Crofting will also help us promote and protect various crofting brands such as crofting produce, crofters' pies, and crofting holidays. We are working with the Innovator's Counselling and Advisory Service for Scotland to do this as effectively as possible.

The aim is to make crofting more economically viable, so that we as members can continue to keep the crofting counties as a vibrant place for us and our successors to live and work.

If you have any views on this, please get in touch via HQ or to Russell Smith at russell@crofting.org.

Royal Highland and Black Isle Shows



1. Shetland specialities launched into the Slow Food Ark of Taste – Eleanor Arthur and Su Braithwaite of Slow Food UK. 2. Norman Leask gives an interview to Nancy Nicolson. 3. Richard Lochhead samples the Crofters Mutton Pie, watched by Ishbel Crawford LANTRA, Russell Smith and Patrick. 4. Roland Stiven, author of the new woodlands book and Su Cooper, training manager 5. Official crofters beer – Crofters Pale Ale brewed on the croft by An Teallach Brewery, Dundonnell. 6. Shetland specialities – lamb, beef and reestit mutton.

RENEWABLES

Renewable developments on croft land and common grazings

by Eilidh Ross, Inksters, Solicitors, Inverness

The information given here must not be construed as legal advice.

THIS ARTICLE summarises the options for a crofter, landlord or developer if he or she wishes to locate a renewable project on croft land or common grazings.

Scheme for development – common grazings / croft land

This concept was established by the Crofting Reform (Scotland) Act 2007 – which amended the 1993 Act rather than standing alone – and allows the development of croft land and common grazings without removing either from crofting regulation.

An application to the Land Court must be made by the landowner, accompanied by a scheme which can include the ending of all or some crofters' rights on that land or make different arrangements for different parts of the land. Any approved scheme would be

binding upon both crofters and their successors in tenancy.

Common grazings

In some cases, despite the advent of the scheme for development, parties prefer to remove land from crofting regulations completely. If the land involved is common grazing land, it must be resumed by application to the Scottish Land Court under section 20 of the 1993 Act.

This application must be made by the owner of the land and should be accompanied by planning permission for the development (to prove to the court that it complies with the reasonable purpose requirement) and the consent of shareholders.

Crofters sharing in the common grazings are entitled to receive 50% of the value of the development; and crofters will wish to contract with the landlord and the developer to ensure that their rights are protected in this regard.

In-by-croft land

If a crofter wishes to develop a renewable project on in-by-croft

land, (s)he may remove the land from crofting regulation by decrofting it; and this may be a prerequisite if a developer is involved.

In the event that a crofter wishes to proceed without decrofting the land, we must consider whether this is permitted by crofting law.

A crofter is required to cultivate the croft – essentially put it to agricultural use – or else put it to some other purposeful use. To fulfil the definition of 'other purposeful use', a project can be any planned and managed use which does not adversely affect the croft, the public interest, the interests of the landlord or the use of adjacent land. Importantly, before putting the croft to a purposeful use, the permission of the landlord of the croft must be obtained if the crofter is a tenant crofter.

What if you have purchased your croft and are therefore the landlord of a vacant (tenantless) croft? Have you purchased the landlord's interest and therefore do not have to ask their permission? If so whose permission would you ask?

If a crofter purchases his or her

croft, does (s)he also purchase the air above it? Minerals are dealt with in section 12 (3) of the Act, which excludes them from the definition of croft land for the purposes of purchase, but the air above a croft is not dealt with specifically.

Landlord's permission and permanent improvements

It is a long-established principle of crofting law that a crofter is entitled to receive compensation from the landlord for any improvements made to the croft if the tenancy is renounced or if the crofter is removed.

Although a wind turbine is not listed in Schedule 3 as a permanent improvement, it is covered by section 30 (6A and 6B), which provides that if a landlord has consented in writing to the project and has stipulated that he is happy for the wind turbine to be considered a permanent improvement for which a crofter is entitled to payment upon renunciation, the crofter will then be so entitled. If no such consent has been obtained, no payment will be required.

Renewable opportunities

IF SOMETHING LOOKS too good to be true it usually is.

The natural scepticism that most of us have as crofters is holding us back from benefitting from very generous government incentives to develop renewable energy production on our land. This government largesse cannot be guaranteed post-2013, so we need to move quickly if we are to take advantage, but we must avoid the pitfalls and read all the small print.

With this in mind, over sixty crofters attended SCF's second renewable energy seminar held at Strathpeffer in July. The event aimed to provide information on the steps needed to exploit our natural resources of wind, water and even sunshine.

At the domestic level, John Whitfield of Culgow Microgen outlined methods of energy saving and income generation by adapting an existing dwelling house to renewable sources.

Dingwall engineer John Duncanson spoke on hydro generation. He said that heads of water as low as one metre and producing 0.75kw could be viable. By comparison the

community scheme on the Isle of Eigg produces 100kw, and the Knoydart scheme 300kw. Hydro turbines are durable and reliable and there are hundred-year-old machines still operating in the Highlands. Sadly, some of these are being unnecessarily replaced as only new equipment qualifies for Feed In Tariff.

Eilidh Ross, crofting law

specialist with Inksters Solicitors, explained the legal processes to be gone through in order to carry out development on croft land or common grazings.

Our own expert, Norman Leask, took us through his own experiences in Shetland getting two wind turbines operational on the croft; the main issues being planning permission and grid

connections. Norman had grown up on a croft that relied on an old wind turbine, a diesel generator, peats and paraffin lamps – and has made a move back to that self-sufficiency. Norman reminded us too that we must not neglect our peat resource.

We then had presentations from two renewable energy companies, 1Stop Renewables Ltd, www.1stoprenewables.com and Icon Energy, www.iconenergy.co.uk, on the schemes that they can offer individual crofters and townships. At a township level there is the potential for £30,000 a year income, but quick decisions are needed in order to qualify for Feed In Tariff at its present level.

Conclusions of the day? There are undoubtedly huge benefits to be had from renewables both for townships and individual crofters.

We need to study very carefully what is on offer in order to get the best deal. What was not made clear is what happens if the machines go wrong. What about storm damage? And are the risks insurable? Would-be renewables developers need to ask these questions and be happy with the answers.



RENEWABLES

Micro-generation can retain population in the periphery

LAND BASED wind generation is the most likely way to help climate change in the next few years.

I have erected a wind generator and it is the best thing I have ever done. With a little bit of tweaking it can be the best way of keeping people in the countryside.

I have argued with big business that, fair enough, single farm payments should maybe be

dispersed in multiple hundred of thousands to industrial food production – or as some say ‘land destruction’ – if the government so wishes. However, to have less favoured areas support as a production subsidy rather than, as Europe says, a system to allow people to make a viable living in the countryside, has really upset me and the SCF for many years.

The SNP government accepted

our argument and believed they had made a big move of LFASS to the north and west. However their good intentions were scuppered by interested pressure groups and their stooges. If they ask for a breakdown of changes in what is received in each council area, they will see what I mean.

Feed In Tariffs should be given to community groups, as long as they are making sure that fuel poverty is being wiped out in their areas. FIT is backed by the government, (at no cost to them) to encourage renewable energy, but it could do so much more if FIT is capped so that 20kw microgeneration or any size community-owned turbine is eligible. FIT should not be used to make multi-millionaires from outwith Scotland even more wealthy.

Micro-generation has the huge potential to secure the population of the Highlands and Islands.

I discussed some of the problems of micro-generation with Alistair Carmichael MP. Government had at last come up with a scheme that can benefit crofters, but he said it

was a pity that officials – instead of keeping this brilliant accessible, simple and workable scheme – set out to destroy it. He promised to bring forward the problems that pertain to Westminster to the appropriate London minister and his officials for us.

While Jean Urquhart MSP was in Shetland, she spent many hours visiting people who were experiencing connection problems, including ridiculous charges. Since then things seem to be improving, but there is still a resistance from officials; so no doubt other problems will now raise their ugly heads. We are ready.

I implore government and officials to work with us, so that for the first time it will pay crofters to stay in the countryside and look after Scotland's world-famous landscape, where people from all over the world love to holiday, relax, hike and explore our history as well as appreciating the flora, fauna, bird-life and fishing, at no extra expense to the government.

Norman Leask



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New Land Settlement Association could deliver food security

Dear editor

Northampton Square, a new source of quality research on market gardening, small farms and islands has published a short comment on Provenance's William Hudson's call for a new Land Settlement Association, to improve the UK's food security. This article will be of interest to Crofter readers and, of course, comments are welcome.

Go to www.northamptonssq.com and you will see the article on our home page.

Sincerely

Peter Clark

Find a friend

Dear editor

Would any readers be interested in a network for lone crofters to make contact with each other in order to provide an opportunity to form friendships and /or long term relationships?

Whilst it would be important to be able to make contact with the network via the postie and/or a landline, it would also be nice to be able to use email and/or a mobile.

If anyone is interesting in this idea, please make contact via rabkits@yahoo.co.uk so that we can assess the potential.

SCF member 43/316



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CROFT WOODLANDS FEATURE

Funding for croft woodland creation

THERE ARE NOW three funding routes for crofters or townships considering woodland development – Crofting Counties Agricultural Grants Scheme (CCAGS), Land Managers' Options (LMO) and Rural Priorities (RP).

The first two are appropriate to small-scale projects and are non-competitive and simple to apply for. Grant is made by a single payment at satisfactory conclusion of works. Although Rural Priorities is competitive and harder to access, woodland projects are not subject to rounds of applications and can be submitted at any time. As well as a grant for establishment, RP makes annual maintenance payments for five years as well as a number of additional payments for specific circumstances. RP is more suited to larger schemes at township or community level.

The normal grant rate for CCAGS is 50 per

cent, with a ten per cent top-up for applicants under 40 years of age. The grant is payable on the actual costs of establishing the shelter belt, including necessary fencing and there is an allowance for the crofter's own labour, calculated at wages board rates.

www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/farmingrural/SRDP/CCAGS

Option 18 of LMO supports creation of woodland of native species in areas 0.1ha to 1ha in size. A total of 2ha may be planted in a year and there must be at least 15m separation between each block. There is a flat rate payment of £2,500 per hectare.

www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/farmingrural/SRDP/Land-Managers-Options/Availableoptions/Smallscalewoodlandcreation

The Rural Priorities options are on a larger scale and the scheme is more complex. There are six different types of woodland

supported, ranging from productive commercial conifers to natural regeneration within or adjacent to existing native woodland. The native woodland options are available for areas as small as 0.25ha and the commercial conifer options must be at least 5ha. A reasonable rate per hectare is payable for establishment and there are annual payments for maintenance over five years. Additional payments are available for active farmland, community woods, short-rotation biomass production and in certain Argyll islands. Fencing is also supported, at a standard cost.

www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/farmingrural/SRDP/RuralPriorities/Options/WoodlandCreation

As well as the web links above, information on these schemes is available from local SGRPD offices.

Embo Trust woodland crofts initiative – a history

WAY BACK around 2006/07 changes to crofting legislation and to the National Forest Land Scheme (NFLS) opened the way to the creation of woodland crofts.

This was enthusiastically welcomed by all parties but to date no woodland crofts have been created on ex-Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS) land. Looking at the history of one group, the Embo Trust, highlights some of the problems and suggests some radical solutions.

The concept of woodland crofts was first raised in Embo in autumn 2006 by the SCF and very positive meetings were held between interested young local people and representatives from HIE and the Crofters Commission. Urras Euraboil (the Embo Trust) was incorporated and meetings were held with FCS officers with a view to bidding for a local plantation under the National Forest Land Scheme.

The NFLS bid was prepared in summer 2008 and the district valuer's valuation was £370,000 for the 158ha plantation (£2,340 per hectare). A ballot was held which indicated substantial support in the local community for the bid. That December FCS approved the Embo Trust bid to purchase the Fourpenny Plantation to allow establishment of 12 tenant-only four hectare woodland crofts (with no right to buy), with remaining land to be used for community purposes including allotments, composting and supported employment for local disabled

people in conjunction with Highland Council social work department.

In 2009 a bid to the Big Lottery was prepared, following advice from HIE who indicated a possible 20% contribution towards the purchase of the plantation from their sources. Sadly the funding application was rejected and later statements indicated that approval had never been likely. Early indication that the bid was unlikely to succeed would have saved the volunteer directors of the trust a huge amount of wasted time and effort.

Plan B, the purchase of a reduced area of 53ha, was discussed with FCS and the trust was encouraged to seek a valuation for this section of the plantation. Reference to recent FCS land sales pointed to a figure of £1,100 per hectare which would have put this section into an achievable frame, especially since the vast proportion of the area had been clear-felled and was awaiting re-planting.

The valuation in May 2010 came in at £195,000 for the 53ha section, an unachievable £3,700 per hectare, comprising development value, timber crop and solum. Highland Council planning officials believed that development value was not relevant and most of the area had no timber crop. An independent valuation gave £45,000 for the solum of the area.

The Embo Trust submitted an offer of £45,000 for the 53ha in line with the independent valuation. This offer was verbally declined by FCS and the NFLS bid was terminated.

Five years later, the need for businesses and housing for young people has not gone

away and the latest plan (Plan C!) is to put in an offer for 12 x one hectare plots and turn these into crofts. Initial discussions with the Crofters Commission and FCS are positive. Is fheàrr fheuchainn na bhith san dùil – it's better to try than to hope.

Three other groups – Mull, Gigha and Kilfinnan – are progressing with their schemes to create woodland crofts on land they already own. Other areas have also expressed interest but the post of woodland crofts project officer has now been withdrawn.

Possible ways forward

- There should be consistency in the valuation of forestry land with no account taken of development potential, so that communities know what they are letting themselves in for and to stop the repeated need for costly valuations.

- HIE should pledge a fixed amount of support per hectare so that communities can plan and budget.

- The croft housing grant needs to be raised to make new housing viable with a mix of grant, self-build sweat and local materials. Tenant-only no-right-to-buy holdings should qualify automatically for the maximum croft housing grant regardless of where they are. Repayments from the old croft housing loan scheme could finance it.

- Or if woodland crofts are such a good idea, and FCS are now permitted to lease land, why does FCS not establish such crofts on their land themselves?

CROFT WOODLANDS FEATURE

New guide for crofter forestry

AT THE Royal Highland Show this year the SCF launched a new publication, *Managing Small Woodlands in the Highlands and Islands; a guide for crofters, communities and small woodland owners*.

The book describes the types of small woodlands you're likely to find in the Highlands and Islands. It covers the creation of new woods and managing existing woods. There is also a section on making use of wood products. It is not a practical 'how to' book because so much information on planting, managing and harvesting forests is available on the internet. Instead it tries to give woodland owners an overview of what is involved in managing woods and why they may want to do it.

The guide provides links to helpful websites and concludes with a number of shared experiences written by woodland owners across the crofting counties from Shetland to the Western Isles, from Argyll to Assynt.

I drew this book together on the Isle of Raasay, so did not have too far to look to see examples of why woodlands are important to crofters and to crofting communities. Within walking distance of the house are many types of woods, used and enjoyed by many people in many ways.

There are policy woods around the big house: groups of large trees, of beech, elm, pine and ash planted 100 years ago for amenity and landscape and still today framing the view of Raasay House.

Around the coastline there are scrubby patches of willow, blackthorn, alder and hazel fringing the shore, sheltering the sheep, protecting houses and roads and providing cover for otters.

Crossing the burn through the village is a path network built by the heritage trust, leading through alders, ash and scattered conifers, part of a heritage walk used by locals and visitors.

Around the village are plantations of larch and spruce, planted by local people for the Forestry Commission in the early 1970s on previously crofted land. This is criss-crossed by well-worn paths used by walkers and mountain bikers. The plantations also provide wood for a community fuelwood scheme.

I walked my young children in the plantations, surprising deer, collecting chanterelles and sorrel, pushing rope swings, building dens and coming home with pockets full of cones and lichens and assorted sticks (which had taken on the form of swords, wands or light sabres). Patches of the plantation forest are now being harvested by hi-tech

machines that cut down trees and spit out logs in seconds. The logs are being hauled to the shoreline and taken out by boat, feeding sawmills on the mainland. The forest that regenerates will be more diverse but still produce timber.

In the steep gorges are native woods of birch, hazel, oak and alder, naturally protected from a century of grazing – and now a haven for wildlife and providing a setting for gorge walks and abseiling led by the outdoor centre. The crofters planted a new area of native woodland on the common grazings. These are still young but will come of age and add to the shelter and diversity.

At the south end of the island is an oakwood, a site of special scientific interest for its flora and fauna that provides seasonal shelter and grazing for cattle. Walking round further to Hallaig through wooded banks of primrose and watched over by eagles and ravens, the birchwoods have encroached over the abandoned village, providing subject matter for the poet Sorley Maclean and inspiration for visitors since.

On the walk down to the beach at Inver and at the end of Calum's road are areas of semi-natural woodland, expanding under managed grazing, where butterflies, dragonflies and birds

abound and the occasional adder lies out in the sun.

As in much of the Highlands, there is opportunity to make even more of these woods. A more reliable and developed fuelwood supply for instance; better access to the stands of timber, less of the invasive rhododendron, better-cared-for heritage sites, improved shelter and woodland grazing, opened-up views, all-abilities paths, more school visits, even more demanding bike trails, myriads of butterflies and a new generation of amenity trees to replace those lost to storms.

Perhaps the old sawmill could be refurbished, with modern versatile machinery producing firewood and other timber products. There is scope too for much-needed house sites or maybe woodland crofts, re-connecting local people with woodland management.

The interest and enthusiasm of people is critical if we are to make the most of the small woodlands in the Highlands and Islands. I hope the information and the experiences portrayed in this book encourage more people to get involved.

Roland Stiven

roland.stiven@phonecoop.coop



Demonstration of small-scale extraction.



A modern harvester in a pine plantation.

***Managing small woodlands in the Highlands and Islands; a guide for crofters, communities and small woodland owners* is available from SCF HQ for £10 plus £2.50 postage.**

The publication is a joint venture by Forestry Commission Scotland, Highland Birchwoods and the Scottish Crofting Federation (SCF), with additional funding from Scottish Natural Heritage, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar and the Highland Council.

CROFT WOODLANDS FEATURE

The best thing I have ever done in crofting

Donald Murdie describes how he overcame the challenges of planting trees in Lewis.

TWENTY-ODD YEARS AGO in the west of Lewis, planting trees on the croft was at best regarded as a bit eccentric.

Sheep subsidies were at their height. Trees were considered a waste of grazing land and they wouldn't grow anyway. I was considering ways to shelter polytunnels (another eccentricity!) and to create what is now referred to as biodiversity.

The CCAGS grant for shelter belts was a very attractive 85 per cent and that included any fencing required, so it made sense to combine fencing that was needed anyway with some shelter planting. I submitted a plan to the Department and, within a couple of weeks, a very sceptical agricultural officer visited. Received wisdom at the time was that only lodgepole pine and sitka spruce would tolerate the gales and sea spray of the Outer Hebrides, but I was proposing to plant predominantly native, deciduous species.

The officer wished to have the ground prepared by a forestry plough, which would have created a quagmire in the confined planting areas, whereas I intended to mound each planting station with a spade. An offer of grant was made in due course, conceding an element of willow and alder in the scheme, but insisting on a nurse crop of at least 50 per cent lodgepole.

I did the fencing in the autumn and started planting the following March. The ground was peaty, which is to be expected, but the peat was reasonably shallow, overlying the typical blue clay of most of Lewis, which would provide the trees with a bit of mineral nutrition. They also received a top dressing of rock phosphate to help root establishment. The main challenge for the next few years was keeping them free of grass.

The willows got away at great speed and the alders did well too. The lodgepole, far from being a nurse crop, became the nursed crop and as soon as they were tall enough the wind started to shake them loose at the roots, causing die-back. Most were replaced with spruce and Japanese larch which did a lot better. I planted more trees each year and extended the shelter belts, which caused a bit of difficulty with the IACS maps as the fences were moved to accommodate more trees.

Eventually I got my way with the deciduous natives, introducing downy and silver birch, rowan and hazel, as well as the non-native sycamore and even a couple of horse chestnut. Where we needed low, quick-growing shelter for a new polytunnel, rosa rugosa was planted. This is a controversial species, being non-native and a bit invasive, but it cannot be beaten as a pioneer species in areas of high exposure and poor soil. It has nice flowers too.

Twenty years on and having left behind a

varied, well-established piece of woodland in Lewis, I would say that tree planting has been the best thing I have done in crofting, as it benefitted every other crofting activity. It brought on earlier grass growth; sheltered polytunnels and outdoor crops; improved the soil nutrient cycle by leaf fall; provided shelter for lambing; and sheltered the house too, leading to fewer draughts and lower heating costs.

Here in the north of Skye we inherited some established shelter belts and have done some more planting. By comparison with Lewis, trees grow like weeds, thanks to the mineral-rich, free-draining, basalt-based soil.

To summarise: the successful species in Lewis were birch, willow (goat, grey and eared), alder, sycamore, hazel, rowan, Japanese larch and sitka spruce. The failures were lodgepole pine and Scots pine (the latter being well outside its natural range and not salt-tolerant). The fast-growing pioneers were rosa rugosa and the willow species. In very exposed areas a planting density of 3000 stems per hectare – twice the normally recommended density – is required.

CCAGS rate for shelter belts is now down to 50 per cent (with the extra 10 per cent for young entrants), but there is now the alternative funding of Land Managers Options (Option 18). This is specifically for native species planting of up to 1ha. So no lodgepole pine – how times have changed!



Lodgepole pine struggling in the peat



Pete Glanville with densely planted shelter belt at Tingwall, Shetland



Method of reducing grass competition

Kingsburgh forest trust

BACK IN 2003 the residents of Kingsburgh, a crofting community in the north of Skye, became aware that Forest Enterprise was about to sell their local forest to a private company.

Research revealed that the two blocks of forestry were on the township's common grazings and had never been decrofted. To cut a long story short, the proposed sale was halted and the 178 hectare forest was acquired instead by the local community, with the aid of the Community Land Unit and the Scottish Land Fund.

Since taking over the land, the Kingsburgh Forest Trust has harvested no less than 27,789 tonnes of mature and windblown timber; created a sustainable wood fuel supply chain for the local community; and secured Big Lottery funding for a forest access track.



Neal Stephenson, Forest Trust Chairman, with John Laing

Replanting has commenced which will provide a valuable asset for the next generation.

On the first Saturday in August the community held an open day in the forest to celebrate these achievements with music, a fun run, a barbecue and beers.

Councillor John Laing cut a ribbon to open the new track which, as well as allowing forestry management operations, has provided easier access to the township's hill grazings and an amenity for locals and visitors.

Someone pointed out that the track is better than most of the roads in Skye. John replied that at least the council won't have to fill the potholes on this one!

Congratulations to Kingsburgh community on their great achievements. We wish them continued success.

CROFT WOODLANDS FEATURE

Woodland crofts

WE ARE nearing the point where the first community owned woodland crofts will be created on the national forest estate.

The community in north-west Mull – the first community to purchase woodland under the National Forest Land Scheme (NFLS) in 2006 – hope to have their first woodland crofts tenancies signed later this summer. These represent the first of up to 10 planned crofts and tenants have been agreed for all.

The Kilfinan Community Forest Company – another successful NFLS applicant – is also working up plans for woodland crofts now that the community owns its local woodland. A current Lochcarron community NFLS bid to purchase Kirkton woodland will, if successful, also result in the creation of woodland crofts.

It has taken three years to get to this stage, with some groups not able to progress their ambitions and others deciding that the woodland crofts option did not meet their needs.

Over the last few years crofting has been the subject of considerable debate following the publication of the findings of the Shucksmith Inquiry and the development of the Crofting Reform Bill 2010, factors that led many community groups to adopt

a 'wait and see' approach.

Community ambitions to develop crofting have also suffered from the financial downturn and its impact on efforts to raise funds to support asset purchase, but the success of recent projects shows that funding is still to be found.

Interested communities can also take advantage of a comprehensive suite of guidance on woodland crofts which will shortly be available on Forestry Commission Scotland, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Scottish Crofting Federation and the Community Woodlands Association websites.

These organisations and others involved in developing the woodland croft approach, such as the Highlands Small Communities Housing Trust, Highland Council and Argyll and Bute Council continue to provide advice and direct support to communities interested in establishing woodland crofts.

This advice, together with the gradual realisation of community croft projects on the ground, will hopefully help other communities to focus their efforts to realise their own ambitions and see the generation of more woodland crofts across the crofting counties.

*Jamie McIntyre
Woodland crofts project officer,
community assets team, HIE*



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CROFT WOODLANDS FEATURE

Mighty oaks from little acorns grow

John Bannister describes how growing native trees from seed found locally in the Highlands and Islands can be the modest start to growing a tree or creating native woodland.

THERE ARE many benefits from growing trees.

Not least are the benefits to the visual appearance in the landscape; the wildlife habitats contained within the natural

environment; shelter for all creatures great and small (including humans); and of course wood fuel, to help stave off the high energy costs of heating and limiting our carbon footprint. One needs to be clear as to why woodland is desired in the first place. It can be to satisfy any one or more of these benefits.

All this has to start somewhere and with

something. The somewhere is an enclosed piece of protected land or individual tree protection – protection against livestock, deer and certain mammals without which you will be wasting your time. The something is a source of seed – best found from established trees or mature woodland. No particular skill is needed other than the urge to grow something which may feature in the landscape long after

you've gone. Whatever the motives – a tree, or a number of trees (woodland) – most folk can agree that it is a worthwhile long-term activity with many benefits.

I have referred to native woodland and we must first know what trees are native. It helps if you can identify species from leaf, bark and/or form (appearance). Here's the list of native Highland deciduous trees and shrubs.



Woodland pigs

Alder (common) <i>Alnus Glutinosa</i>	Aspen <i>Populus tremula</i>	Birch (downy) <i>Betula pubescens</i>	Blackthorn (shrub) <i>Prunus spinosa</i>
Bird cherry <i>Prunus padus</i>	Elder (shrub) <i>Sambucus nigra</i>	Gean (wild cherry) <i>Gean</i>	Guilder rose (shrub) <i>Viburnum opulus</i>
Hawthorne (shrub/tree) <i>Crataegus monogyna</i>	Hazel (shrub/tree) <i>Corylus avellana</i>	Holly (shrub/tree) <i>Ilex aquifolium</i>	Juniper (shrub) <i>Juniperus communis</i>
Oak (sessile) <i>Quercus petraea</i>	Rowan <i>Sorbus aucuparia</i>	Whitebeame <i>Sorbus rupicola</i>	Willows (shrub/tree) Grey/Goat/Eared <i>Salix cinerea/caprea</i>
Evergreen conifers * not native but useful timber or cover			
Scots pine <i>Pinus sylvestris</i>	*European larch (NOT native) <i>Larix decidua</i>	*Hybrid larch (NOT native) <i>Larix x eurolepis</i>	*Mountain pine (NOT native) <i>Pinus mugo</i>








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Why do I emphasis native trees more than other species? The important thing from any grower's point of view is success, and one is more likely to be successful growing native trees which have, over millennia, adapted to our soils (tending mineral, peat, acidic; and weather/climate (tending wet, windy and cold).

Returning to seeds: it takes a number of seasons to identify where a particular species of tree seed can be obtained. When a source of a healthy, flourishing tree species has been found it is very tempting to gather all the seed needed from that one tree. However, whilst the temptation is great, especially when there is an

apparent dearth of that species, it is best practice to gather seed from, at the very least, one other tree of that species (ideally also from another location) and mix the seeds together. The reason is simply to select from the best possible specimens and examples of the tree species that you wish to grow, thereby ensuring that no genetic problems are carried over to the next generation. This will be familiar to herdsman who select the best examples from the breeding stock of his herd.

I shall return to this topic in the next edition of *The Crofter* when I shall discuss seed gathering and preparation in readiness for autumn harvest.



John and Beryl Bannister with young trees



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Connections across the world

THREE SCF representatives were among more than 200 delegates attending a celebration of indigenous food cultures from around the world, held in the Scandinavian Arctic in June.

The indigenous 'Terra Madre' (Mother Earth) took place in Jokkmokk in Sweden, hosted by the Sami people of Northern Europe and the Slow Food movement, which promotes food systems that are 'good, clean and fair'. Delegates attended from 50 indigenous communities in 31 different countries.

Ol-Johan Sikki, president of Slow Food Sápmi, opened the Terra Madre saying: "As indigenous people we share much in common. We are all dependent on the earth and nature. Our cultures are based on respect for the land. Most indigenous people

don't own the land they live on and other people try to exploit this. This is a problem for all the representatives here, whether from Sápmi, or South Africa."

Among the presentations that most interested the crofting delegation was that of Andrea Carmen of the Yaqui nation who is executive director of the International Indian Treaty Council and has for many years been involved in lobbying at the United Nations for indigenous peoples' rights.

Former SCF chair Ena Macdonald said: "Andrea gave us a very interesting explanation of the international laws that are available for indigenous peoples to use. If we can get accepted as indigenous it will mean that our own customary rights to the land must be recognised when we are

in discussions with landlords and the government."

Ena added that the event had been a great learning experience. She said: "We are returning with a new resolution to explore how our indigenous crofting cultures can be recognised and strengthened."

Morag MacKenzie, chair of the Skye and Lochalsh branch of the SCF said: "We shared our experiences, stories and music and we found connections with so many of the people there. We met wonderful, enthusiastic cattle breeders from India who sing songs with the slogan: 'Long live pastoralism'. They have been fighting against government policies in India that encourage farmers to stock non-native types of cattle at the expense of native breeds. These non-native cattle are not suited to the local

environment and they need expensive inputs to survive. They are not good for the land either. These pastoralists realise that it is their own native breeds they should be encouraged to keep because these breeds are suited to their own environment.

"Isn't it the same with our own Highland cattle? Because they have lived in the Highlands and Islands for so long they graze in a way that supports the richness of local ecosystems – the grassland and the hills and the balance of plants and flowers that grow."

SCF researcher Iain MacKinnon said: "We are very grateful to the Slow Food Movement and the Sami people of northern Europe for inviting us and for their generosity, and to the Vodafone Foundation for supporting us to attend."



Murdo MacLeod, chair of Bhalto Community Land Trust, with Uighean and Reef machair behind him



Crofting delegates and Highland cattle keepers Morag MacKenzie and Ena Macdonald meet pastoralists from India

Community land ownership strengthens rural communities

Dr Sarah Skerratt, senior researcher and team leader, rural society research, SAC, outlines the findings of her recent study.

AT A TIME when the Scottish Government has set up a group to review the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 and is committed to reinstating the Scottish Land Fund, I wanted to find out whether ownership of land and development of assets by communities meant that those communities were becoming stronger or more resilient.

During May I visited the biggest, smallest, oldest and youngest community land trusts. Their populations range from 23 people to 11,000. Together, they own just under half a million acres. They are mainly located in the north and west of Scotland: Assynt Foundation, Bhalto (Lewis), Borge and Annishadder Crofting Townships (Skye), Eigg Heritage Trust, Galson (Lewis), Gigha Heritage Trust, Knoydart

Foundation, North Harris Trust, North West Mull Community Woodland Company Limited, Rum Community Trust, Storass Uibhist (South Uist), Stornoway Trust and West Harris Crofting Trust. I also visited four trusts which are trying to purchase the land: Aigas Community Forest, Barvas (Lewis), Mangersta (Lewis) and Pairc (Lewis).

Community land trusts own and manage the land they have purchased from private landlords, public sector bodies or government, going on to develop the associated assets. The trusts are primarily volunteer run, while some have paid development officers. Their focus is on long-term sustainability of the community and its land for future generations.

Our research shows that community land ownership is playing a successful role in strengthening rural Scotland – including some of the remotest crofting communities. It is leading

to the re-peopling of rural areas by enabling existing residents to remain and encouraging immigration. Land ownership has given communities the opportunity to increase local employment and develop revenue streams through the creation of new business, build affordable housing, sustain rural schools and deliver basic infrastructure such as roads and electricity. Re-peopling is a priority and was the specific driver for West Harris Crofting Trust where the drop in the school roll meant imminent closure of their local school.

Our evidence shows that community land ownership is one clear way of achieving a more vibrant rural Scotland. David Cameron, chairman of Community Land Scotland, said: "SAC has undertaken the most comprehensive study yet that provides independently evaluated proof that community landownership is working successfully in Scotland. On the basis of the evidence provided in

the report, I am confident that it will encourage other communities to consider whether landownership could be an option for them. This applies not only to areas in the Highlands and Islands – I believe that there are absolutely no barriers to it happening right across Scotland wherever there are willing communities.

"We hope that the study's findings will be circulated to all levels of government and to agencies connected with community empowerment. Its conclusions surely must encourage them to contribute to a new and exciting time in community landownership."

You can access the report on SAC's Rural Policy Centre website (with a summary in Gaelic): <http://www.sac.ac.uk/ruralpolicycentre/rpchtotopics/commlandowner/>

For further information, please contact me on 0131 535 4335 or sarah.skerratt@sac.ac.uk

ON THE CROFT

Second annual blackland conference – 24 September

THE BLACKLAND PROJECT, based in Grimsay, North Uist, studies the wet black soils so common on crofts in the islands and west of Scotland and works on practical ways of regenerating them with tradition, science and agriculture as guides.

The second blackland conference looks at tillage and nutrition – and asks the questions “What do livestock need?” and “Can we grow it?” Speakers will include SAC research scientists Bruce Ball, Ken Davies (retired) and Tony Waterhouse, as well as presentations from crofters and crofting projects in the Uists and Skye.

The conference will include talks, Q&A sessions, croft walks and machinery demonstrations, with plenty of time for informal discussion. There will be a dinner following and a ceilidh by young musicians.

The conference will be held at the blackland project's research centre on the croft at Kenary, 5 Scotvein, Grimsay, North Uist, on Saturday 24 September from 10am to 4pm.

Pre-registration is required: please contact Mary Norton **01870 602954**

The blackland project also publishes information on blackland crofting:

Frank Fraser Darling's practical classic *Crofting Agriculture* has been reprinted and is now available by post for £10.

How to *Make and Use Compost in the West Highlands and Islands* of Scotland by Dr Audrey Litterick is just published and costs £6.

Please order by writing to the blackland project, enclosing a cheque. Prices include postage.

Tractor skills workshop

AS PART of their Grow to Eat project, Camuscross and Duisdale Initiative (CDI) held a tractor skills workshop earlier in the summer which focused on ploughing skills.

Led by crofter Donald Macdonald from Eynort, the event attracted twelve keen crofters of varying ages and ability who benefited from the practical hands-on approach to the day.

Three tractors of differing vintages were available to the students along with a variety of ploughs. One participant, who had never ploughed before, said that it had been very worthwhile and that she now felt confident enough to try a little ploughing at home.

Speaking after the event, Donald congratulated CDI on grabbing the bull by the horns and running a fundamental skills event at grass roots level. He said, “If we are serious about keeping traditional crofting skills alive as practical working skills – and not confining them to museums and special events – then more of these back-to-basics courses are required. There are a host of skills that are in danger of being lost and I would like to see the SCF run similar events across the crofting counties to encourage those who are interested to participate and learn from them.”

Feedback from participants has been positive and it has been suggested that future events could focus on haymaking and tractor maintenance.

Dates for your diary

KEEP YOUR crofting calendar up to date with our guide below, put together in partnership with Scotland's Environmental and Rural Services (SEARS).

These are some of the key dates and deadlines for application forms, licenses etc. The list is not exhaustive and some dates may change. Keep in touch with your local department for the latest information.

If you're claiming calves born on or after 1 August 2011 under the Scottish Beef Cattle Scheme (SBCS), please bear in mind that the British Cattle Movement Service has issued new cattle passports for these animals. The new passports do not have movement cards, so the change will affect you if you previously sent movement cards to support your paper claim(s). To claim SBCS you now have two options:

1. You can submit an electronic claim online at www.ruralpaymentsonline.com. Submitting online means you won't need to send any supporting documents, reduces your postal costs and is more secure. Call **0845 6017597** during office hours if you have any questions.

2. If you still want to claim on paper and previously sent movement cards with your claim(s), please use the address sheet(s) that came with your new passports. Please do not send RPID your new passports or copies of them.

For more info visit <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/farmingrural/Agriculture>.

27 September - results of the 2011 June Agricultural Census will be published on the Scottish Government website.

30 September - If you're a new applicant to the Less Favoured Area Support Scheme (LFASS) (ie you didn't claim LFASS or submit a single application form in or before 2009) please return a completed animal declaration form to RPID by 30 September 2011 to allow prompt payment. If you don't return your form, your claim will not be paid. Forms are available from your nearest RPID office. For more info on LFASS visit <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/topics/farmingrural/Agriculture/grants/Schemes/LFASS>.

Before winter sets in, remember to adhere to SEPA's general binding rules (GBRs) to control pollution:

GBR 20 – ensure safe distances along water courses when ploughing for winter cereals;

GBR 18 – ensure slurry stores are empty. Also remember to cover effluent tanks, as rainfall can fill them.

For more information visit <http://www.sepa.org.uk/default.aspx>.

For more information on SEARS visit <http://www.sears.scotland.gov.uk/>.



Streamlined approval process for Rural Priorities applications on nature sites

Farmers, crofters and other land managers can take advantage of a new streamlined approval process for applications to the Rural Priorities scheme, part of the Scotland Rural Development Programme (SRDP).

This process is available for projects worth up to £50,000 which will benefit designated sites (SSSIs and Natura sites).

Applicants can still use the existing online application system but don't have to wait for the next funding round for it to be considered for approval, as this is done on an ongoing basis.

Anyone considering a Rural Priorities application for managing their designated nature site is advised to discuss this with their local SNH office. www.snh.gov.uk/contact-us/how-to-contact-us/offices/

ON THE CROFT

Yellow peril



RAGWORT IS a poisonous weed found in grasslands. In most crofting areas common ragwort is present, while Orkney has populations of marsh ragwort. Cattle, horses, pigs and chickens are very sensitive to poisoning through eating ragwort. Sheep and goats are more tolerant, but not immune. Ragwort poisoning has no cure and can lead to large losses.

Cattle and horses will not normally graze ragwort unless the grass sward is poor or if they have a nutritional deficiency. Sheep and goats may graze young plants at florette stage of growth but tend to avoid mature or flowering ragwort. Cases of poisoning are often caused by ragwort consumed in hay and silage taken off infested fields. Ragwort management in such fields in critical and in some situations it may be best to desist from making hay or silage until the following year when the problem is controlled.

Control is necessary not only because of the health risks to stock, but because it is a prolific plant that may make you an unpopular neighbour! It is also a listed injurious weed in law.

Methods of control

As with many weed species such as rush, a good tool is to ensure you have dense vigorous grassland swards, so the weeds cannot establish. This may involve soil testing to ensure optimum levels of pH, phosphorus and potassium. If swards are sparse then oversowing or a full re-seed may be required. Please ask your local SAC consultant for advice on seed mixes, fertiliser and CCAGS grant.

Pulling

Pulling ragwort can be effective, if backbreaking, work. This is only recommended for light infestations or where chemical means such as on organic farms are not allowed.

Harrowing

Light harrowing on established grass in the autumn and early spring may help because ragwort does not tolerate ground disturbance.

Sheep and goat grazing

This is the most common technique used in crofting areas. Sheep are grazed in late winter/early spring to keep populations of ragwort at low levels, as sheep are less susceptible to poisoning. However, this is only acceptable where the field is lightly infested. Ensure you do not graze young stock or pregnant ewes because, as stated above, sheep are not immune.

Herbicides

Spot treatment

Spot treat with citronella oil (Barrier H). This scorches grass so apply carefully!

Weed wipe

A weed wiper can be used with a glyphosate type product. This only treats adult plants and does not affect seedlings.

Total field spray

Several products are available including those based on the chemicals MCPA or 2,4-D or a combination product. Always follow rates on product information leaflets and do not hesitate to contact SAC if you require further advice. Keep a spray record in case of SGRPID inspection.

Timings

The best time to treat ragwort is in the spring – late April to May. Do not allow stock to re-graze field for three to four weeks.

Hay and silage fields are best treated the previous autumn. You must never cut hay or silage until all the treated ragwort has fully rotted away – this will take at least one month. Autumn treatments may also be less harmful to clover.

For further information about ragwort please request SAC technical note 570. Please contact your local SAC office with any queries from this article.

Janette Sutherland
SAC Portree



Crofter's wife column

WHENEVER I'M ASKED what I do for a living, I'm never quite sure how to reply.

I'm self-employed, don't work nine-to-five and can't find a job title that fits. In a recent conversation I bristled when I was cast as a "portfolio worker". This in-vogue phrase is defined by Macmillan Dictionary.com as: A way of organizing your working life in which you work for several different employers and do several different jobs at one time instead of working all the time for one employer.

That may sum up how I work but it says nothing of what I actually do. It's very open and ambiguous and I can't imagine ever using it.

However, it did make me think that perhaps the origins of portfolio working could be traced to crofting. After-all, those of us who croft tend to have at least one other job – that's the way it has always been. From the early crofters who were crofter-fisherman, through to the crofter-postmen and crofter-bus-drivers and now to the anything-goes-era which sees crofters working in all fields (pardon the pun) of both the public and private sector.

Are we the original portfolio workers then? Perhaps so, but I prefer the term crofter, which is, admittedly, equally ambiguous but far more attractive!

So, if you insist on knowing what I do, why, I'm a crofter's wife!

Ten things you need to know before becoming a crofter's wife...

1. You will come to depend on baler twine for a 1001 uses you never imagined possible.
2. Red oxide will be the colour of choice when it comes to nail varnish.
3. You won't have any nails to varnish.
4. You won't be taken seriously in anything other than traditional green or black wellies.
5. You will develop a darker "farmer's tan" each and every summer which will look ridiculous if you ever try to wear a dress/fancy top.
6. You must expect to be dragged from your bed/favourite TV show/phone conversation with your best-friend/mother to go and rescue some poor creature from a bog/ditch/bramble patch at least five times a year.
7. You will succumb to the glamorous look of the midge hood.
8. There will come a time when the dogs receive far more pampering than you do.
9. Mud will be your constant companion – on the carpets, on your face and your clothes. It will try to steal your wellies off your feet but will provide a soft landing when you trip chasing an errant ewe.
10. A day out means a trip to the mart and a burger.

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Pipe dreams

Marina Dennis shares some more tales from times gone by.

MY GREAT GRANNY, Grace MacPherson, smoked a pipe.

I still have one of her white clay pipes and can just imagine her sitting relaxed by her fireside gossiping with neighbouring women over a pull or two on her pipe. The other cailleachs would probably be pipe smokers too and, if tobacco was in short supply, then the pipe would be passed round. This would have been the original 'smoking joint'.

But the clay pipe reminded me of a story old Jimmy Grant from Avelochan told me years ago, about Tulloch school. Around 1900 the schoolmaster there was a Gregor Cumming, a relation of Jimmy's mother, and an unusual and inspiring teacher. When angry, which he very frequently was, he would swear fluently in both English and Gaelic. It was not unusual for him to smoke his pipe during school hours, as did some of the older boys, and his pipe was of the long-stemmed clay type. During some of the rougher, more riotous sessions with the boys it often got broken. Then the sparks would fly with everybody young and old, innocent and guilty, being

punished indiscriminately. I am not sure if that was with a cane, the birch or a belt, but it would have been painful.

After one such a row one of the older boys believed he had been unfairly skelped and was hell bent on revenge. Gregor Cumming liked a good fire which would have been of peat, and no matter how well the fire was going, the first thing he did every morning when he came into the classroom was to give it a good stir and turn over the peats with the poker. So one morning, just before he knew the master would be coming in, the boy set the poker handle in the fire until it was almost red hot before putting it back in the box.

Sure enough the master came bustling in and caught hold of the poker. He was boiling mad with rage and pain and danced about the floor with his badly burnt hand shoved under his armpit. His anger knew no bounds and he demanded to know who had done it. No one would own up or tell so he said he would thrash them all and no doubt would have but found his hand too sore to deliver the punishment. Determined that his sentence would be carried out, he went into the school house to ask his niece Teenie, who kept house for him, to do the

job. Teenie was a shy, gentle sort of girl and refused to carry out her uncle's wishes – which made him more irate than ever.

So nobody was thrashed, but Gregor Cumming had the last word and would not allow the fire to be lit. Eventually the parents complained about the freezing conditions in the school which were not conducive to learning. The fire was re-lit but he had made his point. Jimmy said he was an eccentric old chap but almost every child who went to Tulloch school at that time turned out to be a good scholar.

Old Kate

Although this story is not from Tulloch it has a common theme of clay pipes and tobacco. Old Kate had died and as was the custom she lay in the best room while her neighbours and friends visited the house of the dead to talk about her and offer up a prayer for the redemption of her soul. There was a lot of chatter in the house with the old women sitting round the fire smoking their clay pipes praising Kate and remembering all the good she had done, be it calving a cow or laying out a corpse.

Nobody knew how old she was and so the question was asked: "In and out of one hundred,"

came the reply on a plume of pipe smoke from a bodach whose stumpy teeth were as brown as peat.

Living in this community was a grandfather and grandson, neighbours of old Kate. The boy was a teenager and the grandfather decided that it was time now for the boy to see a corpse – as he had never seen a dead person; and who better than the grandfather's old friend Kate, whom the boy knew well.

When they reached the house the grandfather said softly to the boy: "When you go in, take off your cap, go down on your knees and say a prayer beside the body." The grandson was shocked to see the change in Kate brought about by death as she lay as straight as a candle under a white sheet. He went down on his knees but it was not prayer he was thinking of – it was the throbbing fear in his head that the body would stir, her eyes open and take revenge on him for stealing a plug of her tobacco last year. His grandfather, kneeling beside him, got up slowly and as the boy rushed to his feet he fell over his grandfather who looked wisely at him and said: "All beginnings are weak and you will do better next time."

Membership matters

Areas and branches

In the last edition of *The Crofter* the Caithness and East Sutherland area reported on their activities and gave some simple tips for organising meetings which will be of interest to members and non-members alike.

If you have an idea for a branch or area meeting but are not sure where to start, please get in touch with Karen at HQ. Similarly if you have any news that you would like to report, please let Karen or Fiona, editor of *The Crofter*, know.

We have had a flurry of AGMs recently with new office members elected, so we would like to welcome those who have volunteered and also encourage more people to get involved. If you are not sure who the contact is for your local area, or would like to volunteer please contact Karen at HQ.

Membership numbers

We are pleased to have seen a rise in our membership over the past year and would like to welcome all of our new members.

A number of members have signed up after attending training courses through the skills

development scheme, at various shows through-out the year and also from recommendations by other members. We are now rewarding members who sign up new recruits with a 20% discount on their next year's subscription. If you want to sign someone up please speak to Karen about this or ask the new member to put a note on the application quoting your own membership number.

Gift Aid and contact info

Currently 56% of our members have opted to Gift Aid their subscriptions, a slight dip over the past five years. To enable SCF to reclaim the tax you have paid on your subscription you simply have to pay at least an equal amount of tax to that which we will reclaim on your donations. If you are not sure whether you are signed up to Gift aid give HQ a call and we can tell you over the phone.

If you would like to update your contact details, please let us know. Remember that we can also add your email to our mailing list so you can ensure you are right up to date!

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TRAINING AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

Entry level crofting induction course

THE EVER-POPULAR induction course is being arranged this autumn with courses likely to go ahead in Skye, Strathcarron, Ardnamurchan, Shetland, Uists, Lewis and Inverness-shire.

Designed for those who are new or returning to crofting, the course assumes no prior knowledge and takes participants through the fundamental requirements of modern crofting. Experienced crofters have also found the course useful as a refresher or an update on some of the relevant legislation. Places at the time of writing are still available on all courses, so please get in touch if you would like further information or to attend.

Also, for the first time there will be a residential course available for those who are unable to make it to an evening class. This will take place in Inverness on 11 and 12 November.

A further set of courses will take place from January 2012. If you would be interested in these please get in touch.

Local course organisers are also required to be able to offer the course more widely throughout the crofting counties. This is a home-based, part-time administrative position involving setting up the course, booking venue and speakers and facilitating on each evening of the course.

For further information on any of the above, contact Su Cooper on training@crofting.org or **01599 530005**.

Practical training courses this autumn

3 & 4 September – Permaculture, Shetland
6 September – Introduction to cattle, Sutherland
6 September – Sheep husbandry, Inverness
7 September – Sheep dipping, Oban, Argyll
15 September – Sheep husbandry, Shetland mainland
17 & 18 September – Dry stone walling, Caithness
23 September – Sheep husbandry, Stornoway
27 September – Sheep husbandry, Skye
late September (2 days) – Small scale horticulture, Ardersier
early October – Sheep husbandry, Sutherland
mid-October – Basic vet skills, Conon Bridge area
October – Sheep husbandry, Strathspey

Contact Su Cooper, training@crofting.org for more information and to book a place.

Further courses are being arranged all the time and information is regularly updated on the training page of the SCF website. Requests for additional courses are still being welcomed. Please fill in a registration form available from the website or contact Su Cooper.



Soil testing

Can you help us to help new crofters?

WITHOUT new crofters, crofting has no future.

There is nothing surer than that. Some people who take over crofts have grown up with crofting and have learned the skills. Others have to try to pick things up as best they can. They might read books about, for example, lambing and go on a one day course, but when actually faced with it for the first time it can be a challenging experience.

SCF will always try to assist members with any questions they have on any crofting subject. To help us do this we would like to put together an informal voluntary network of experienced crofters with a variety of skills who would be willing to occasionally provide advice and support to new crofters in their locality.

How it would work is that if a member contacted SCF for specific advice we could put them in touch with another member who might be able to help. This would be done discreetly through the office and the volunteers' names and contact details would not be published. If you would be willing to take part, please phone head office, 01599 530005 or email hq@crofting.org stating your areas of skill and knowledge.

Thanks for your help.

Sheep shearing in Shetland

Course report kindly provided by Donna Marie Jamieson

IN EARLY JULY our group arrived at a fine large agri-shed down in Bigton, in the Shetland Isles, ready to embark on a two-day sheep shearing course.

This was one of several sessions organised by the Scottish Crofting Federation and the British Wool Marketing Board and led by Neil Mutch, an experienced sheep shearer and instructor.

I have a small croft at home and up till now have clipped by hand. This is not a time of year I look forward to, as my skill in this area is most definitely limited. When I was informed of the course through the SCF I thought right, time to do something about this and learn how to do it properly. Now, standing in the shed with pens full of a variety of breeds, it was time to do just that.

First and foremost, issues of safety were addressed. The dangers of electricity and those posed by the equipment and machinery were covered in detail.

Next we were shown how to put the equipment together, so that cutters and combs were correctly aligned and everything correctly tensioned. We put together our equipment as shown, which was then checked by Neil ready for the next stage.

We observed as he deftly sheared the first ewe out of the pen. We were then shown the correct way to roll a fleece for presentation to the wool broker to gain the maximum financial profit, by showing the neck wool to the outer with the hindquarter wool to the inside of the roll. Moving on to the second ewe, Neil again demonstrated and explained in detail each stage of the shearing technique – where to place your feet; how to hold the ewe; the direction in which to move the clippers to safely remove the fleece, minimising the chance of injury to the ewe.

Working in pairs, it was then our turn to put the theory to the test. It took considerably longer than Neil to shear the sheep; and trying to remember everything wasn't easy. However Neil was

always on hand to give advice and encouragement as he observed us shearing.

Several sheep later, I successfully completed shearing my first sheep unaided and I felt elated. I'd done it. It was a successful first day and we were all tired but happy with the progress we'd made.

On day two those that felt confident were able to get started

shearing straight away and for those not so confident Neil demonstrated the techniques again; following which we got stuck in and began the shearing again.

If you need to learn how to shear sheep I would certainly recommend this course. It was very worthwhile, being both informative and enjoyable. It gave us the skills and the confidence we needed to 'have a go' ourselves.



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SAC Consulting provides leading edge, independent and impartial advice throughout the crofting and rural communities. Our consultants combine local knowledge with extensive experience and are supported by our team of renowned specialists.

Among the services we can provide are

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- **Sheep and cattle record keeping**
- **Fertiliser, reseed and crop recommendations**
- **Horticultural advice**
- **Studies and development of renewable energy projects**
- **Enterprise planning**
- **Completion of Assignations, Decrofting and Sublet applications**
- **Croft maps.**

Contact your local SAC office:

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Scottish Crofting Federation

NOTICE OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

NAME OF COMPANY: Scottish Crofting Federation
COMPANY NUMBER: SC 218658
CHARITY NUMBER: SC 031919
REGISTERED OFFICE: Unit 26 Kyle Industrial Estate, Kyle of Lochalsh IV40 8AX

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that the **ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING** of the above named company will be held at **2.30pm on Tuesday 4th October 2011** at **Sabhal Mor Ostaig, Sleat, Isle of Skye** for the following purposes:-

- 1. To approve the minutes of the previous annual general meeting held in Balmacara Hotel, Kyle of Lochalsh, Ross-shire on 3rd June 2010.**
- 2. Chair's report – Eleanor Arthur.**
- 3. To consider and adopt the company's accounts and the report of the directors and auditors for the year ended 30 November 2010. A summary of the accounts will be available at the meeting and the full or summary accounts will be provided prior to the meeting on request to the company's registered office.**
- 4. To appoint new directors in place of those retiring.**
- 5. To confirm other appointments to the board.**
- 6. To re-appoint Ritsons Chartered Accountants, of 27 Huntly Street, Inverness IV3 5PR as accountants/auditors and to fix their remuneration.**
- 7. Close of AGM.**

Dated this second day of September two thousand and eleven.

By order of the board.

Company Secretary

N.B. A member entitled to attend and vote at the meeting convened by this notice is entitled to appoint a proxy to attend and vote on a poll in his/her place. A proxy need not be a member of the company.

SCF Annual Gathering 2011 1886 and all that!

Crofting land tenure past, present and future

Sabhal Mor Ostaig,
Sleat, Isle of Skye

3rd/4th October

Day One

12.00	Registration and lunch	
13.00	Welcome and introduction to the theme	Alasdair MacMhàoin SCF director
13.10	Keynote address	Stewart Stevenson MSP, Minister for Environment
13.35	Historical context	Dr Annie Tindley Glasgow Caledonian University
14.00	Crofting land use and communities	Dr Calum MacLeod Centre for Mountain Studies
14.25	Crofting culture and tenure systems	Iain MacKinnon SCF researcher
14.50	Tenant farmers	Angus McCall Scottish Tenant Farmers Association
15.15	Networking break	
15.45	A different perspective Glendale	Liza Cleland Glendale Estate
16.10	Tenancy and owner-occupancy or What makes a crofter a crofter?	John Mackintosh Crofter, SCU past president
16.35	Panel discussion	
17.30	Close	
19.30	SCF chair's reception	
	Voices of the Island Crofts	Pam Rodway and children from Crofting Connections
20.00	Dinner	

Day Two

09.00	Welcome	Eleanor Arthur SCF chair
09.10	Crofting community ownership	David Cameron and Murdo Mackay Community Land Scotland
09.35	Common grazings Development opportunities Taking stock, renewables, woodlands, carbon trading etc.	Yvonne Richardson and Donald Murdie SCF Crofting Resources Programme
10.00	A national network for graziers on common land	Peter Lanfear Foundation for Common Land
10.25	Networking break	
10.55	New crofts SCF crofting strategy proposal	Patrick Krause
11.10	Woodland crofts	Bob Frost Forestry Commission Scotland
11.35	Young crofters	Karen Campbell SCF
11.50	Panel discussion	
12.30	Voices of the Island Crofts	Pam Rodway and children from Crofting Connections
13.45	Close	
13.45	Lunch	

Programme correct as we went to press.

Contact SCF HQ on 01599 530 005 or visit www.crofting.org to reserve your place.



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1886 and all that – SCF Annual Gathering 2011

Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, Sleat,
Isle of Skye

3rd and 4th October
(lunchtime to lunchtime)

THE THEME of the Scottish Crofting Federation annual gathering this year will be crofting land tenure: past, present and future.

It is appropriate that the gathering should return to Skye, after a break of almost 10 years, as 2011 is the 125th anniversary of the Crofters Act 1886. It was in Skye that crofters' discontent at their ill-treatment rose into a mass protest and became a national scandal; and names like the battle of the Braes and the Glendale martyrs entered Scottish consciousness.

In 1886 the Crofters Act was passed through parliament and the crofting community for the first time had the rights and regulated land tenure which we still value today.

After 125 years crofting is still a form of landholding which is recognised as the glue that holds the community together in some of the most remote and fragile areas of Britain. Many believe that this form of land tenure should be introduced to the rest of Scotland to re-

populate the rural areas that have been cleared by industrial agriculture.

There will be speakers on crofting history; crofting community and culture; the formation of crofting regulated tenure; other forms of land tenure, including the Glendale Irish example and agricultural tenancies; community ownership; use of common grazings; and current crofting law in regard to land tenure.

Young crofters will be meeting to discuss what they feel are the needs and aspirations of their generation and there will be plenty of time for open discussion on issues such as regulated versus non-regulated systems, owner-occupancy versus tenancy, what is needed to sustain crofting tenure and yes, the big question, what is best for rural Scotland?

But not all work: children from throughout the crofting islands will be performing the poetry and song of their island ancestors and the young crofters will be organising a ceilidh after the celebrated SCF dinner. And, no doubt, the craic will be good.

Contact SCF HQ to reserve your place at this year's annual gathering.



Projects or events reported in this issue are made possible by funders:
European Commission, SRDP, HIE, Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, SNH.

SCF Board of Directors:

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Company secretary:

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**SCF registered office Unit 26, Kyle
Industrial Estate, Kyle, IV40 8AX**

Company Number SC 218658

Charity Number SC 031919



Scottish Crofting Federation

rooted in our communities

How to contact us

hq@crofting.org 01599 530 005

SCF HQ, Unit 26, Kyle Industrial Estate, Kyle IV40 8AX

Crofter editor –Fiona Mandeville

fiona@crofting.org

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