

## RSE report on our hills and islands

CROFTERS WILL have been very pleased to see the article in the Press and Journal on Saturday 7th February "LFA aid for those who need it most", commenting on the excellent piece of research carried out by the Royal Society of Edinburgh (RSE) into the future of Scotland's hills and islands and their conclusion that the Less Favoured Area Support Scheme (LFASS) has been, and continues to be, mis-directed.

The travesty of using a wily formula to divert less favoured area support to the better-off areas of Scotland has been fought against by the Scottish Crofting Foundation for longer than we care to remember, but now we are at last starting to see the possibility of justice being done. The voice of crofters was of course expected to be heard crying out against the injustice, but with the considerable weight of both the RSE and the Committee of Inquiry on Crofting adding to this, the Scottish Government surely has to listen.

There are many other valid conclusions drawn by the RSE committee and the report is well worth reading. It can be obtained from the RSE by phoning 0131 240 5031



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## Carrying on against the odds

THIS ARTICLE – and indeed this issue of The Crofter – was to have been about local food and the opportunities for crofters, with their vast and underused land resource, to meet the ever-increasing demand. The argument is as strong as ever, and more crofters will, as time goes on, go down the road of direct marketing of their produce.

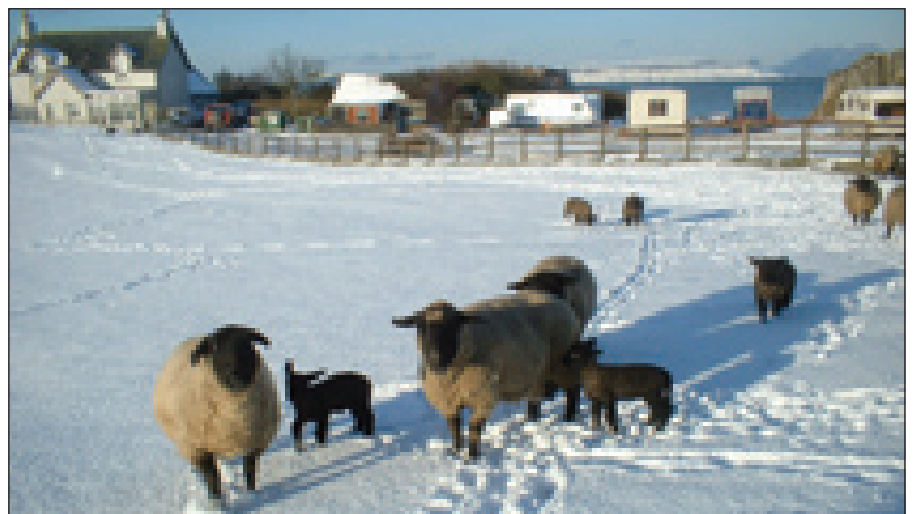
However, the greatest concern of the moment for all of us in crofting must be the future of livestock production in Scotland's hills and islands. Store livestock is, and will continue to be, by far the largest output from crofts. Why? Because it's what crofters were encouraged to do by thirty years of European and UK agriculture policy and, of course, because crofters are very good at it. Their stock is of high quality, hardy and of excellent health status – something well recognised in the industry at large. In a submission to the Committee of Inquiry on Crofting, Scottish NFU vice-president Stuart Wood said, "It is essential that crofting remains a vibrant and

viable sector as it plays a very important part in Scottish agriculture and makes a large contribution in providing good quality breeding stock to the wider industry."

Recent reports from the Scottish Agricultural College and the Royal Society of Edinburgh have highlighted the environmental, economic and social damage being caused by loss of livestock from the hills and islands, and this has been acknowledged by Scottish Government ministers. What politicians say, however, and what their civil servants do are often at odds. A very senior agricultural civil servant was recently heard to remark that Highland agriculture didn't really matter because it's "inefficient" and grazing could always be maintained by red deer!

So here is a challenge for the new Minister for the Environment and Crofting. The following is a list of reasons not to keep livestock. Most of these can, at the very least, be mitigated by Scottish Government action. If Government recognises that there's a case for livestock

*Continued on page 3*



## Welcome reprieve for the bull scheme, but is the tail wagging the bull?

THE SCOTTISH CROFTING FOUNDATION has welcomed the decision by (former) Minister for Environment Michael Russell to delay changes to the crofting Cattle Improvement Scheme – the bull scheme – until a review team has investigated and reported back with possible alternatives this autumn. In effect this means that the current scheme will continue for another year with bulls being available for hire and also for sale – ie for the same price bulls

can be hired and returned, or kept for good.

SCF has put a great deal of effort into this issue over a few years as we know how much the bull scheme means to crofters and how vital it is to retention of cattle on the hills and islands. We are very happy to see that the minister listened to what we have been saying, and we appreciate too the efforts of MSPs in other parties who have strongly taken this up.

But what is really behind all this? The attack

*Continued on page 3*

## Message from the chair...



**A** NEW YEAR but the work of the SCF carries on relentlessly. The sheer commitment, time and effort expended by the board, staff and area councils never ceases to amaze me.

Although we appear to be punching above our weight, testimony to our work is in the amount of media coverage we get, in farming and local press and airtime. There is rarely a day that we are not asked to quote or comment on crofting or environmental issues which affect the crofting counties. This

affords us a great opportunity to advance the cause of crofting and its contribution to Scottish life.

Marina Dennis and I, who are both long-serving assessors, meet with the Crofters Commission in developing the role of the assessor in the light of the recommendation from the Committee of Inquiry into Crofting.

I sit on the Scottish Rural Development Council which is chaired by Richard Lohead, QMS Technical Advisory Committee, Scottish Sheep Strategy, local LEADER Action Group, and the WIIC Joint Crofting Group.

Norman Leask, Shetland, spends more time in the Parliament and Scottish Office fighting for crofting causes as well as being on the LANTRA board than he does at his home! This is but a small example of what we do.

But we can point to tangible success stories ie Beef Calf Scheme, a growing awareness

of the inequity of LFASS and its importance to rural areas. The Bull Hire Scheme is continuing in its present form for another year and we have the opportunity of being part of the working group which will recommend how this scheme will continue. The Crofting Mark and our training programmes all auger well for the future and make our membership fee – which is less than we pay for our newspapers – money well spent. Could I make a plea for new and old members to renew their membership as funding is essential to maintain our work on your behalf.

I would like to thank Michael Russell MSP, former Environment Secretary for his open-door approach and listening ear. He has been a real friend to crofting and will be missed by me and my colleagues. The SCF owe him a great debt and wish him well in his new post where his undoubted

talent will be realised.

I would like to welcome Roseanna Cunningham MSP to her new role as Minister for Environment with responsibility to crofting. We would like to meet with her at the very earliest opportunity to brief her on the multi-faceted work that crofting is and our willingness to work with her to promote a sustainable future for crofting and the environment.

With the heightened prices finishers are receiving for sheep and cattle, we are optimistic of receiving better returns for our stock and for numbers holding rather than declining as in recent years, but this can only be achieved by the realisation of where we fit into the scheme of things.

My wishes for the spring season would be good calving, plenty lambs, good weather and lots of grass!

*Neil MacLeod*

## LFASS message being hammered home in the Lords and in Holyrood

**T**WO SEPARATE opportunities have arisen recently for the SCF to put the case for a properly targeted LFA scheme, against a background feeling that eventually the tide of opinion may be turning.

Answering Scottish Government's December consultation on the use of the LFA measure in 2010-13 and beyond, the SCF teamed up with the European Forum for Nature Conservation and Pastoralism to argue for an LFA scheme, the aims of which are in accordance with those set out in the regulation. The formula currently used to calculate payments (resulting in the better-quality land which is able to carry more stock getting paid more per hectare, based on what a producer used to do) is, we argued, contrary to the spirit of the regulation and is untenable.

Given a finite amount of money, we argued that the LFA measure must support systems which are sustainable and maintain the countryside, so must be targeted at the higher nature value areas.

Criteria used to identify LFA land and to calculate payments should be defensible to public scrutiny. We argued that this scheme presently fails on both counts. A new formula that directs payment to actual delivery of public goods is needed. Both the Committee of Inquiry on Crofting and the Future of Scotland's Hills and Islands

study undertaken by the Royal Society of Edinburgh concluded that the LFASS must change to provide support to the truly less favoured areas as intended.

We argued that addressing the inadequacies of LFASS would send a very strong message to those remaining in the livestock sector that the Government is serious about supporting not just the farming/crofting communities, but the whole fabric of society, economy and environment which is dependent on these enterprises.

In summary we argued that LFA support should help overcome market failure in the provision of the specified public goods and should be calculated solely on the basis of the costs of meeting the requirements of the scheme in the year of participation by the particular claimant.

We also argued that if the lack of a peripherality criterion within the new LFA rules means that the extra costs it imposes on claimants on islands cannot be met in the standard scheme, there must be a specific handicap scheme targeted at them. Likewise the greater flexibility in payment levels for mountainous areas means that using this definition is desirable. The UK is the only EU member state which could designate some areas under the mountain category of LFA that does not do so.

An enquiry by a House of Lords

committee provided another opportunity for the SCF to highlight the importance of the LFA measure and its role underpinning agricultural activity. The SCF submitted written evidence to the enquiry, which is under the chairmanship of Lord Sewel. An SCF representative was invited to develop this in oral evidence as a witness to the enquiry.

Against a background of England replacing the LFA measure with a targeted upland agri-environment approach, the HoL committee was keen to explore the rationale and justification for LFA support as well as looking at the proposed new European criteria for defining the standard area LFA.

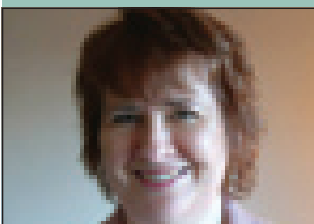
The point was made by the SCF witness and also by the NSA and NBA representatives appearing on the same panel, that LFA was a necessary and important part of maintaining agricultural activity in areas with natural disadvantages. As to how successful it was in doing so, we had to point to the poorly-targeted use of Scottish LFA money and agree that the current use of the scheme in Scotland was not as effective as it should be.

In response to the future direction of the LFA, there was real common ground between the witnesses, a point hopefully not lost on the gentlemen of the committee.

### Culture + environment = crofting

**I**T WILL NOT have escaped any government watcher's attention that the Minister for Crofting Michael Russell has moved to take up the portfolio for culture.

The remit for crofting goes to Roseanna Cunningham as the new Minister for Environment.



Ms Cunningham's experience as the convener of the parliament's rural affairs and environment committee will undoubtedly stand her in good stead and Mr Russell's experience in Scottish culture makes him a very strong choice for that post.

If one believes in serendipity, in happy coincidences, then one can not help but feel optimistic about how this re-shuffle could work very well for crofting and Scottish rural development. What an alliance that could be – two ministers with experience of rural development working in the two areas that together make up the fabric of crofting: culture and environment.

We wish both well in their new roles and look forward to some real 'joined-up' working.

# Carrying on against the odds

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production in the hills and islands, at least some of these must be addressed.

## Reasons not to keep livestock

- Single Farm Payment – you get paid anyway, even for doing nothing
- Financial losses on production
- Ever-increasing bureaucracy
- Irritating and repetitive inspections for the most active producers
- Identification rules – threat of electronic tagging and/or individual movement records
- Transport rules and licenses
- Costs – feed and medicine costs rising in advance of inflation
- Fuel and transport – some relief but cost trend will always be upwards and fuel prices are still far higher in remote areas than in cities
- New diseases – bluetongue – compulsory vaccination and threats of loss of SFP, fines and even imprisonment for not reaching 100% compliance
- Shortage of labour for all tasks but especially hill gathering

- Collapse of township structure, communal work and facilities
- Lack of young, active, local new entrants (new entrant scheme 'suspended')
- Lack of stability in store markets
- Constant attacks on crofting support schemes – eg ongoing threat to bull scheme
- Difficulty and cost of accessing SRDP measures
- Blatant discrimination in LFASS against the least favoured areas
- Lack of abattoir facilities over large areas
- Perceived Government indifference

## So why keep livestock?

- There are niche markets that can give a small but positive return
- Livestock keep the croft and grazings in good order
- There is hope that markets will improve

Crofters carry on against the odds for a whole variety of reasons – attachment to the land, love of the animals and a deeply-ingrained culture. As one crofter said when asked why he persevered with his cattle, "I can't help it!"

# Welcome reprieve for the bull scheme

Continued from page 1

on the Livestock Improvement Scheme started back in 2003 and led to the closing of the ram scheme. It is noticeable that the battle for the bull scheme has continued through different governments – government parties try to close the scheme and the opposition parties oppose it, then they all change places and do it again. So presumably this isn't a party issue. The constant throughout is the agricultural civil service, so is it coming from there?

In 2003 it was claimed that the scheme was not state aid compliant. An MEP investigated for SCF and was told by a European Commission (EC) official that the EC had no interest in the scheme until a Scottish Government official drew it to their attention as a problem – the EC then were obliged to investigate. The scheme was cleared.

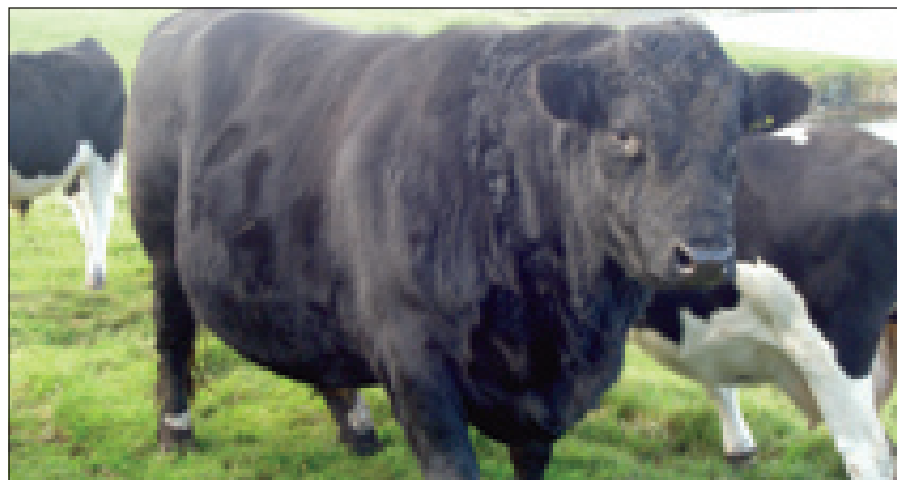
In this round of the fight civil servants again infer that the scheme is non-compliant, illegal. And again on investigation we find that it is a perfectly legal scheme under de minimis regulations on state aid.

Other doubtful claims have been made such as that the Committee of Inquiry on Crofting

recommended closing it (not actually what they said), it doesn't demonstrate genetic improvement (watch what happens to cattle quality if the scheme is closed) and it isn't cost effective (the wider benefits to environment, to communities, to economic sustainability have not been taken into account).

Those who have rural proficiency such as the SCF, the NFUS, the RSPB, FWAGS and Highland and Island MSPs have all argued that crofting livestock improvement schemes are vital to the retention of livestock, to the welfare of crofting communities and to the Scottish livestock industry.

So why do the civil servants appear to be so determined to see them end? Is it simply that a faceless bureaucrat somewhere has decided this? Dare we ask who makes the decisions in the Scottish Government? The previous administration's crofting legislation came to grief because civil servants, rather than elected politicians, were allowed to make policy. Surely the same cannot be allowed to happen again.



# Policy updates

## Electronic ID

Directors are continuing to have meetings with MSPs, MEPs and officials to pressurise Brussels to give derogations to Scotland to make the legislation more acceptable to those who have extensive farms and those who have sheep on common grazings. When speaking with the officials our representative discovered that EID for cattle is well underway. We require more information on this. A director has been invited to Brussels for their sheepmeat committee where sheep EID will be top of the agenda. EU legislation for ponies seems to be more acceptable.

## Blue tongue

Representatives continue fire-fighting on this legislation. At a meeting in Edinburgh on 6th February it became obvious that there is a great urgency for local councils and politicians to pull together suitable byelaws for the individual islands so they can attach the appropriate health schemes like those already in place in Shetland. There is a more comprehensive article on blue tongue vaccination on page 8 of this issue.

## LFASS

Work continues in Edinburgh, Brussels and even as high as the House of Lords to get a fair settlement. After several consultations and inquiries, last week SCF had representation in the House of Lords giving evidence on this vital support. Our message was clear: "Direct LFASS support to the truly less favoured areas".

## Stock quality scheme

We are working hard to get in place local byelaws and health schemes where a suitable bull and ram scheme would be attached to ensure continued stock quality in the uplands and islands. We are trying to develop cross-party consensus in Holyrood to ensure that this is possible and stop the collapse of stock numbers in the uplands and islands.

## Geese

Geese continue to be a growing menace. There is some recognition from environmental bodies that the animals are feral in some species and that natural flocks have changed migration patterns. SCF is working to determine local counts and behaviour with a view to extending control seasons. Some work is ongoing to develop locally significant measures in order to avoid damage. Communication remains important in seeking to deal with the truly migratory species and those flocks (mainly greylag and Canada) which have carved out niche environments for themselves.

**WEBSITE**  
find us on-line at  
[www.crofting.org](http://www.crofting.org)

## LOCAL FOOD PRODUCTION

# Not a nine to five job

**W**HAT HAPPENS when five people huddle under the meagre shelter offered by a market stall at the end of a Skye summer? They start hatching plans, that's what!

Last year, whilst conversing over a farmers market stall in the less than tropical location of Portree square, crofter Calina MacDonald who produces jams, jellies and chutneys under the name Calina's Conserves, smallholders Keith and Rachael Jackson who produce a wonderful range of traditionally-reared meat products as Earlybird Enterprises, and artisan bakers Barry and Liza Hawthorn of the Isle of Skye Baking Company hatched just such a plan – and so was born The Skye Food Company.

Over the year we had all had enquiries about selling our products further afield, making our products available to avid customers throughout the year regardless of their location and, not least, providing ourselves with some income throughout the quieter winter months. Rather than form yet another committee to further discuss the pros and cons of making our wares available to a wider consumer base or wait for user-unfriendly investment funding, we took the bull by the horns and formed The Skye Food Company. We knew we all produced quality food that complimented each other with traditionally-produced conserves, jellies and chutneys, slow-grown and matured Highland meat and hand crafted bakery delights.

The Skye Food Company is a partnership of beautiful food with three local producers working together to supply the customer with exceptional quality food produced on the Isle of Skye.

Customers can either phone up and order direct from each – or all – the producers or place an order online. The online shop also offers special occasion hampers and tasty foody gifts. This is very much a hands-on company with all of us home-based and each of us undertaking and sharing the tasks involved with running a company of this kind – from designing the website to packing the orders. It is also very important that our customers know where their products come from – all items are produced and ingredients sourced as much as possible on the Isle of Skye.

Traditional production methods, simple, wholesome and locally produced are key factors in the products we offer our customers. MacLeod's Tables wild venison and mutton ham (traditionally made using native breed sheep, dry sweet cured and a wonderfully tasty treat), all-butter hand-made shortbread hearts and real ale (from Isle of Skye Brewery) oatcakes, Talisker chocolate spread, Scottish-recipe marmalade, rowan jelly and rhubarb and ginger jam (using family recipes handed down through generations) are just a few of the delicious delicacies on offer. It is food with provenance, where our customers can enjoy the flavours that come from purity of product and simplicity of production.

We each still run our own businesses as separate entities. Keith and Rachael have been smallholders at Orbest estate since 2002 and from small beginnings have built up a herd of native breeds including Soay sheep, Highland cows and Iron Age pigs whose products they sell from their on-farm licensed facility Earlybird Enterprises.

Calina has turned what used to be a hobby producing jams for family and friends into a fast-growing enterprise run from the croft she shares with husband Donald (who enjoys the preserves, but prefers producing sheep and cattle). Liza and Barry, who are originally from South Africa but have spent a few years getting acclimatised to our rather less sunny weather on Skye, produce home-made delights ranging from traditional oatcake wedges to wedding cakes, including a number of speciality items.

Although the company has only been live for three months or so, we have successfully negotiated our first batch of Christmas orders and are now updating and upgrading our website to make it even easier for customers to find out what we do and how to get their own taste of Skye. Setting up such an enterprise in the current economic climate might seem a bit foolhardy, but we have shown that even with little capital but a great deal of commitment and courage, it is possible.

Keith was recently overheard conversing about the benefits of being his own boss: "I don't work a nine to five job," he said. We can safely say the rest of us would indignantly exclaim, "No! It's a 6am to 2am job." What it boils down to is that we are all passionate about what we do – about great food crafted from quality raw materials, with care and attention to detail. Through the Skye Food Company we now have the opportunity to share that passion with others.

*Rachael Jackson and  
Calina Macdonald*

[www.theskyefoodcompany.co.uk](http://www.theskyefoodcompany.co.uk)

## Slow Food puts Shetland lamb on the menu

**B**Y POPULAR demand Slow Food East Lothian members enjoyed Shetland lamb at their autumn get-together at the famous La Potinière restaurant, Gullane.

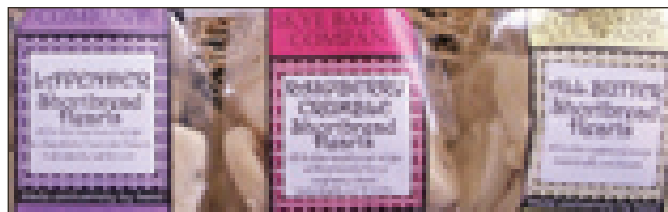
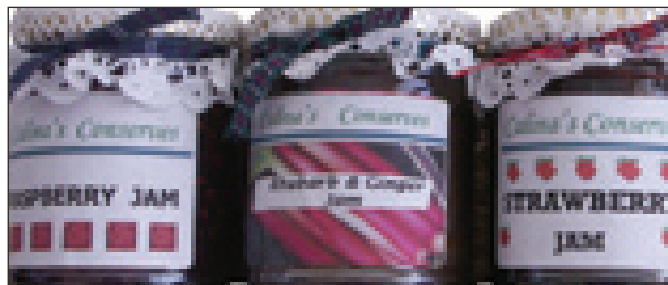
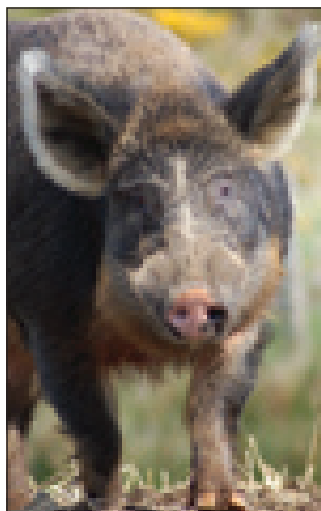
The theme of the meal was to explore how the grazing environment affects the character of the meat with the Shetland lamb sourced by Shetland sheep breeder Richard Briggs from crofts on Shetland.

Before the main course was served, Richard explained that chefs Mary Runciman and Keith Marley had created a main course which would enable diners to taste three different lambs: Shetland lamb from a typical Shetland croft, local lamb from East Lothian and Shetland's most celebrated example, Shetland seaweed lamb, sourced from flocks which can graze on the sea shore. The EC has recognised the distinctive characteristics of Shetland lamb by granting the title "Shetland Lamb" protected designation of origin. Other products whose name has been similarly protected to assure customers of the genuineness of what they buy include Cornish Clotted Cream, Jersey Royal Potatoes and Stilton Cheese.

As a member of Shetland Livestock Marketing Group, Richard markets his Shetland lamb under their "Taste Shetland" brand. His Shetland lamb is also one of the products certified by the new Scottish Crofting Produce Mark. Slow Food chose Scottish Crofting Produce Mark products to represent Scotland at the recent Salone del Gusto international Slow Food fair in Turin, Italy.

On the plate the examples of lamb were presented in three groups made up of roast and slow-cooked lamb with colcannon, seasonal vegetables and lamb sauce. It was immediately apparent that the Shetland lamb had darker meat and bone compared to that from East Lothian and the first reaction to taste was one of universal approval. There was a consensus amongst the company of twenty seven that any of the three types of lamb served alone would have provided a delicious and enjoyable course but the

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LOCAL FOOD PRODUCTION

# Good for you, the environment and your pocket



Richard at La Potinière

## Slow Food puts Shetland lamb on the menu

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combination added interest and sparked lively debate. At the end of the meal there were advocates for all three, both in terms of flavour and tenderness. Not surprisingly, Richard thought that his Shetland lamb got the vote.

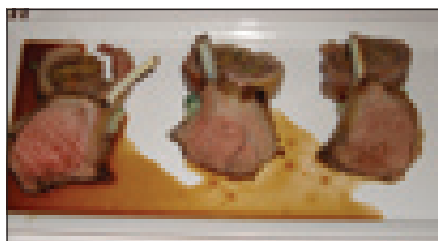
When the course was served, the diners were told what was what on the plate.

On the left – lamb from Richard’s flock of ten pedigree Shetland show sheep that live in clover on his smallholding in East Lothian.

In the middle – Shetland lamb from the in-bye from Richard’s Benston Croft in South Nesting. In Shetland this would be described as “park fed”.

On the right – Shetland seaweed lamb from Agnes and Davy Leask’s croft at Stromness in Whiteness. The lamb was sired by a ram from Richard’s flock at Benston.

*Our thanks to Slow Food East Lothian for the use of this report.*



*Ingrid Ritchie reaps the benefits of years of hard work.*

**L**OTS OF PEOPLE are doing it (or at least trying to) but I have been doing it for many, many years – growing my own vegetables, that is!

When we first got our croft at Achmelvich it was fenceless, boggy, almost treeless, very exposed and close to the sea. I can see the Isle of Skye from my window as a grey mass very far away.

First we put a fence around the house and garden plot, then we opened the main drain running through a flat bit of land – peaty, boggy and wet at the bottom of rocks, so there was a lot of run-off. After that lots of side drains; these created squares of land to cultivate.

That really was hard work, getting through the tufted grass, cutting little turfs then lifting them one by one by hand and turning them upside down and attacking the soil with fury to turn them into crumbs. Seaweed and shell sand from the beach was incorporated, horse muck added and potatoes and brassicas planted the first year.

Each year we attacked a piece about six metres square – five altogether. The land became well drained, pliable, fertile and very productive. We have cow, horse and chicken manure now and I make compost all the time and dig in lots of it every winter. The shell sand is very good for the sour, peaty ground, instead of lime, and that gets added every few years.

When the fence was put up, we used off-

cuts or slab wood to create windbreaks and planted alder, willow and larch behind it. There was also some regeneration of hazel, birch and eared willow. Once these trees had grown a bit, flowering hardy shrubs were planted to make it pretty in the summer, attracting bees and other insects. Birds started to nest and became a pest when I wanted to grow soft fruit. They all have to be netted now, but that is all right, well worth the effort.

I can produce loads of strawberries (last year even before Wimbledon), black and red currants, gooseberries, loganberries, Worcester berries, apples and sometimes plums. Not raspberries – they always seem to get a virus and I have given up on them.

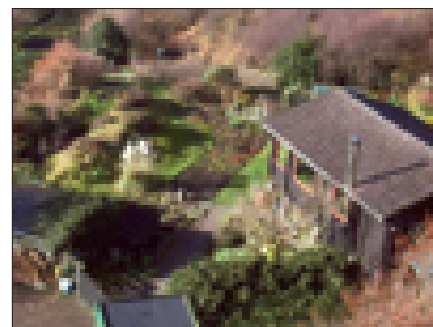
I grow a huge variety of vegetables. Almost everything does well here, now the garden is well sheltered. Even so, every so often a storm comes and wreaks havoc. The wind does more damage than any frost ever does.

I sell quite a lot in the summer months to tourists, plus a few local families and the hotel get a bag of mixed vegetables every week. Even at this time of year I still have potatoes, swedes, parsnips, leeks, beetroot, onions, carrots, artichokes, cabbage and kale. Peas and beans in the freezer, jams, jellies and chutney on the shelf.

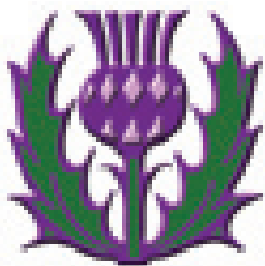
Long before it became fashionable I grew everything organically and it does taste very good. So if you have a bit of land, get digging and growing – it’s good for you, the environment and your pocket too!



Before, after (August 03) and Ingrid’s house



## LOCAL FOOD PRODUCTION



### Scottish Allotments and Gardens Society

# Adding to the quality of life

**A**LLOTMENTS are now news. People are concerned about the cost of food, health risks from herbicides and pesticides used in mass food production and the carbon footprint generated by the distribution systems of large supermarkets. Experiments like the Fife Diet Project, focussing on locally-sourced food, are proving surprisingly successful. But in many areas local suppliers and small shops have already been driven out of business by the fortnightly supermarket trip that has become the norm.

So people who are not prepared to cut all non-local non-seasonal food from their menu, but would nevertheless like to take control of their diet, want to grow some of their own food. In a society where private gardens are shrinking the answer is – get an allotment.

Who can have an allotment? In 2007, the Scottish Allotments and Gardens Society (SAGS) published the first ever audit of Scotland's allotments: "Finding Scotland's Allotments". This showed where there are allotments and also where there are none. At the moment most allotments are concentrated in the big cities. Some local authority areas, for example the Western Isles, have none. The audit found roughly 6500 allotments and nearly 4000 people on waiting lists. 4000 may be the tip of an iceberg of demand as when people are told that there is a ten year waiting list they tend to give up.

It is a myth that allotment gardening is a

**Availability of suitable land is a problem in rural areas as well as in towns and cities.**

solely urban phenomenon. Once every country stationmaster had a flower and vegetable plot on spare land provided by the railway company. Farm labourers and other rural workers frequently had access to land where they could grow food. Now these sources of land have disappeared under commercial pressure.

SAGS is in touch with more than 60 groups in areas all over Scotland outside the big cities, who are trying to get land for allotments. However, since the recent publication by COSLA of guidance notes on allotments for Scottish Councils, rural councils from Shetland to the Borders are waking up to their obligations and to the advantages which allotment gardening can bring to individuals and communities.

Availability of suitable land is a problem in rural areas as well as in towns and cities.

However, a proactive council should examine its holdings to see if it has an area which can be used for allotments. The existence of allotments can add greatly to the quality of life of the local population. For the plotholder, allotment gardening provides a variety of benefits. As well as the basis for a healthy diet there is physical exercise, mental stress release and inclusive social interaction.

Community groups such as eco-schools and mental health organisations have been welcomed onto many allotment sites and usually their pupils and clients love the time they spend on the allotment and benefit in all sorts of ways. Another myth – that the allotment gardener is a retired male whose main love in life is his prize leek – is thoroughly exploded. Allotment gardeners, male and female, come in a wide variety of ages, social and ethnic origins.

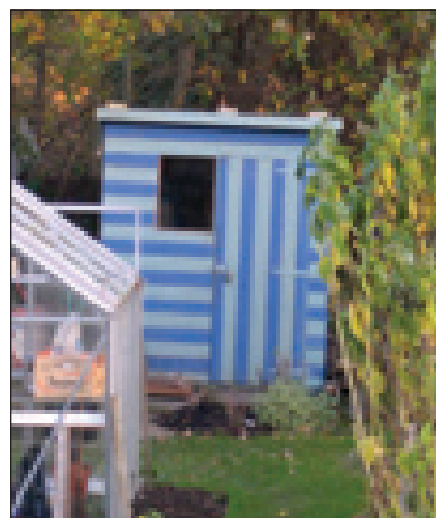
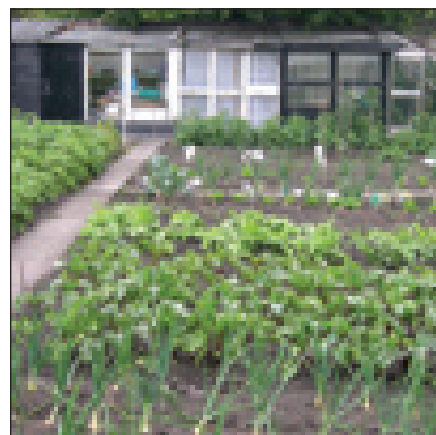
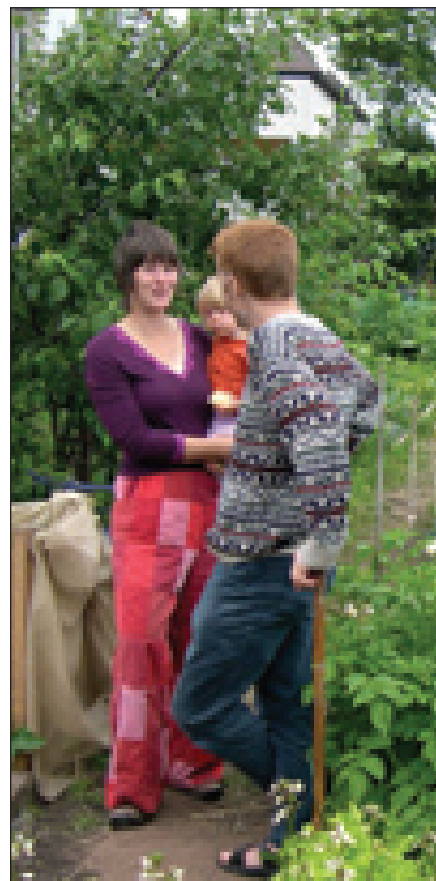
Writing this amidst occasional snow flurries, it is satisfying to remember that it is possible to have some salad leaves available most of the year round. Leeks and parsnips can be left in the ground until required. Brassicas and spinach survive the worst of the weather. Our long summer days are ideally suited for soft fruits.

SAGS is currently asking its members to record the time spent on the plot and the varieties and quantities harvested. Preliminary results show that even in cold Scotland it is possible to produce large quantities of courgettes, sweetcorn and mange tout peas outdoors – and with a greenhouse or cold frame you can have tomatoes, aubergines, melons ...

Producing one's own food is not effortless. About 10 hours a week on the plot in summer seems to be ideal. But sowing, weeding, and harvesting are part of the pleasures. Little can beat the satisfaction of knowing that the delicious food you are eating has been produced by you, from a small seed that you stuck in the earth a few months ago.

The Scottish Allotments and Gardens Society is a voluntary organisation, founded more than ninety years ago. Its aims are to protect, preserve, promote and campaign for allotments. Its management committee can help local groups on all aspects of allotments, from lobbying officials, basic facilities, to drawing up constitutions. Increasingly, SAGS has become involved in making the case for more allotments at national level. In the long term, it is looking forward to the time when the demand for plots is satisfied.

*Jenny Mollison and Barbara De La Rue of the Scottish Allotments and Gardens Society*



[www.sags.org.uk](http://www.sags.org.uk)

## LOCAL FOOD PRODUCTION

# Food processing, marketing and co-operation

*Mark Nicoll, Manager of Food Industry Support at the Scottish Government outlines the assistance available through the Food Processing and Marketing grants in the Scottish Rural Development Programme (SRDP)*

### What is available under the programme for a crofting/farming/food business?

Adding value to food and identifying and exploiting a range of business and market opportunities is a critical factor in achieving a successful food business. Scottish food producers, food processors, retailers and the food service sector should also work together to identify, inform and meet market demand, drawing on business advice and sharing resources and experience to develop ideas, control costs and increase incomes.

Measures under the SRDP will help meet these objectives by providing assistance to develop facilities to process food and add value to primary agricultural products. The measures will also encourage innovation and new product development, add value and develop co-operation opportunities to exploit new markets. They aim to link producers, processors, and others in the supply chain to work together, to shorten the food supply chain and develop their market to best effect.

Assistance will be available to:

- support capital costs of businesses involved in the processing of primary agriculture produce to develop new, and improve existing, processing facilities
- support non-capital costs towards the wider development of food processing businesses such as marketing plans, market research and consultancy and product development.
- support co-operation activity between food producers, food processors and third parties.

Levels of assistance will vary depending on the type and size of business applying for support. However in general terms this will range from 20-50% for investment in food processing businesses and 50-100% for support towards co-operation activity.

### Who is eligible to submit applications?

Individuals, partnerships, groups of producer and private or public companies who are involved in processing food or developing co-operation within the food chain.

### What information will I require to include in an application?

For an application under the food processing and marketing element of the scheme you will be required to clearly describe that you have considered the full implication of the development. Confirmation will also be required that you have fully costed the proposal through the submission of quotes and identified achievable benefits which may include confirmation of market outlets.

For support towards co-operation activity in the food chain you will be required in the first instance to set out your proposal and the benefits, through a feasibility study. If the study identifies opportunities, these would be explored in a fuller application which would support the feasibility study and identify the resources required and confirm costs to deliver the proposal. Funding would be available to facilitate or support the development of the feasibility study and delivery of the activity.

### How can I participate in this element of the Programme?

Guidance is available on the web site at: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2008/08/05125327/0>, which will provide full information on the schemes and the application process. ERAD area offices will also be able to provide further information and advice.

### What will happen once I have submitted my proposals?

You will be provided with clear information on the next steps and the timetable for consideration of your proposal.

### Where can I go for further information and advice?

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Rural> will provide further information on the development of the Scottish Rural Development Programme. ERAD area offices will also be able to provide further information and advice.

# Lochhead outlines vision for Scottish agriculture

**A**VISION for Scottish agriculture which will see direct financial support for farmers continue in the years ahead, provided they fulfil contracts with the public to deliver outcomes for food and the environment, was outlined in January at the Oxford Farming Conference by Richard Lochhead, Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs.

Mr Lochhead claimed that growing food is the primary purpose of Scottish agriculture. He highlighted the differences between the Scottish vision for agriculture and the UK's, focusing on the issues of food security and the economic, social and environmental benefits of farming.

Mr Lochhead also reflected on the need for more powers for the Scottish Parliament to help it deliver for farmers and crofters, claiming that too many decisions taken in DEFRA still had an impact on Scotland. "Farmers gather in Oxford against a backdrop of

economic uncertainty," he said, "but I believe that the Scottish Government's vision for agriculture combined with the industry's reputation and skills provides hope and optimism for the industry.

"Scotland has attached great importance to agriculture. My vision for Scotland is to have agri-food and land-based industries which produce for the market, recognised for the economic, social and environmental benefits derived from them and which are appropriately regulated.

"What I would like to see for the future is, effectively, a new contract between our society and farmers to deliver clear outcomes in the interests of Scotland. A contract that recognises the fundamental role of farmers and land managers in managing and utilising Scotland's biggest asset in the public interest, then addresses specific issues through more targeted measures.

"Our policy tools need to ensure that farmers will only get the payment if they actively carry out the practices that deliver economic, social and environmental benefits.

"The agri-food sector is strategically important to Scotland and farming continues to be a mainstay of the rural economy.

"The primary purpose of Scottish agriculture should always be food production. Maintaining a national capacity to produce food is crucial for Scotland's future. That requires an infrastructure and workforce with the necessary skills. Given the national importance of agriculture, public support for farming is wholly justified and will be essential in the years ahead especially given the unique challenges faced by Scottish farmers.

"The treasury-driven DEFRA vision for agriculture that calls for a quick end to subsidies and that UK Ministers are attempting to

sell to the EU is not Scotland's vision as it ignores Scotland's unique circumstances.

"2009 will be a pivotal year for our industry. We will be taking decisions on how to implement the Common Agriculture Policy Health Check and we will be deciding on the shape of our Less Favoured Area support from 2010 onwards.

"We are also reviewing the Scotland Rural Development Programme to see whether it is properly equipped to deal with the challenges of the economic downturn.

"Putting together clear, successful policies for the future will need genuine engagement, by governments and stakeholders.

"Food is now higher on Scotland's agenda than ever before and our farmers are a vital resource in delivering food security for future generations."

## ANIMAL HEALTH

**Bluetongue – an innocent-sounding name**

**A**N INNOCENT-SOUNDING name, but it's also a killer disease that affects animals and is fairly widespread throughout Europe.

To put it in context, the BTV8 strain of this disease has been identified on 23,959 holdings in France while the BTV1 strain has been identified on 4,339 holdings. There are other strains too. France has implemented a compulsory vaccination programme to combat this.

With the exception of isolated incidents in England as a result of irresponsible farmers importing from France, Great Britain is accepted to be disease-free.

A compulsory vaccination programme was agreed by the industry bluetongue stakeholder group and the Scottish Government in September 2007. It was considered the most sensible way to offer adequate protection against the disease. Scotland has now become a BTV8 protection zone.

While Scotland chose this route, England decided on a voluntary programme. At a recent meeting in Edinburgh, chief veterinary officer Professor Charles Milne maintained that it would make perfect sense to have a 'GB zone' where vaccination was also compulsory in England and Wales. It is his view that Scotland's efforts could be undermined by England's decision.

Why then should it be compulsory in Scotland? The logic is that by making vaccination compulsory we will be in a much better position to give BTV8 immunity to all of our stock and

be safe in that knowledge. So far, there has been a 23.4% uptake and officials are encouraged by the response. In sharp contrast, the uptake in England has been disappointing, particularly in the north-west.

**Why is it compulsory in the Western Isles while Shetland has a voluntary programme?**

First of all, Shetland has had a health scheme in place for many years funded by the Shetland Isles Council. It is the assurances given under this scheme that enabled Shetland to request a derogation allowing voluntary vaccination.



Stamper the tup – blue tongue free

We have five ports of entry in the Western Isles. This would have to be reduced to no more than two ports under any proposed health scheme. It would involve robust bio-security controls on all animals entering the Western Isles. Appropriate bye-laws would have to be introduced by CNES who would fund and administer such a scheme. First of all though,

consultation must take place with all the stakeholder groups and the majority of crofters would have to show willingness to sign up to such a scheme.

Norman Leask from Shetland, immediate past chairman of the SCF, has for several years argued the benefits of the Western Isles, Shetland Isles and Orkney Isles having a co-ordinated approach to animal health and strongly believes that this is the way forward. It would certainly make a difference when negotiating at Government level.

All animals must be vaccinated by the end of April. That is the law. However, at a recent meeting in Edinburgh, Professor Milne was sympathetic to a request for more time in order to vaccinate young animals in the summer. He gave a strong hint that the deadline may be extended till the end of June. If this is so, then all stockholders will be notified in due course.

Will animals have to be vaccinated year after year? It is hoped that this may only have to be done for the next two years but that very much depends on what is going on in England. The Scottish Government is subsidising the programme to the value of £2.6 million which will greatly help stockholders but it should be borne in mind that this is only for the first year.

**What do we do now then?** We must vaccinate all animals before the 30 April deadline as required, once for sheep and twice for cattle. I would remind all stockholders about the penalties for not doing so.

On inspection, if animals are

found unvaccinated after the deadline, producers can face a penalty of a fine up to £5000 and/or six months imprisonment.

It sounds very draconian and I venture to suggest that only an individual with little or no knowledge of the crofting way of life could have dreamt up such an absurd penalty. Try to imagine an eighty-year-old crofter who forgets to vaccinate his six sheep being dragged to court, threatened with imprisonment and branded a criminal! The potential danger is that large numbers of crofters may decide that it is no longer viable to keep stock. This would most certainly, in the long-term, prove environmentally disastrous and have other consequences too.

Vaccine can only be sourced through the vet and a declaration must be signed to provide evidence, on selling, that vaccination has been carried out. At auction, the declaration must be submitted to the auctioneer prior to the sale.

The Scottish Crofting Foundation works tirelessly on behalf of all stockholders and holds regular meetings with Government ministers and officials. It is always advantageous to fight from a position of strength and it is thanks to its supportive members that the SCF can carry out its functions.

Should anyone wish further information on bluetongue or any other crofting matter or require membership please visit the SCF website at [www.crofting.org](http://www.crofting.org).

*Donnie MacDonald  
SCF Area Representative Lewis*

**Research highlights benefits of on-farm faecal egg counting**

**R**ESULTS FROM NEW EU-FUNDED RESEARCH show that, with the right equipment and guidance, farmers can accurately carry out faecal egg counts, giving a better understanding of roundworm problems to target treatment when it is needed.

On average the number of doses administered was reduced by 35% per year, which resulted in considerable savings on sheep wormer costs. The reduced reliance on anthelmintics should also help delay wormer resistance.

Part of the research programme, known as PARASOL (PARASite SOLutions), aims to test the practical applications of various targeted selective treatment initiatives. Desired outcomes are reduced reliance on wormers with resulting cost savings, reducing the threat of wormer resistance and improved quality of animal products off the farm.

One part of the project run in the UK by Innovis assessed the impact of on farm faecal egg counting. Farms in the project were geographically dispersed in the UK and included a range of farm types from hill to lowland.

Using the FECPAK system developed in New Zealand, participating farmers showed an average 35 percent reduction in treatments with anthelmintic wormers with no reported negative effects on the performance of lambs. In some cases there was an increase in lamb performance. Farmers reported the system was quick and easy to use.

For Northumberland sheep and beef farmer Alan Cowan, it was the ability to see more clearly what was going on that made the difference to him. "Although saving on drench costs is a benefit, the greatest advantage I have seen is that I now have confidence in only worming when it's needed and I can hopefully delay the development of resistance to the levamisole and ML groups on my farm."

A survey showed that 74% of farmers using the system reduced their numbers of treatments to lambs. This was achieved by timing treatment for when the worm burden was shown to be present rather than guessing or blanket treating.

*For more information visit [www.fecpak.com](http://www.fecpak.com)*



## ANIMAL HEALTH

# Tackling liver fluke in cattle

**A**N INCREASE in the number of cases of liver fluke disease and liver condemnations at abattoirs have been recorded in cattle.

Fluke is normally associated with regions of the UK which have a high annual rainfall such as western and hill areas. However, there have been increasing reports of outbreaks of fluke disease in central and eastern areas. A combination of environmental and management factors are thought to be responsible.

Liver fluke requires a semi-aquatic mud snail as an intermediate host. This dependency on a suitable snail for completion of the life-cycle means that the occurrence of fluke is markedly affected by climate, particularly rainfall and temperature. Liver fluke differs from roundworms in several respects.

Firstly, the complete life-cycle from an adult fluke in the liver shedding eggs onto

## Types of fluke disease and effects on host

Where large numbers of infective cysts are ingested over a relatively short period, acute and sub-acute disease may occasionally be seen, particularly in young calves. Chronic disease, which results from a prolonged intake of moderate numbers of cysts and the presence of adult fluke, is the more common form of infection in cattle and is seen in late winter/early spring.

Heavy infection in young susceptible cattle can cause marked damage to liver tissue, development of anaemia, hypoalbuminaemia and submandibular oedema which is similar to that seen in sheep. In addition, there is often enlargement of the gallbladder and calcification of the bile ducts giving the surface of the liver a 'pipe-stem' appearance.

Migration of flukes to organs other than the liver is more common in cattle and flukes can sometimes be found encapsulated in the

Many flukicides are not licenced for use where milk is to be used for human consumption. Refer to manufacturers' withdrawal periods. Dairy cows can be treated at drying-off. It is important to monitor the need for treatment.

## Climate

There has been a trend over the last few years towards milder winters, warmer and wetter spring, summer and autumn seasons. These weather patterns will favour fluke transmission by enhancing snail survival and abundance and produce a longer season of snail activity and fluke development within the snail.

Movement of untreated cattle and sheep and the presence of wildlife reservoirs (such as deer and rabbits) may be important in introducing infection into new areas. On many mixed farms and crofts, cattle are often not treated for liver fluke as generally they are more tolerant of fluke than sheep, showing less clinical signs, and in endemic areas they develop a partial immunity to infection.

## Quarantine measures

Where the farm environment provides a potential habitat for the mud snail then it is advisable to treat all introduced livestock (sheep and cattle) with a flukicide which is effective against immature and adult fluke. Farmers need to adopt an effective quarantine strategy in conjunction with a veterinarian or specialist advisor. As livestock can pass fluke eggs for about three weeks post-treatment it is advisable, where practicable, to keep treated imported animals on pastures with no snail habitats for up to for four weeks.

*Dr Bob Coop is the retired Head of Parasitology Division of the Moredun Research Institute, Edinburgh. Moredun runs a membership scheme which aims to keep farmers, crofters and their vets up to date with the latest developments in animal health research.*

If you would more information on fluke control or are interested in becoming a member of Moredun, please contact Margaret Bennett, phone 0131 445 5111 or visit their website at [www.moredun.org.uk](http://www.moredun.org.uk)



Healthy cows on hill grazing

pasture to a new generation of mature fluke in the liver takes a minimum of 18-20 weeks. In roundworms the life-cycle is direct and can be completed in as little as three to four weeks under optimum conditions.

Secondly, there is a multiplication phase in the fluke life-cycle. Each egg passed in the dung can produce one infective stage (a miracidium) which may infect a snail. Following multiplication in the snail around 500-600 stages (cercariae) are shed onto pasture.

These stages encyst on vegetation as metacercariae and are infective for livestock for several months. In contrast, with roundworms each egg shed in the dung has the potential to develop into only one infective larva and following ingestion by the sheep this may develop to one adult worm.

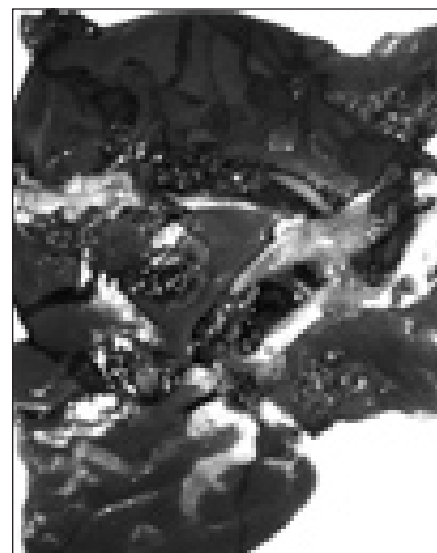
An increase in metacercariae on pasture occurs during two periods. The summer infection of snails leads to an accumulation of infective cysts on herbage around August to October and accounts for the majority of disease outbreaks in early/mid winter. In the winter infection, infective cysts appear on pasture around May to June. These are derived from infected snails which have hibernated over winter.

lungs. Heavy infections may cause a reduction in milk quality and yield, particularly in cows during the winter. Where infections are lighter the clinical effects are minimal and often there is no effect on productivity. Diarrhoea is not a feature of bovine fasciolosis.

## Treatment and control

The timing of treatments will depend on the spectrum of activity of the flukicide. A typical treatment schedule in endemic fluke areas in an average rainfall season would be:

- Dose cattle in autumn with a flukicide which is effective against young immature fluke to reduce liver damage from fluke migration. This is irrespective of whether cattle will be housed or out-wintered. In-wintered cattle need to be treated soon after housing; the timing of treatment will depend on the spectrum of activity of the flukicide.
- Dose grazing cattle in winter with a flukicide which is effective against adult fluke and late immature stages. In-wintered cattle need to be treated after housing (timing of the dose varies with the flukicide used).
- Dose out-wintered cattle in spring with a flukicide which is effective against adult stages. This removes fluke burdens and reduces contamination of pastures with fluke eggs.



Diseased liver

# Embo Trust (Urras Euraboil) news

*Jim McGillivray provides an update on the trust's activities*

Forestry Commission Scotland has approved The Embo Trust's application to the National Forest Land Scheme for the community purchase of the Fourpenny Plantation. The sale should be concluded within 18 months.

We are now preparing our application for Big Lottery funding under the Growing Communities Assets programme.

We're also developing our applications for funds to the LEADER programme and to SRDP. These programmes won't fund the purchase but they will partially fund smaller projects within the overall plan. Other funders are being explored as well. The purchase price is £370,000 and we estimate we will need about £320,000 in the first five years to put down the basic infrastructure for the woodland croft sites, replace the boundary fencing which has come to the end of its life, train volunteers

in woodland skills and employ a part-time woodland manager. Although we will have an income from activities in the plantation we will need to source grant funding for the non-recurring capital expenditure.

The trust has registered community interest in land at Trentham Farm, Coul Farm and 7 The Poles. This simply means that should the land come onto the market for sale we, The Embo Trust, would be given the first opportunity to purchase it. We know however, from correspondence with the owner in 2006 that he states he has no intention of selling the land. The registration is therefore a long-term project and the owner is currently able to appeal to the sheriff against the Scottish Ministers' decision.

I was one of several people giving presentations to the Rural Affairs Minister on his visit to Sutherland on 9th February. I took the opportunity to explain the immediate

aims of the Trust in setting up tenant-only, no-right-to-buy woodland crofts to service the housing and economic needs of the young generation in the area and the opportunities the Fourpenny crofting project will provide in terms of local food production, local renewable energy projects, carbon sequestration and biodiversity.

I also appraised the Minister of the trust's future ambitions should it ever be in a position to take control of the neighbouring farms at Coul and Trentham, and the blue sky thinking behind the concept of "sea-crofts" being created out into the Dornoch Firth (or the Embo Ocean as it will be called) to harvest the resources of this much under-utilised environment.

It is to be hoped that Mr Lochhead took on board the aims and ambitions of the trust.



Fourpenny

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

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## STOP PRESS!!

Two bits of good news as we go to press:

The SCF has been awarded £228,803 by the Food Processing, Marketing and Co-operation Grants Scheme (part of SRDP) for its three year Crofting Resources Programme, which we have outlined in previous editions of The Crofter.

This programme is designed to strengthen community resilience through promoting crofting resources such as healthy, ethical food and collaborative working. More information about this grant scheme appears in this edition.

Ali Bain, celebrated Shetland fiddler and champion of Scottish culture, has agreed to be our patron. Many thanks Ali – and welcome

# Wisdom beyond education

*Notes from a talk delivered by Norman Leask at the launch of the schools' crofting course, Grimsay, North Uist*

**I T HAS BEEN SAID** that: "Crofting is a piece of poor land surrounded by legislation." This I believe to be nonsense.

Crofting is a piece of paradise surrounded by views, flowers, animals, birds and aquatic life that people would die for. And did. This is so important, but without people in the Highlands and Islands to maintain this utopia Scotland will be much the poorer and less attractive.

It is also said: "Crofting legislation causes problems." This too is incorrect.

Just take a drive from Carlisle to Hawick up the A7 and you will realise the importance of crofting legislation. The rural Scottish borders are almost devoid of habitation because there is no crofting there.

The SCF, the Crofters Commission and our Government are working hard for much better and more appropriate legislation for the 21st century that will give crofting its place leading repopulation of the rural areas.

Wisdom beyond education does not mean that I am critical of education within the Highlands and Islands. I believe Scottish

education is the best in the world and that the Highland and Islands have the best education in Scotland. So work hard and fulfil your potential in education so your life can be easy with a well paid job; then you can turn to crofting.

I have personally seen crofting, its community and traditions in action on these islands. About 6pm one night I phoned someone who I was told knew about the traditions of the islands. A very disappointed voice said they were really sorry but due to a very early start the next morning as they were off on holiday and the cases had to be packed, we could call for 10 minutes and maybe have a cup of tea.

Over four hours later after stories comparing our traditions, some beautiful Gaelic singing and hearing my favourite tune, 'The Dark Island' – and of course enjoying a little dram – supper was prepared and we went home leaving these lovely people to do their packing and catch their transport with virtually no sleep. And I regularly have the hospitality of another family where deep and meaningful discussions on the similarities and differences to problems in our various islands are compared.



Norman Leask, Neil MacPherson and Michael Russel MSP at the launch of the crofting course



Drew Ratter (right) and Aberdeen Angus bull

## Assessors – Crofters Commission chair Drew Ratter reports

**I T IS A WHILE NOW** since the annual Crofters Commission Assessors seminar took place on 18th November, at the Thistle Hotel in Inverness. From my own point of view it was gratifying to see so many assessors there. We had a turnout of 85%, which must be good for any body, particularly one so far flung as our crofting assessors from Unst to Campbeltown.

We at the Crofters Commission very much value our assessors. They are a representative, expert, volunteer network embedded in the community, with skills and expertise. At very low cost, they add very substantially to the work of the Crofters Commission. I can't think of another public body who could muster their equivalent for their own area, nor can I think of a public body which would not give their eye teeth for such an equivalent.

For that reason, we are now working hard, in partnership with SCF, to improve assessors' skills, and help them in the job they do. I will return to that later.

In November, the programme for the day was made up of

presentations – including a thought-provoking contribution by Colin Roxburgh on community engagement, as experienced within Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park area – and smaller group discussions. Unsurprisingly, diverse views were expressed, reflecting the different experiences of crofting in different areas.

In response to feedback from assessors, the programme was altered to provide an opportunity to hear a presentation on the decline in hill stock numbers, by Davie MacLeod and Sarah Allen, followed by a question and answer session. This was greatly appreciated, and certainly assisted assessor response to the Scottish Government consultation on LFASS the following month.

The latter part of the afternoon was set aside for facilitated discussion between assessors, both in their own areas groups, and across areas. This allowed all of them a chance for local discussions with area staff and commissioners, looking at how the role of the assessor could be supported and developed.

This is an issue also considered in joint meetings between the Crofters Commission and the SCF. Last year a joint working

**Two particular issues have been agreed as being of high importance: training and information flow.**

group was established, to promote improved dialogue on assessors. Several meetings later, this seems to be working well. More meetings are planned and, taken together with feedback from the assessor seminar; there can be no doubt that assessors welcome the opportunity to engage with commissioners and staff.

Two particular issues have been agreed as being of high importance: training and information flow. A proposed way forward on both has just this month been agreed by the board of commissioners.

The Commission hopes over the coming year to offer training to

all assessors, in all four crofting areas, with an appropriate pack to keep, with all the issues which are at the forefront of Commission activity covered. With the new high stress on effective regulation now top of the agenda, it is essential that assessors are helped to play into the business of the organisation as well as possible.

As far as information is concerned, the main tool at our disposal is the web site. A very high proportion of assessors have access to email and internet, and the Commission hopes to offer training in the use of these media, where necessary, so that all the information which is so important to good regulation can flow in both directions.

As I said at the beginning, the Crofters Commission values its assessors. They are a very important part of our information gathering process. I hope we are putting our money where our mouth is in showing that we value them and I look forward, over the coming year, to taking a continuing look at developing that network.



# Scottish Crofting Foundation

rooted in our community

**Our mission is to safeguard and promote the rights, livelihoods and culture of crofters and their communities**

**crofters commission**  
ughdarras nan croitearan

Crofting is a vital element in the economic, environmental, social and cultural structure of our rural communities.

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# Towards a Foundation for Common Land in Britain and Ireland

**A** NEW ORGANISATION is being formed for the protection and promotion of common land in England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland (north and south).

The SCF is joining the Foundation for Common Land in Britain and Ireland (FCLBI) – as crofters are, of course, big users of common land and this vast asset is often overlooked or misunderstood.

It's early days yet, but given the similar problems we and our friends in England, Wales and Ireland face and since the main voice for the UK in the EU, whether we like it or not, is DEFRA's, we feel that it is important for SCF to be active in the foundation from the word go, ensuring that the Scottish angle is not lost and the significance of Scottish common grazings on the UK scale is recognised.

Very well done to the organisers for setting it up and all strength to your arm!

*The following is an extract from an address by Andrew Humphries, former president of Cumbria rural community council and director of Newton Rigg Hill Farm in the Lake District, which has common rights. Andrew was speaking at the meeting in December which made the decision to form the foundation.*

"I should say right at the start that my experience is primarily with common land under the English legal framework. A major challenge will be to look beyond the local and see patterns at a national or even wider scale. Commoners in England and Wales are those with pasturing and similar rights on commons, but when I use it here I intend it to include those with similar rights on common land in Scotland and Ireland.

"A first consideration is to acknowledge that pastoral commons are a complex mix of resilience and vulnerability. Critically their future depends on the choices made by society and those made by commoners. That is not an either or option; both are essential.

"For commoners the key challenge is to look at ourselves and ask the question 'what can we do?' We need an active not a passive response. In recent times the balance between passive and active has been inadequate – we have been 'done to' whereas our custom historically was 'to do'. External agencies will inevitably continue to be a strong, and in many cases necessary, influence but will function more effectively in partnership with practitioners to the mutual benefit of all interests. However

that will only happen if we take responsibility to bring it about.

"Though there are some long-established bodies in Scotland, Dartmoor and the New Forest, the clearest change in recent times has been the establishment of many more regional groupings of commoners. Alongside these, federated groups established themselves in Wales, Yorkshire and Cumbria. These are strongly embedded in the custom and culture of their areas, which are immensely diverse. However many decisions are taken at a higher level or would benefit from co-operation at the UK or international level.

"English regional bodies have no way of co-operating to respond to DEFRA on national issues. Scottish crofters do have a body which represents them at all levels, but there is no forum where they can unite with commoners down south on common issues. Commoners in the UK share many problems with the users of commonage in Ireland, who lack even a single voice within their own country.

"This is where the foundation fits. It does not seek to duplicate the work of these various groups, but rather be the missing piece in the jig saw which both fills a gap and gives more meaning to the other pieces.



A gather in the New Forest

"Commons are complex both legally and in practice. Informed, sound decisions depend on understanding which needs to be informed by evidence. Hence the central concept of an observatory for common land at the heart of the foundation is critical.

"Consider all of the values of common land – they include food production, the conservation of systems of husbandry, local communities, types of livestock, cultural landscapes and archaeological remains, management of high nature value land and the provision of access

opportunities. Water catchment management, carbon storage and cultural landscape protection will become important. Whilst these issues are not unique to commons, their application to commons will need to be uniquely considered and practised.

"What this presents is the need for a range of skills, understanding and evidence that can only come from collaborative working. Commoners who are at the point of delivery have a critical contribution to make. Their skills, experience and local knowledge are not within the grasp of other partners – and the converse is equally true.

"So, for the observatory, what is being proposed is a means of building a community of commoners where now a spread of disconnected groups exists. Commoners would be able to communicate with each other, with the public and trans-nationally, and not just with the EU institutions. Commoners exist in most EU states, but almost all of them think they are alone, facing unique problems at the margin of national policy.

"Over at least two years, alongside informal collaboration between some of the regional commoners groups, there have been a number of presentations to meetings that indicated a real interest on the part of commoners. A start has been made on an observatory website and a booklet identifying the general aims of the foundation was distributed. In August 2007 a small steering group was asked to take the process forward.

"We have prepared a prospectus and taken legal advice. A draft memorandum of agreement and articles and a draft development plan for wider discussion have been prepared. Natural England have agreed to support the establishment of the foundation and a project officer has been identified to give 25 days' input to the end of March 2009.

"The future for our pastoral commons cannot be 'a borrowed idea'. It must come from within the community of common interest and focus on diverse and well-understood pastoral practice and its relationship with all of the outputs appropriate to the contemporary needs of common land and commoners in our time.

"Our strength has been in building from the grassroots – recognising the importance of local diversity. We need to hold on to that, but to bring interests together for the common good."

*Andrew Humphries*



Borrodale, Lake District

## White-tailed sea eagle – tourist attraction or unacceptable predator?

SNH IN 2002 commissioned a report on the effect sea eagles had on Mull where there were also reports of lamb losses. One of the recommendations in the report was that all reintroductions should involve wide consultation among potential stakeholders. However, consultation was never carried out in Wester Ross.

Farmers and crofters in Wester Ross have been losing lambs steadily since these birds were released. Four holdings on the Gairloch

peninsula have suffered unprecedented losses, with over two hundred lambs lost to the sea eagle from May to September 2008. Over the last few years farmers and crofters have witnessed the destruction of their sheep flocks, with a 54% reduction in the lambs taken to the sales. Lambs have been found with puncture holes on their bodies, gasping their last breath after being dropped from the sky.

SNH and RSPB claim that the white-tailed sea eagle will only take weak or unviable lambs, but there is evidence that they do kill strong lambs. Witnesses have seen them attacking ewes and even hinds and deer calves.

The habitat these birds left 100 years ago when they were made extinct would have been very different from today, indeed you only have to go back thirty years to see the changes. Sea birds and ground nesting birds are dropping in numbers, rabbits are scarce and hares have never been seen for many a year, but the sea eagle cannot be blamed for the loss of all these creatures as they were in demise before their arrival. If there had been some consultation, many of these concerns could have been raised. I do feel that if there were plenty of birds, fish, rabbits and hares then probably our lambs would stand a better chance of being left alone – or would they?

Lord Burton in 1984 expressed his concerns at encouraging the birds' return saying in *The Times*: "As I understand it, the reason these birds became extinct in Scotland was because

they were so destructive to sheep. If people are trying to make a living in the west Highlands it is very bad luck to have these thrust upon them."

Farmers and crofters for generations have been custodians of the land and have done a good job, making the most of the harsh environment. We know our hills and we have seen the changes. We know our sheep, and it is very distressing to see the possible end of this way of life and Highland culture.

After a public meeting in Poolewe hall at the end of September SNH agreed to fund an independent enquiry. They will work along with local crofters and representatives of SNH, SCF, RSPB and SGRPID. A meeting was held at the end of November to find a way forward. There will be another meeting in February to finalise the timing of the study, hopefully at the end of May. There will be two holdings involved, one in the Gairloch area and one in Skye; this is yet to be decided.

The Scottish Government has undertaken to protect crofting in fragile areas. However, along with electronic tagging, the end of the bull hire scheme, blue tongue and the modern trend for house farming, this is yet another nail in the coffin of farming and crofting in these remote areas. There has been a mass exodus of sheep in the north of Scotland. This problem has to be sorted out and taken seriously or it will only add to the acceleration of the exodus of sheep.

Willie Fraser

Photo: David Whitaker from Skye Birds by R.L. MacMillan



## Evidence before compensation

ON A BEAUTIFUL May afternoon in 1908 my father, aged seven, and his sister Maggie were sent over the hill to the local mill with the last of the bere and oats to be ground for flour.

Subsistence living meant that schooling for older children in the family was an optional extra reserved for days when nothing else of importance was happening on the croft, to secure the survival of the whole family.

They were dressed for the occasion with suitable clothing, equipment and food (a beremeal bannock each) for the round trip. Aunty Maggie had a beautiful red and maroon scarf she had knitted for herself and my dad took his favourite piece of driftwood as a staff. When they were deep into their journey, (in Shetland you can never be far from the sea) they noticed a large bird following them. Requiring a rest and some sustenance they sat down on a rock where suddenly this evil bird swooped down just missing them. My dad being the man (aged seven) held up his staff protecting his sister, screaming in the forlorn hope of attracting help. They believed to their dying day that the red scarf made this aggressive bird think it had found an injured prey which it could easily take back to its chicks.

The screams of the children was heard by an elderly neighbour who happened to be in the

hill doing the community lambing. She came to the rescue throwing her naturally coloured Shetland hap over Maggie's head and staying with them until the nasty bird went on to look for another easy prey.

The red scarf was thrown, the children went on to complete their task, the old neighbour went home and summoned a posse, knowing where the bird's nest was. The best shot in the community was sent out first and he successfully shot the offending hen when she returned to feed her hungry chicks. The most agile youngster was roped and sent down the cliff to destroy the chicks in the nest.

The old male hung around Shetland for a year or two but eventually it too died, thus ending the scourge of the sea eagle in Shetland.

I would never encourage anyone to break the law, but it is a great concern to me that these beautiful but deadly birds are being introduced to Scotland again. My father, who laughed when telling about being torpedoed twice and having an oil tanker go on fire under him, had a terror in his eyes which I never saw at any other time in his life except when telling about their attack by this fearsome predator.

There is also the story of the little girl lying asleep wrapped up in a Shetland hap (shawl – a very important item of attire for both young and old) at the side of the tattie rig, while the

rest of the family were attending the crop. A sea eagle swooped down and snatched the child by the shawl and carried it to its eyrie in the sea cliffs. Once more the community gathered together sending a roped youngster down the cliff where the child was found unharmed. The lass was lucky as the chicks were obviously not hungry. The young man went to sea and after many trips around the world came home and again rescued the now young woman by marrying her and having a large family and there are many people believing they are descendants of this miracle union thus proving that the sea eagle is not all bad.

Although there is as yet no evidence, I suggest crofters should refrain from using red or orange paint on their stock, if there is any possibility of attack from sea eagles, as this may indicate to this natural predator a weakness they can exploit. If we do all we can as crofters, we must insist on whoever authorised the realignment of the balance of nature to compensate us for any damage.

Please let me know of any experiences you have had through unexplained losses and damage and what you believe the problem is. However before compensation can be sought tangible evidence must be presented.

Norman Leask

find us on-line at [www.crofting.org](http://www.crofting.org)

# Livestock burial rules hit both crofters and birds

**T**HE EU Animal By-products Regulation ((EC)1774/2002) is currently being revised, with discussions ongoing in both the European Parliament and Council.

The strict EU rules on carcass disposal were enacted as a result of BSE. However, the number of cases has declined since 2005 after feed rules were tightened up. Sheep and goats don't suffer from BSE. All reported cases of related Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathy (TSE) in these animals are scrapie, a disease not known to transmit to humans.

This regulation dramatically changed livestock management and banned both:

1. the abandonment of dead animals in fields, and
2. their removal to specific designated locations, or 'dumps'.

In Scotland, remote areas were granted a derogation allowing on-farm burial or burning of certain types of carcasses, but crofters who knowingly leave carcasses unburied are still in breach of the law.

This regulation is not only costly and impractical for producers in marginal areas, but has had severe and long term consequences for populations of birds that feed on carrion, such as vultures, kites and eagles. It also hits the many types of invertebrates which on which decomposition, and thus a healthy environment, depends.

The situation is particularly serious in Spain and Portugal, which host more than 50% of the European population of carrion-feeding birds. The plight of groups of starving vultures has been widely reported in the media there.

But it's also a concern in the UK, where there are of course significant populations of golden eagles, red kites and recently-reintroduced white-tailed eagles, all protected under the EU Wild Birds Directive. And of course, for white-tailed eagles in particular, lack of dead food must make the taking of live prey, like lambs, more attractive.

The pressure group BirdLife International is asking for a modification of Article 27 of this regulation to allow easier access for these species to their natural food, while maintaining strict EU biosecurity rules.

BirdLife believes it is appropriate to update the rules for handling animal by-products not suitable for human consumption in order to allow dead livestock to be removed to recognised locations or, as was previously the case, left in the wild where they are immediately consumed by carrion feeders. On this at least, crofters can surely agree wholeheartedly with them.

The BirdLife proposals to modify Article 27 derogations regarding the collection and use of animal by-products would allow member states to implement, where appropriate, a combination of measures.

First, member states should be allowed to establish feeding places, such as those for red kites in Easter Ross, without unnecessary restrictions (for example, on a farm by farm basis), taking into account all threatened carrion-feeding species. But although important, it is crucial not to rely too much on feeding stations. Some of these locations already attract thousands of hungry birds, and there are inherent risks in relying on them too heavily, eg vulnerability to poisoning.

Second, there need to be further measures in areas like the UK uplands where extensive sheep (or goat) farming is widespread. Despite 1.5 million small ruminants being tested for BSE between 2000-2006, only one French goat has exhibited BSE. Yet the carcasses of goats and sheep have still had to be cleared away.

BirdLife say that this is a disproportionate regime. Instead special activity zones for carrion-feeding birds should be defined. In these there would be exceptions to the compulsory removal (or in the case of remote Scotland, burial) of livestock carcasses in areas under extensive management that do not involve specified risk material. In these zones, sheep and goat carcasses could be disposed of naturally. Such exemptions should also extend to extensively-reared cattle younger than 24 months (free from specified risk material).

Further information on this campaign is available from [sacha.cleminson@rspb.org.uk](mailto:sacha.cleminson@rspb.org.uk) 07771 74 3346

*Our thanks to Gwyn Jones for this report*

# First of its kind Highland farming conference a success

**V**ETAID'S Family Farming in east Africa conference, held in Dingwall late last year, gathered members of the agricultural sector and overseas development experts to discuss and debate some of the most pressing issues facing the world's poorest small-scale farmers.

Neil Fisher, former Food Security Advisor for development organisation Action Against Hunger, introduced the group to the countries of east Africa and the types of farming that people are engaged in there. The majority of people living in these areas are subsistence farmers, growing enough crops and rearing livestock for their own needs.

discussed some of the wider issues affecting east African farmers. She considered the impact of bio fuels, trade tariffs and climate change upon their way of life.

VETAID's John Ferguson commented "The conference was an opportunity to reach people in the north of Scotland where there are a lot of smaller farms. I felt we brought something new to the area.

"It's important that we can bring information about people living in other parts of the world to people across Scotland, not just to those living in the cities. So, holding the conference in a rural area has been important in order to reach



Maasai cows

The various crops grown by families in east Africa were considered, plus the pros and cons of some of these crops. For example, ugali (which is made from ground maize) is a staple for many families in the region. But maize is not an indigenous crop and, in fact, traditional vegetables are more nutritious.

Many comparisons between farming in east Africa and in the UK were made. For example, average cereal yields in the east African region are around 1.5 tonnes per hectare while in the UK, each hectare produces an average of 7 tonnes of cereal.

Many of the attendees had lived in east Africa in the past and were interested in learning about farming developments in the region during that time.

Oxfam's Eilidh Whiteford

our target audience. It's clear from the enthusiasm of those who attended that there is an interest in the issues affecting poorer countries in Africa and across the world."

VETAID is a registered charity working for reduction in poverty and increase in food security for people in Kenya, Somalia and Tanzania who are dependent on livestock for survival.

The conference is part of VETAID's Herds and Clans project, which aims to increase awareness of farming in east Africa among the Scottish agricultural community. The project is part of a Europe-wide initiative, run in partnership with *Vétérinaires sans Frontières* (VSF) in France, Italy and Belgium.

For more information, please visit: [www.vetaid.org/sustainable-farming.asp](http://www.vetaid.org/sustainable-farming.asp).

LOCAL FOOD PRODUCTION

# The buzzing of the bees

**WE GIVE THE BEES** their Christmas present ideally on the first calm and sunny day of the year; a slab of confectioner's fondant placed on top of the brood box.

Unfortunately, on Skye where we live, it is seldom sunny or calm in January. This year we battled in one of the many early January gales to remove the various shelters we have built around our beehives to protect them from the winter winds – and more importantly rain (bees hate the wet) – and hastily inserted the sugar before the bees succumbed to the wet and cold.

It is not easy keeping bees this far north and in such a wet climate. It is marginal at the best of times – but it is possible. We took over 20lbs of honey off one of our hives this year and many folk locally took a lot more. But the amount is risible when it is compared to the 90lbs or more it is possible to take off a hive further south and still leave sufficient stores for the bees for winter. Here, however it is essential to feed bees through the winter whether one takes honey off or not, for colonies regularly die out – not due to the causes currently being reported in the national press: varroa mite, colony collapse syndrome, pesticides – but simply due to starvation.

Skye thankfully remains one of the few varroa-free areas left in Britain, for in such a marginal area for bee keeping varroa could well spell its end. When we moved to Skye there was still a ban on importing bees to the island. Unfortunately this restriction has since

been lifted as officially the whole of the British Isles is now considered contaminated with varroa. Tests run by the Skye and Lochalsh Beekeepers last year, however, suggest that Skye is still varroa free and we are all extremely keen to keep it that way. This means it is vital for bee keepers locally to breed new colonies to restock hives and to supply the growing number of new beekeepers and thereby reduce the likelihood that infected stocks are imported.

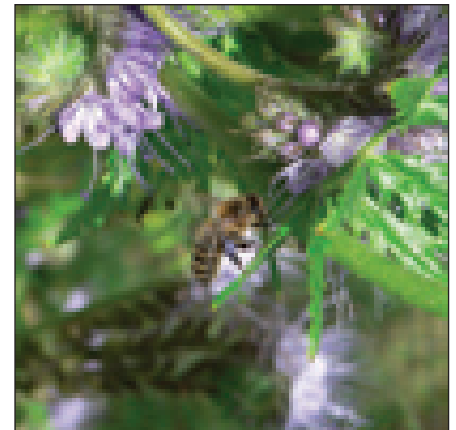
Despite all the publicised difficulties, bee keeping – certainly locally – does seem to be becoming increasingly popular. Personally I am not surprised, as bees are absolutely fascinating creatures for which there should be a place on any croft. They can be as little or as much work as you wish. Some folk keep bees simply as pollinators, never managing them for honey and simply leaving them to breed and naturally re-queen. Others, like ourselves, are more proactive and during the season (May to September) go through the hives every 10 days or so to check things are progressing as we would like.

Even though a lot of crofts these days are essentially used for grazing they would still be able to provide the forage (flowers) that bees need to gather both the pollen and nectar required to survive. Hazel and the hated whin are invaluable sources of early pollen for the young brood in the spring. Spring flowers such as bluebells and primrose are good sources of nectar, as are meadowsweet and brambles later in the year. Then there is the heather at

the end of the season which can be absolutely fantastic forage and produces the wonderful rich-tasting honey for which Scotland is famous.

So, even though the amount of honey at the end of the season and the difficulties of keeping bees on the west coast would perhaps not make a viable business by itself, there is still an incredible value to keeping bees, whether as pollinators, to help supplement other incomes, or for the simple pleasure of hearing the buzzing of the bees.

Jenny Hey



For further information on keeping bees in Skye and Lochalsh please contact Mark Purrett, secretary to Skye and Lochalsh Bee Keepers Association: 01471 866207

CROFTING MARK

## The Crofting Mark in use, promoting products by Kathy Coull

**THE WOOL USED** was home grown on Kathy's croft in Fair Isle. The yarns are hand-spun in Fair Isle, and mill-spun at the Mini-Mill in North Ronaldsay. The weaving was done by Kathy, with the assistance of the

Centre for Creative Industries in Sellafirth. The knitting was, of course, done on Fair Isle.

The produce, therefore, covers a large part of the Northern Isles!

[www.KathyCoull.com](http://www.KathyCoull.com)



**Scottish Crofting Produce**  
 Highlands and Islands Croft Origin  
 Às a' chroit anns a' Ghàidhealtachd 's na h-Eileanan



LOCAL FOOD PRODUCTION

# Farmers' rights – what's in it for crofters?

**C**ROFTING agriculture was and is something very special, in conserving bere, small oat, Shetland oat, Murkle oat, local rye, Shetland cabbage and local potatoes such as Shetland Blue ringed, Shetland Black, Lewis Black, Foula Red and other local varieties.

Many of these have useful traits for breeders – hence the term 'plant genetic resource'. Small oat has been used in disease resistance trials for its big cousin, the mainland oats. Shetland cabbage has been used as a source of clubroot resistance breeding.

Threatened worldwide, since early last century, international organisations have collected seed of local varieties and their wild relatives for genebank conservation. Recently the emphasis has shifted towards conservation on location. This is a dynamic form of conservation that keeps evolution going and allows further adaptation to climate and habitat. As a consequence, the role of farmers who maintain these useful plants has become more highlighted.

Legislation to promote conservation of plant diversity, including agricultural plants, has been developed with the Convention on Biological Diversity (1992) and more recently the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture that came into action in 2004, which the UK ratified in 2006 and is now in the process of implementing.

**So what's in it for crofters?**

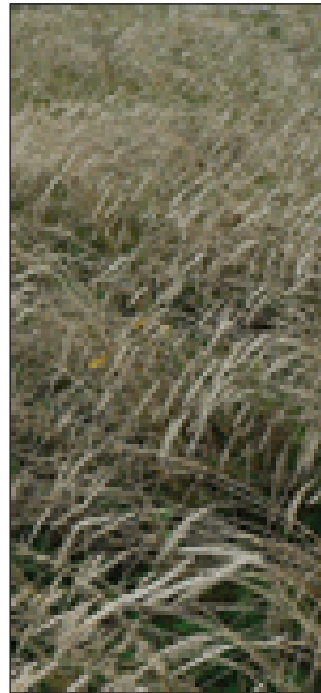
The international treaty aims at conserving a large number of useful plants for food and agriculture by genebank conservation, but also by supporting local management and conserving traditional knowledge associated with the local resources. It also proposes benefit sharing between local communities who maintain the resources and end-users of the plants (for example plant breeders). Finally, it formulates farmers' rights.

Farmers' rights are basically about enabling farmers to continue their work as stewards and innovators of agricultural biodiversity, and about recognizing and rewarding them for their contribution to the global pool of genetic resources.

Farmers' organisations have successfully seized the opportunity this treaty opens to real-



Shetland cabbage seed plant



A pure stand of Uist Rye



Safeguarding the survival of local varieties



Stewardship of plant genetic resources

Photos: Maria Scholten

ise farmers' rights: rediscovering and documenting traditional knowledge (Norway), organising community gene banks (India), adding value to local varieties (Nepal), capacity building in seed potato selection (Kenya). In France farmers' organisations, in collaboration with scientists, suc-

cessfully reintroduced traditional varieties and adapted them to farmer's needs and to the local environments. This is a combination of conservation and development, ie improving local varieties for yield or disease resistance. In the French case organic breeding principles were used, suitable

for low input cropping. (Examples all taken from the website [www.farmersrights.org](http://www.farmersrights.org)).

In the UK implementation is in process. Because the treaty text is difficult, combined with the rarity of local varieties, the Scottish small oat and bere maintained by crofters can be easily overlooked. Authorities involved may also not yet have thought of realising farmers' rights associated with local varieties and their maintainers – in Scotland, mainly crofters.

Realising farmers' rights could have several benefits. Western Isles local biodiversity action plan's proposal (2004) to include seed production of local varieties into agro-environmental schemes has not been followed up. The work and expertise of local seed growers deserves acknowledgment and support. By supplying seed to others they provide a community service and – by maintaining a variety of local seed stocks and guaranteeing the survival of local varieties – also a public service, ie in situ conservation.

Support for marketing and development could be another action point.

Raising the profile of local varieties may help to balance the SRDP's treatment of plant genetic resources in which native willow seeds are now treated as plant genetic resources and collecting native seeds accredited, but no mention of, let alone accrediting, other plant genetic resources such as local crop varieties which contribute significantly to wildlife.

**Further information:**

- Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) (1992): commits national governments to inventory, monitor and conserve biodiversity, including agricultural biodiversity, both in genebanks and on location <http://www.cbd.int/convention/convention.shtml>
- International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGRFA) <http://www.planttreaty.org/>
- Scottish local varieties and their genebank conservation: <http://www.scottishlandraces.org.uk/>

*Maria Scholten is an independent research professional, currently working on small oat and Shetland cabbage at SAC Edinburgh. This article represents her personal opinion.*

Maria Scholten

# Members discount scheme

These suppliers offer a discount to SCF members. Please contact individual suppliers for further details.

- **Agricultural Supplies and Machinery**  
Hamilton Brothers Groundcare and Agricultural Equipment  
Bishopton 07771 577889

Linklater Engineering  
Stenness, Orkney  
01856 851 000

Foyers Services Ltd, Foyers  
01456 486333

Animal Health, Dingwall  
01349 865425

CSC Crop Production Ltd  
Culbokie, Dingwall  
01349 877557

Dean K Gilfillan  
Weasdale, Shetland  
01595 830248

Horner Shearing Equipment  
Bolton by Bowland, near Clitheroe  
01200 441284
- **Building Supplies**  
Highland Services Building Supplies  
Tobermory, Isle of Mull  
01688 302296

Wood-bees Hardware  
Thurso  
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Highland Industrial Supplies  
Inverness 01463239160  
Fort William 01397 705159  
Elgin 01343 547561  
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Beaver Timber, Sheds, Garages  
Oban  
01631 720353
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Filpumps  
Inverurie, Aberdeenshire  
01467 623010
- **Trees**  
Taynuilt Trees, Taynuilt  
01866 822591
- **Bulbs etc**  
Evelix Daffodils, Dornoch  
01862 810715
- **Office Supplies and Stationary**  
Point 1 Technologies, Stornoway,  
Isle of Lewis  
01851 703244
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Harris Home Furnishings  
Edinbane Isle of Skye  
01470 582 255

# Future Farmer Award 2009

**E**ACH YEAR the Future Farmer Award supports a farmer or crofter who is managing land in ways which promote sustainability and who would like to share ideas with others. The 2009 Future Farmer Award is now open for entries, with a closing date of 13 April.

The winning Scottish farmer/crofter will be awarded £4,000 and a package of practical support to help communicate ideas to other land managers. The cash can be used either to fund a specific project or simply to allow the winner take time away from the farm or croft work to speak at events or host farm/croft walks.

The award was set up to encourage creative thinking and positive action on sustainability in Scottish agriculture. It aims to help farmers/crofters learn from each other about practical ways of making land management more sustainable – things which can be seen working on the ground on Scottish farms and crofts.

Award organisers are looking for ideas which promote sustainability and which could be taken up by other land managers. The ideas do not have to be unique but the winner will be someone who is doing something practical on the ground and who is prepared commit time over the year to sharing his or her knowledge and experience.

The award is able to support a wide range of initiatives, for example:

- managing soils to reduce flooding risk
- cutting CO<sub>2</sub> emissions on-farm and in supply chains
- integrating native woodland management with grazing livestock
- choosing crops varieties which are

**Scottish farmers urged to submit ideas for sustainability award**

resilient to wet summers

- developing new ideas for productive and sustainable management of hill ground
- running farm machinery on farm-produced bio-fuel
- creating the right conditions for commercially useful 'wild' plants to grow

Other ideas are welcome and anyone who is responsible for managing productive land in Scotland is eligible, whether he or she is an owner, tenant, crofter or employee. In 2009 the organisers are particularly interested in ideas which combine environmental sustainability with economic advantage.

Land managers can apply on their own behalf by submitting a few paragraphs about why they would like to enter the award via the website at [www.futurefarmer.org.uk](http://www.futurefarmer.org.uk). Alternatively, anyone can nominate a farmer or crofter who they think should be considered for the award.

The Future Farmer Award is an initiative of the Murray Trust and is financially supported by

Scottish Natural Heritage. The presentation of the award is sponsored by Savills and will take place at the Royal Highland Show in June 2009.

Full details about the award are at [www.futurefarmer.org.uk](http://www.futurefarmer.org.uk) along with information about last year's winner, Whitmuir Farm, including photos and a video clip. Whitmuir Farm will conclude its year as Future Farmer Award winner by hosting an open day in May.

For further information contact: Anna Ashmole, Food and Farming Consultant  
T: 01899 830 536 E: [anna@futurefarmer.org.uk](mailto:anna@futurefarmer.org.uk)  
[www.futurefarmer.org.uk](http://www.futurefarmer.org.uk)

## Making a will – why it's important

**T**HINKING ABOUT MAKING A WILL may seem daunting; as a crofter you will almost certainly have a dozen or more things to do at any given time and making a will may not be high on the list of priorities. It may also seem a bit morbid.

However making a will is simple and is an important way to protect the future of your loved ones. It's the only way to be absolutely certain that your belongings, your estate, goes to the people and causes you want them to and it allows you to decide how your estate is shared out.

If you die without a will (intestate) there are certain rules which dictate how your possessions will be allocated and this may not be the way that you would have wished. For example when two or more people are entitled to a share in the estate, the executor must decide which one of them should obtain the croft tenancy. If the value of the tenancy is worth more than the individual's share of the estate he or she would be required to pay the difference to the executor so that it can be dispensed among the beneficiaries. Alternatively, an executor may decide to realise the value of the croft tenancy and divide this among the beneficiaries. As a crofter you are entitled to leave the tenancy of your croft to

a person of your choice and the best way to ensure that your wishes are carried out is to make a valid will.

It also makes sound financial sense to make a will, as failure to do so means your family may end up paying more inheritance tax than necessary – this is currently charged at 40% – so rather than your estate going to who you want it to it could go to the state. This is a complex subject that your solicitor will be able to advise you on.

You may consider leaving a gift, a legacy to charity. A common misconception is that a legacy is an enormous sum of money, but this is not the case. Any gift left in a will, no matter how large or how small, is an important legacy to the charities you support.

Please consider leaving a gift in your will to the Scottish Crofting Foundation and help support crofting for future generations.

If you would like further advice about succession of croft tenancies, the Crofters Commission produce a helpful booklet. Phone 01463 663450 to obtain a copy. If you want further advice on making a will, your solicitor or the Citizens' Advice Bureaux will be able to help, or you can find a lot of useful information on the internet – and you can actually make your will on-line.

## Community energy powering ahead

**T**WENTY FIVE new community jobs have been created across Scotland from Shetland to the borders, thanks to funding of over £1,494,000 from the Scottish Government's Climate Challenge Fund, the largest award to date.

Community Powerdown is a consortium of 27 community groups, supported by Community Energy Scotland (CES, a Dingwall-based charity) and Development Trusts Association Scotland (DTAS).

DTAS set up to help communities tackle climate change by reducing their carbon dioxide emissions. This is the largest Climate Challenge Fund award since its inception in 2008, and highlights the significance of the Powerdown programme.

The 25 new jobs means a massive boost for the communities involved to develop a wide range of 'low carbon' community projects, 20 of these new jobs being in the Highlands and Island area. Projects include setting up local food allotments and markets, using electric vehicles, thermal imaging cameras for energy audits, developing local renewable energy generation and restoring old hydro schemes. The Powerdown consortium will show that it is possible for communities to develop and thrive whilst at the same time reducing their reliance on fossil fuels. The funding will enable project officers to be appointed in 25 communities and additional support to the remaining two communities, giving a massive boost to each community's plans.

Urras Oighreachd Ghabhsainn (Galson Estate Trust) is one of Western Isles community groups who will benefit from the funding.

Carola Bell of UOG responded: "This award gives our community the opportunity to make energy use more efficient. There will be many benefits in sharing knowledge and experience with the other groups involved and the support will create a full-time local post. The trust aims to increase understanding on local fossil fuel and energy efficiency issues, analyse local properties in terms of energy efficiency and build on these two actions with a scheme to tackle fuel poverty in the area. There will also be development of regular crofters' markets to sell local produce and to encourage increased food production in the area."

Eric Larnach from Latheron Lybster and Clyth Community Development Company in Caithness commented: "This funding and partnership working with Community Energy Scotland and DTAS will be the ideal vehicle to allow us to develop our local projects to reduce carbon emissions and become more energy efficient. Our projects will include a locally-grown food initiative, a poly tunnel project for education on locally-grown food linked to a healthy eating initiative and a community-owned wind project to deliver renewable energy, as well as an information and education centre – working with both primary schools and secondary schools in Caithness.

Community Energy Scotland also now leads Scotland's first national community energy network and communities wishing to join the network can find details at [www.communityenergyscotland.org.uk](http://www.communityenergyscotland.org.uk) or call Marion O'Hara, membership manager, on 01349 860122.



Carola Bell and colleagues at Galston

## Becky Shaw

Becky Shaw, probably one of the best known faces in Scottish rural development and crofting, has left the SCF to work as a freelance consultant.

Originally trained as a lawyer in Edinburgh and with a masters in sustainable rural development from Aberdeen, Becky joined the SCF in 2001 as the environment policy officer. She became known for her very keen grasp of rural policy issues, her huge commitment to crofting and for her cheerful disposition!

Becky then managed the SCF croft land use programme for its three years and continued working for us in policy analysis. She was also seconded for part of her time to the Committee of Inquiry on Crofting, one of the most important pieces of research done on crofting for decades.

Becky has been a great pleasure to work with for all in the SCF and we hope that there will still be opportunities for us to work together. We all wish her the very best in her new endeavours.

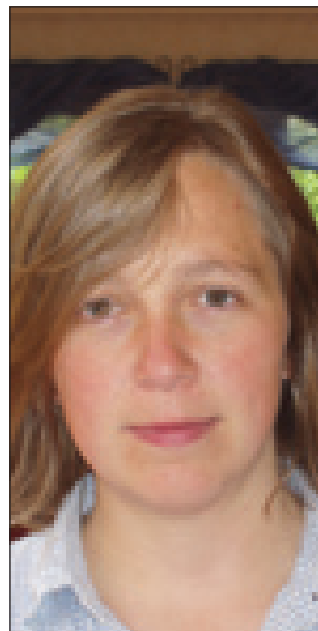


## Scottish Crofting Federation

**A**T LAST YEAR'S AGM we discussed the name of the organisation and whether we should consider amending it.

There are several reasons to even contemplate this. Firstly, there was a sense of loss over the 'Union' part of the name going in the change to charitable status (though it was at the time the law that dictated this); secondly, 'Foundation' can be confusing as in development and funding circles this is a name given to a grant-awarding body; and thirdly, as the only member-led organisation promoting crofting the representative status of the SCF could be reflected better in its name.

So, after many contributions the consensus is currently to return to the name 'Federation' which indicates that we work as a group of self-governing areas who share a common goal – to safeguard and promote the rights, livelihoods and culture of crofters and their communities. This will be put to the AGM as a resolution in June. If you have any opinion on this please let it be known.



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## MEMBERS' PAGES

## Membership – spreading the word

**I**N THIS EDITION of The Crofter you will find enclosed a membership leaflet/application form, which we hope you will be able to persuade a friend or neighbour to complete.

By joining the Scottish Crofting Foundation a new member will become a vital part of the only member-led organisation dedicated to the promotion of crofting and the largest association of small-scale food producers in the UK.

Crofting is going through changing times, with more reforms of legislation and policy that effect crofting happening than at any other time in the history of crofting. We must remain ever vigilant to ensure that crofters and crofting do not suffer in any way at the hands of those who think they know what's best for us: civil servants, decision makers, those in the corridors of power.

To enable us to do so in the most effective and democratic way we must have a strong and vibrant membership along with the finances that enable us to keep us in touch with what is going on, to help prepare us to meet any proposed changes with reasoned argument or even approval.

To say that SCF needs more members to make it more effective is an obvious statement

but the strength and clout any representative organisation has is directly related to the size of its membership.

The many reasons why anyone would want to become a member of this uniquely important organisation are contained in the

**Yes, you only have to recruit one person to make a difference.**

membership leaflet and it would be a relatively easy task for any of our present members to seek out a fellow crofter (whether an active crofter or not), who is either a lapsed member or a potential new member. Yes, you only have to recruit one person to make a difference.

Attracting new members is the most pressing need for the SCF at the present time and playing your part in keeping this organisation at the forefront of rural affairs is something fellow members and future generations will greatly appreciate and thank you for.

Can you recruit a member? Or even several? If you need extra membership forms, a phone call or email to Marion at HQ is all that's necessary to get them.

## A reminisce

**L**AST YEAR I got an opportunity to attend the annual conference of the Scottish Crofting Foundation in Barra when one of our area representatives had to pull out.

I had not attended such an event since many years, although I was pretty much there about when the Crofters Union was set up and for a good few years afterwards. So it was interesting to observe the organisation in its present guise.

I must say that the event was very enjoyable. It was well run and the island hospitality could not be faulted. I could only describe the atmosphere as but a happy one. Being a hands-on crofter it was not hard to find common ground and it was heartening to see so many able people involved in the cause of crofting. I think that the founding fathers of the movement would be well pleased.

At the start of the Crofters Union, there was an air of enthusiasm and vigour. Some of us thought that one of the strengths of such an organisation might be that crofters throughout the highlands could get together, socialise and exchange opinions. Our local branch had a stab at this with one or two bus outings to other places. Our most memorable trip was to Skye when the crofters of Portnalong gave us a great highland day.

Sadly, the logistics of such an ideal are against it and it is very hard to keep up the momentum, especially among crofters where any sort of jolly has to take second place to the task in mind. After a few years, we had to give up – you need a pretty full bus to make it pay and it just wasn't forthcoming. Our last crofters' trip was to Lochaber, meeting up with the crofters of Corpach who

## Meetings, meetings, meetings

**T**HE SCOTTISH CROFTING FOUNDATION is invited to participate in numerous meetings about matters pertaining to crofting – every week SCF people are making the case for crofting at the Scottish Parliament, in London, to the EU and to all the agencies and organisations that impact on our way of life.

These meetings show the regard that policy-makers have for the Foundation and the importance placed on our participation. Just think what would happen if decisions on all these issues were made without any representation for crofters. This is why it is so vital to have a vibrant organisation with as many members as possible.

And remember, most of the SCF representatives who attend these groups are crofters just like you, elected officials of the SCF who give up days of their own time to fight on your behalf for no remuneration, just for the good of the cause. In respect to their endeavours, we must all try to encourage more people to become members, to stand for office and to strive for a positive future for crofting. Together we can do it.

A summary of recent meetings attended by SCF representatives on your behalf:

- Ministerial statement on ColoC
- Crofting cross-party group
- Rural policy cross party group
- International Food Policy congress
- National Food policy conference
- Crofting assessors seminar
- Foundation for Common Land inaugural meeting
- Scottish Land Court – Askernish case
- CAP health check
- Sea eagle management meetings
- Bluetongue stakeholder meetings
- LFASS stakeholder meetings
- Comhairle nan Eilean's crofting joint consultative committee
- Meetings with MEPs
- Meetings with MSPs
- House of Lords evidence to the inquiry on LFASS
- FSA meat products meeting
- FSA food advisory committee
- RSE hills and islands report presentations
- LEADER meetings
- Lantra training meetings
- EID sheep tagging meetings
- Goose predation
- Crown Estate review



showed us around their patch. But from a busload of forty, only around a dozen of us went on the croft tour. The remainder were ladies on board for a day out and a look at what the shops of Fort William had to offer. We had lost the theme of the venture.

Mind you, there are people around who remember these trips and I still get, "That would be an interesting place to go to." So you never know.

*John MacDonald, a stalwart of the SCF's Rogart Branch in East Sutherland*

## FWAGS Funding Crisis

**T**HE FARMING and Wildlife Advisory Group Scotland (FWAGS) has encountered serious cashflow problems due to cessation of its main funding and faces closure. Having come into existence as an independent charity only in November 2007 (after having been part of FWAG, the UK-wide organisation, for 25 years) this comes as a major blow to all involved in environmentally-friendly food production.

Crofters will have been familiar with FWAGS' farm conservation advisers who help them to secure agri-environment funding, manage wildlife and business integration and form croft development plans.

Funded in the most part by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), FWAGS was known for its local knowledge and 'bottom-up' approach. Let's hope that something of the organisation can be re-generated and that FWAGS will survive in some form to continue its good work.

## MEMBERS' PAGES

## Advertise your business on the SCF website

Self catering cottage to let? B&B? Do you run fishing trips or sell crafts?

If you have a tourist business then you can advertise on the SCF website. Look under Croft Holidays on [www.crofting.org](http://www.crofting.org)

Provide two photos, a brief description, grading (if you have one), contact details (name, phone, email and website). The cost will be £35 for the first year.

You must be an SCF member and the business must be run by yourself or an immediate family member on a working croft.

Contact HQ 01599 566365 for more details.

## NEW OPPORTUNITY

On our new Croftmart adverts page on the website, you can have a classified ad on the internet at the same cost as in *The Crofter*. If you already advertise your business in *The Crofter*, you can have an ad on the internet for half price. Contact Calina on 01478 640 276.

## Crofting induction courses

**D**ESPITE THE TRIALS and tribulations encountered over the past few months with our various funding bids for support in running the crofting induction courses, I am very happy to report that with financial help from HIE these are now finally underway.

This year we are running courses in Skye, Wester Ross, Barra, Speyside and Easter Ross. We have to thank our intrepid local course directors for hanging on, way past our normal starting point, for the funding to be confirmed and the go ahead to be given.

Because of this very short and intense lead-in time, some areas have experienced problems with booking venues and course tutors. It would also appear that the current financial climate is having an impact on availability of staff from agencies, especially those involved with SRDP applications, and this has made the task of local course directors more difficult than ever before. Costs and availability of venues have also been an issue, due in part to the number of schools and public facilities which are now under PFI management.

However, despite all these local difficulties our course directors have made stalwart efforts and all the courses will run with upwards of eight students attending each one. Some locations always prove popular and within a few days of advertising the courses, a waiting list has had to be compiled.

Earlier, in autumn 2008, Shetland College

asked us if they could run a crofting induction course for interested students. This was agreed and the course synopsis and format was passed on to them for delivery with the course completed successfully just before Christmas. Thanks to Evelyn Leask and Roselyn Fraser for their dedication in getting this course organised and running.

We are, of course, always looking to the future and in this regard we have teamed up – through the crofting training panel – with Lantra, to prepare and submit a large funding bid to SRDP to take forward the crofting skills training programme that has been under development for the past two years or so. If this bid is successful, we will be working with Lantra to deliver some locally-based training courses, identify prospective crofting skills trainers and mentors as well as securing the short-term future of the induction courses. It is also hoped to take forward work on the crofting skills workbooks and develop further the online programme. This is a large (for us!) and fairly complex funding application and we hope to have further details in our next issue. For more information on training opportunities in general, please contact our training co-ordinator, *Calina MacDonald*, on 01478 640276 or direct at SCF HQ on 01599 566375 or e-mail: [training@crofting.org](mailto:training@crofting.org).

The following are details of the current induction courses and course organisers.

LOCATION	COURSE ORGANISER
Easter Ross	Marj Donaldson Tel: 01349 861956 (Dingwall Academy)
Isle of Skye	Angus Robertson Tel: 01471 820342 (SLCVO Office, Portree)
Speyside/Moray	Fiona Powell Tel: 01343 835845 (Grantown Grammer School)
Isle of Barra	Nick Brannigann Tel: 07773 131576 (St Barrs Hall, Northbay)
Wester Ross	Kristine MacKenzie Tel: 01520 722882 (Strathcarron Centre)

## Branch meeting news

### Tiree Branch

We, the committee, were very disappointed on the night of our AGM that no one came to our meeting except two members.

However, I must say we had an exciting time in the autumn, discussing, writing letters to different departments – such as Alasdair Darling about red and white diesel, Argyll Estates on geese and rent, a letter to Mike Russell MSP and discussion of the Shucksmith Report. Some of the matters mentioned were a surprise to the crofters.

The day of the meeting, 5th February, I received a phone message from Colin Macfarlane SNP to say that he is coming to Tiree on Wednesday 25th February to hold a meeting about the geese; coming with him is Graham Pirie, Department of Agriculture – so I look forward to this meeting. We have had very wet weather and gales in January but now we are enjoying lovely weather, sunshine by day, moonlight by night, so calm, it is lovely to see the cattle and sheep lying relaxed. Few gathered sea weed, so it is good to see this again, an old time custom.

Mary MacKinnon  
Secretary

### East Sutherland Branch

At a well attended AGM of the Kyle of Sutherland and Lairg Branch in Ardgay recently, Simon Allison of the Crofters Commission gave an excellent and much appreciated breakdown of the SRDP scheme and the opportunities it presented for those with broadband, who could cut their way through the online maze. Simon's customised presentation will certainly encourage quite a few of those present to press ahead with applications.

Office-bearers Russell Smith (branch secretary), Robin Ross (treasurer) and Jim McGillivray (chairman) were re-elected to serve another term.

### You are invited to ...

#### Skye and Lochalsh Area AGM

Thursday 26 March 7.30 pm  
Shinty club Portree. Speakers to be confirmed. Please look in the press for more information nearer the time.

#### Lewis Branch AGM

Tuesday 31 March 09  
Council Chambers, Sandwick Road, Stornoway, at 7.30pm

Main guest speaker:  
Chloe Randall  
(farmer and entrepreneur) Dunlossit Estate, Islay

#### Inverness and east Highland Area AGM

Wednesday 25 March 7.30 pm  
Boat of Garten Village Hall

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## Coming to a computer near you

**I**N THE PAST, some of you may have subscribed to the monthly email bulletins that came from the Scottish Community Land Network.

And recently, the very astute amongst you might have noticed a lull in those newsletters popping into your email inbox. But, like a phoenix from the ashes, the Scottish Community Land Network (SCLN) has risen again, reinvigorated and hopefully coming to a computer near you.

You'll find SCLN online at [www.communityland.org.uk](http://www.communityland.org.uk). It's a useful mix of articles about what's going on in the world of community land; an events calendar; a who's who directory so you can find an expert in most things and a forum so you can vent your spleen without searching for a soapbox.

As from this month we have a new feature on the site that we've called "Give us a CLU" – staff from the Community Land Unit (CLU) at Highlands and Islands Enterprise have agreed to provide a virtual helpline through our forum. So if you have a burning question and need an expert answer, register on the site and get typing. If there's anything the CLU staff can't help you with, they'll do their best to point you in the right direction.

With over 450 members already, the network's rapidly turning into the place to keep in touch with the community land sector. Each subscriber can see the forum discussions, search the database

of other subscribers and get more information on each story on the site. You'll also receive a monthly e-bulletin which brings together all the recent activity from the site, including the latest community land news; discussions posted on the forum and upcoming events.

Many of the articles that are included on the site will be of particular interest to crofters – recent examples include pieces on the Shucksmith report, the demise of the bull hire scheme and the opportunities for renewable energy development.

If you'd like to receive all this information for FREE and have a chance to get in touch with others interested in community land, you can register on the site by going to [www.communityland.org.uk](http://www.communityland.org.uk) and entering a few simple details.

The site is being managed by Walking-the-Talk, a small rural business based in Aberdeenshire, on behalf of Highlands and Islands Enterprise. If you want to know more about the network and how it operates, you can contact Walking-the-Talk through [www.communityland.org.uk](http://www.communityland.org.uk).

Rather than just providing information, we hope that SCLN will grow into a truly interactive space where crofters, community land groups and others can stay in touch and learn from each other. You could call it a network, I suppose!

*Tamsin Morris*

## Angus MacNeil MP



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Tel no 70 2272

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# Scottish Crofting Foundation contacts list

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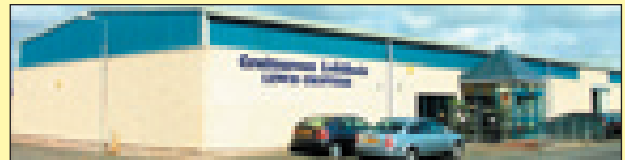


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## CROFTING HEROES

A new topic, in which we feature a well-known crofting figure. We start the series with a profile of Alastair MacIver, Rogart, written by his old friend and colleague, John MacDonald.

# Alastair MacIver – crofter, diplomat



**A**LASTAIR was born in Brora on the coast of East Sutherland, into a district with modest crofts, many still occupied by the descendants of those cleared from the valley of the River Brora in 1819.

Early in his life tragedy struck when both his parents were taken through illness. Alastair and his brother were looked after and brought up by their grandparents. Alastair was sent up to the maternal grandmother and uncle in Rossal, Rogart.

His education was in the local school at Blarich followed by two years secondary education in Lairg. The latter did not inspire him for further education at that stage in life so he left school and started work on Blarich farm, getting good hands-on experience of agriculture. Then, into his mid-fifties with the forestry commission very active, Alastair left the farm to work with a local contractor help erect forestry fences.

Soon another job opportunity occurred when there was a vacancy in the local roads squad of which his uncle Alex was foreman. This was around the same time that the local authority acquired ex-army four-wheel-drive lorries to update their fleet of snow-clearing machines. Alastair became one of the snowplough drivers, a duty he performed for many years and in the process of which he gained a reputation for skilled driving in often very adverse conditions. He became the roads foreman when Alex retired.

During the sixties and seventies there was a new idea on the go for assessing efficiency in the work place: "work study" was the in thing. Alastair put himself forward in answer to a recruiting initiative by the council and along with a few others was sent to Inverness to get trained. This opened the door for further opportunities.

One involved the changeover

from local to regional council in 1975 which brought with it many problems. One of these was a bonus scheme for Inverness council workers. Alastair was to spend the next three years in Inverness supervising the transition of this scheme. This also led to an interest in union activities, which saw him become a representative for the council workers union – a position he holds to this day.

His next involvement was with a management services section, based in Brora but covering the whole Highland Region. This saw him drive vast distances in the line of duty. Following this he was put in charge of a manpower services unit, setting up and supervising youth training schemes. Most of us oldies will remember "YOP."

By the time that this scheme was being wound down, Alastair was 64 and accepted the opportunity of retirement and more time to work the croft. Although working on the home croft all his life, it was only in 1981 when Uncle Alex died, that Alastair took up the tenancy. He greatly increased the sheep flock, upped the cow numbers, built a new house for the croft and following that a splendid large shed.

Fitting in croft work in with such a busy schedule meant a lot of planning and organising, the occasional help from his neighbours being called upon and rewarded in kind when appropriate. He supported the local hill grazings committee, seeking it to take advantage of the grants on offer, one of these being for a forestry scheme.

As if this was not enough, there was the commitment to the local community council, which he served in various capacities including a long spell as chairman.

Parallel to all this was his part in the SCU and SCF. He was there at the inaugural meeting of the SCU in November 1985 and was the second chairman to serve the local branch. Attending every branch and area meeting was the norm. Soon he was rising up the hierarchy of the organisation, attending council and serving for two and a half years as president.

Alastair was constantly being called on to fulfil diplomatic and representative positions for the organisation, attending annually the hill farming review in Edinburgh, trips to Brussels to

put forward a case in support of crofting, special meetings with the then Secretary of State. All the while honing his skills as an arbitrator.

Perhaps his best hour was at the time of the change from SCU to the SCF. It was a time

of much unrest and resignation of active members. The boat got pretty rocky for a while. Alastair was there at the right time to give guidance and encourage change which led to calmer waters.

Alastair still serves the SCF as company secretary.



Peat turning c1975 showing Alastair with his family John and Linda and uncle Alex Vass on plough



Snow plough c 1956



Alastair presenting the township of the year award

# PESTICIDE LIMITS BY EUROPARLIAMENT

Hugh Raven, director of Soil Association Scotland, on the pesticide ban debate

**I**N JANUARY the European Parliament voted to phase out some of the most dangerous pesticides licensed for use in the EU. They should be congratulated for upholding the public interest.

In the current economic climate, we should sympathise with anyone worried about the viability of their business. But I find it hard to understand the subsequent over-reaction to these modest proposals.

The marginal reduction in the number of Europe's more dangerous pesticides is a small step in the right direction. Don't overestimate its significance – it applies to what the European Commission reckons to be five per cent of EU-approved pesticides. Of that small number, most that in due course will go are known endocrine disruptors (ie they can upset human hormone systems). A smaller number are linked with cancer, cause cell mutations or are toxic to reproduction.

Don't take my word for their danger. Professor Vyvyan Howard, a member of the Government's own official advisory committee on pesticides, said recently: "What I find most absurd is the claim that the EU proposals are not based on science. Whole teams of national and European scientific experts are involved. Where a specific pesticide is classified as being

carcinogenic it's because there is substantive scientific evidence linking that substance with cancer."

Nor will these dangerous products be withdrawn at once. The new rules will leave many of them on the market for up to several years, because pesticides that are currently approved for sale will remain available until the authorization expires.

To its shame, the UK government is one of the few in the EU to oppose this small step. Perhaps it was taken in by suggestions that prices of some crops could treble without these sprays. The growing of carrots and sugar beet in the UK could stop altogether, we were told, and wheat yields could be more than halved. Potato yields could drop by sixty per cent, one farming spokesman screamed in the *Farmers' Weekly*, and "At least 10p will go on a loaf of bread, 3p on a litre of milk and 40p on a kilogram of pork," wailed another.

Perhaps we should not be surprised at the extravagance of these claims. Steps towards safer food supplies have almost always been opposed by small but vociferous lobbies. Over the years many deadly poisons have been removed from use, sometimes accompanied by dire warnings about the consequences for food prices. Yet until recently, prices fell almost continuously for generations. And so far as I know, no-one is claiming recent price

increases are in any way related to limits on poisonous chemicals.

Don't expect this time to be any different. The crops in question will continue to be grown. Perhaps the production conditions will change somewhat. More natural methods of husbandry, with rotations that break the cycle of disease and pest attacks, may make a welcome comeback. Arable and livestock production could be reintegrated in the sort of mixed farming that for so long was the mainstay of the Scottish agricultural economy. More resistant varieties of crops could and should be used, and new ones bred for a post-pesticide era.

Most Scottish producers don't and haven't ever used these products. I'd be surprised if some of them have ever been used in crofting.

Farming, crofting and growing can thrive without them. Again, don't take my word for it. Farmers have been producing healthy crops without them for years. Organic producers have been proving that season after season for at least the last thirty years – and so have crofters.

A shorter version of this article appeared in *The Scotsman* in January.

[www.soilassociation.org](http://www.soilassociation.org)

## Future Farmer Award 2009



**E**ACH YEAR the Future Farmer Award supports a farmer or crofter who is managing land in ways which promote sustainability and who would like to share ideas with others. The 2009 Future Farmer Award is now open for entries, with a closing date of 13 April.

The winning Scottish farmer/crofter will be awarded £4,000 and a package of practical support to help communicate ideas to other land managers. The cash can be used either to fund a specific project or simply to allow the winner take time away from the

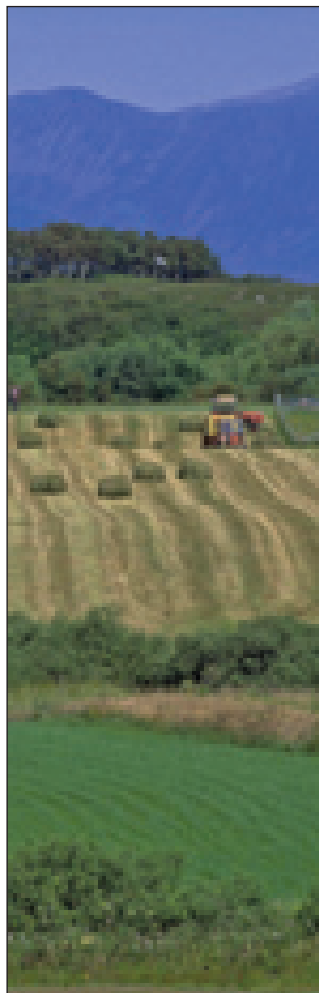
sustainable – things which can be seen working on the ground on Scottish farms and crofts.

Award organisers are looking for ideas which promote sustainability and which could be taken up by other land managers. The ideas do not have to be unique but the winner will be someone who is doing something practical on the ground and who is prepared to commit time over the year to sharing his or her knowledge and experience.

The award is able to support a wide range of initiatives, for example:

- managing soils to reduce flooding risk
- cutting CO<sub>2</sub> emissions on-farm and in supply chains
- integrating native woodland management with grazing livestock
- choosing crops varieties which are resilient to wet summers
- developing new ideas for productive and sustainable management of hill ground
- running farm machinery on farm-produced bio-fuel
- creating the right conditions for commercially useful wild plants to grow

Other ideas are welcome and anyone who is responsible for managing productive land in



Scotland is eligible, whether he or she is an owner, tenant, crofter or employee. In 2009 the organisers are particularly interested in ideas which combine environmental sustainability with economic advantage.

Land managers can apply on their own behalf by submitting a few paragraphs about why they would like to enter the award via the website at [www.futurefarmer.org.uk](http://www.futurefarmer.org.uk). Alternatively, anyone can nominate a farmer or crofter who they think should be considered for the award.

The Future Farmer Award is an initiative of the Murray Trust and is financially supported by Scottish Natural Heritage. The presentation of the award is sponsored by Savills and will take place at the Royal Highland Show in June 2009.

Full details about the award are at [www.futurefarmer.org.uk](http://www.futurefarmer.org.uk) along with information about last year's winner, Whitmuir Farm, including photos and a video clip. Whitmuir Farm will conclude its year as Future Farmer Award winner by hosting an open day in May.

For further information contact: Anna Ashmole, Food and Farming Consultant

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[www.futurefarmer.org.uk](http://www.futurefarmer.org.uk)

**Scottish crofters urged to submit ideas for sustainability award**

farm or croft work to speak at events or host farm/croft walks.

The award was set up to encourage creative thinking and positive action on sustainability in Scottish agriculture. It aims to help farmers/crofters learn from each other about practical ways of making land management more

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# Crofting in the curriculum

**A**SCHOOL in the Western Isles is providing a model for the rest of Scotland in teaching crofting as part of the curriculum. The course was launched by the Minister for Environment, Michael Russell MSP at Sgoil Lionacleit on December 1st.

Until now the skills required to manage, care for and reap a return from the land have been unrecognised in schools. The new National Course in Crofting is now being taught to pupils as well as their other curricular subjects.

Being taught by a crofter and a teacher on a croft, pupils learn about land – soils, crops and weather; livestock – including breeds, welfare and management; the natural environment; diversification; history, and regulation. Gaelic is embedded in the course.

The crofting year is a Scottish progression award for secondary pupils, starting in

third year with pupils progressing through Intermediate 1, achieving an Intermediate 2 qualification at the end of the two years.

It has taken two years from recognising the need to accredit the skills specific to crofting, with its unique method of land custodianship, gaining approval from the SQA (Scottish Qualifications Authority) to write the specialised course materials in Uist, a crofting area, with a view to it being rolled out in schools across the Highlands and Islands, traditionally the crofting counties.

Councillor Archie Campbell, chair of the Sustainable Development Committee for Comhairle nan Eilean Siar said: "In the current time of change, the way land is viewed, how it is managed, how far food has travelled and how it has been produced all mean that a low-intensity, locally-produced, land management philosophy compatible with the urban

'allotment revolution' points to crofting as a model form of sustainable agriculture."

The crofting course is one of a number of accredited vocational courses being offered by Western Isles schools to help make education increasingly relevant to the needs and aspirations of young people and help meet the needs of the local economy.

Already running are courses leading to qualifications in traditional boatbuilding, roof slating and tiling, hospitality and catering and currently work is in the production of a new course related to the Harris Tweed industry.

This determined-to-succeed applied-education approach seeks to promote the development of skills for life and skills for work in young people, making them in turn more effective social and economic contributors in the future.



## New person in charge of Crofter advertising

**C**ALINA MACDONALD has been dealing with the advertising in *The Crofter* for a few years now, but is about to move on to filming for a series in Gaelic on gardening. We wish Calina well in this new career as a film star.

Taking over Calina's role for the next issue will be Claire Nicolson. Originally a city-dweller from Edinburgh, Claire discovered crofting on a family holiday in the west Highlands at the age of seven and became hooked. It took a further twenty-odd years to find herself the right crofter and settle down. She and her family live on her husband's family croft in Duisdale, Isle of Skye, where they keep sheep and cattle.

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## Dates for your diary

**T**he SCF's Annual General Meeting will be held on **Tuesday 23<sup>rd</sup> June** in Dingwall Auction Mart.

Full details and a calling notice will appear in the June edition of *The Crofter*.

Our Annual Gathering will this year take crofters to one of the newly designated crofting areas of Grantown on Spey.

The gathering will take place over two days from **Monday 27 to Tuesday 28 September**. Roseanna Cunningham, new Minister for the Environment and Andy Wightman, well-known land campaigner and author of *Who Owns Scotland*, are confirmed as speakers. Further details and a booking form will appear in the next edition of *The Crofter* and also online as they become available.

During production of this issue of the *Crofter* our editor, Fiona Mandeville, has been hospitalised and we all wish her a speedy recovery.

## You heard it here first

"The Scottish Beef Calf Scheme (the Beef National Envelope) needs to be retained and packaged together with other policy tools in order to provide sufficient support to maintain livestock production in the hills and uplands... By itself, the SBSC does not provide an adequate incentive to influence production decisions. However, if the scheme could form one component of a much broader potential support package then it would be a vital component of this larger element," NFUS Manifesto for the Hills, October 2008.

"In discussions over the use and targeting of a beef National Envelope, the SCF has joined forces with many other organisations to call for targeted support for cattle on units in the north and the west.... With final decisions on the use and targeting of the National Envelope expected as *The Crofter* goes to press, the SCF position is that the National Envelope monies should be targeted effectively to the greatest degree possible to deal with the issues identified."

*The Crofter, May 2004*



**find us on-line at [www.crofting.org](http://www.crofting.org)**