

## Investment in crofting?

### The evidence is clear

**T**O CULTIVATE the health of crofting and to achieve economic and social resilience of communities in rural Highlands and Islands, the Scottish Government must invest in crofting.

The Government claims to be investing in crofting but this claim is not adequately reflected in practice. The following are some of the investment mechanisms that have been withdrawn, downgraded or continue to be mis-targeted over the last five years:

**Less Favoured Area Support Scheme (LFASS)** Despite recommendations by the ColoC and the Royal Society of Edinburgh the Scottish Government did not take the opportunity to redistribute funding from standard to very fragile areas in recent scheme reviews, so farmers in the more favoured areas receive the highest payments per hectare whilst crofters in the most disadvantaged areas receive the least.

**Croft Buildings Grant and Loan Scheme (CBGLS)** Despite this scheme being acknowledged by rural housing experts as the most effective way of supplying housing to rural areas, after being run down for many years the scheme was withdrawn in 2004. The gap between the replacement Croft House Grant and real building costs and the lack of a flexible loan make the scheme unattractive to prospective first home builders. Crofters are also denied access to the higher grant percentage available under the Rural Home Ownership Scheme.

**Livestock Improvement Scheme (LIS)** Despite it being a very popular scheme and crofters having a recognised, important role in supplying hardy, healthy store and breeding livestock to

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## Commitment of Scottish Government called into question by Reform Bill

**T**HE QUESTION needs to be asked. Why, for the second time around, has this bill been received with so much hostility by crofters?

On the surface, the process taken to arrive at this point seems to have been developmentally correct – there was a full inquiry into crofting, into which crofters had ample opportunity to contribute; a comprehensive analysis and set of recommendations was produced; the Scottish Government responded to this and drafted a bill. However, if one looks a little closer it can be seen that flaws in the process – misunderstandings, misinterpretations, lack of participation – have led to an almost total rejection of the draft bill by the very people who gave evidence to the inquiry, the crofters. The key to good development practice is participation and this is what has been lacking at various stages of this process.

For example, the Committee of Inquiry on Crofting (ColoC) were tasked to produce their report

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## Moving from stick to carrot: SCF response to the draft Crofting Reform Bill consultation

**T**HE SCF RESPONSE to the draft Crofting Reform (Scotland) Bill consultation focuses on achieving the balance between regulation – a curtailment of individual freedom for the common good – and incentive to croft.

It is apparent from the draft bill that the intention of the Scottish Government is to whip crofting into shape by cracking down on regulation, imposing burdens and introducing new charges to crofters. Whilst there is widespread agreement that a regulated system needs to be regulated effectively, there is also universal acknowledgement that crofting has to be viable (ie not be an economic drain to the crofting family). The principle problem facing crofting is a basic economic one. If crofting doesn't pay, crofters will not croft – and this will not be rectified by regulation. This was recognised in the Committee of Inquiry on Crofting final report, and whilst

not all the recommendations in the report were welcomed by crofters, it could be conceded that the Committee of Inquiry strove to get a balance by making firm recommendations for increasing investment in crofting.

The draft bill, which claims to reflect the findings of the inquiry, is completely out of kilter, offering plenty of stick and no carrot.

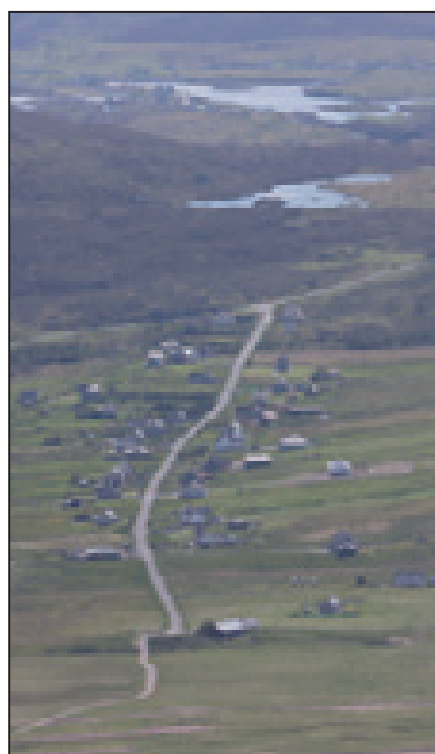
The summary of the SCF response reads:

- The bill is not well placed in the wider picture of what is desired for and what is happening in rural Scotland. It claims to be the result of the ColoC yet only addresses a handful of the recommendations of the committee.

- Much of the proposed bill is rejected by our members. A regulated system needs a fair balance between regulation and incentive, reward and responsibilities. This bill is seen to be very heavy on enforcement of regulation, introduction of new restrictive measures and imposition of charges, with very little in the way of incentive. Indeed existing incentives seem under increasing threat.

- The bill seeks to address the decline of active crofting through enforcement of regulation, whilst ignoring the question of viability of crofting. Investment in crofting activity that is within the power of the government such as payment for public goods

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Martin Benson

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## Message from the chair...



**S**UMMER has been a real roller coaster ride, a few months of many meetings and in-depth debate.

We have been engaging with Scottish Government, Crofters Commission, local assessors, grazings clerks, council officials as well as individual and crofting interest groups – all towards our submission to the draft Crofting Reform Bill consultation which closed recently.

The media coverage has also been hectic. It has been quite a while since crofting has earned so many headlines and column inches. It has

engendered far more debate than the Shucksmith inquiry. Obviously people have woken up to what poses a threat to a way of life with some of the Scottish Government suggestions being unwanted, unworkable and un-costed. They appear to be universally unpopular.

We tasked a working group, ably led by Marina Dennis, representative of the vast diverse area that constitutes the crofting counties, to evaluate and prepare a response to the consultation. Their response and conclusions were succinct and visionary.

I would like to thank the working group on behalf of the membership for the hard work they put into the response in the short time allowed, which was in itself inconsiderate and took no cognisance of what is our busiest time of the year. When I think of the sterling work put in by Ena Macdonald from the Southern Isles in ensuring a response, it reinforces my belief in the depth and passion we have in crofting. If I could make a plea to the Ministers it would be, meet the crofters face to face and not leave it to your civil servants whom many blame for the debacle.

Meanwhile our work on other fronts still goes on, eg EID, which is a nonsense and poses a serious threat to stock numbers. The bull hire scheme is under review – thanks to all who have responded to the questionnaire put out by the review group. An equitable LFASS is still being campaigned for, blue tongue inoculation, SRDP applications, unnecessary bureaucracy, the list is endless.

I was fortunate to be asked to judge at the South Uist Agricultural Show where a very impressive sheep section was testament to

the quality and stockmanship of crofters, I was particularly heartened to see young entrants win prizes. The crofting course in Lionacleite School will surely bring its rewards. But sadly, no cattle in what is one of the finest environs of cattle rearing, surely a sign of the burgeoning paperwork which seems to have put paid to any enjoyment in showing cattle.

The buoyant trade at the early lamb sales is a huge encouragement, but no less than flock-masters deserve after some depressed years. It has been a fairly wet summer as can be seen with a lot of sheep still unshorn at time of writing. Grass although plentiful is still not cut, but the sight of stock in excellent condition and the anticipation of better prices encourages us.

As we approach the end of the summer season our hope is for a period of calm debate and a resolution by all to work together to enable a fit-for-purpose Bill to be presented that will cement crofting in its deserved and rightful place. My hope is that enhanced prices and the use of the crofting mark will sustain and advance crofting. Or as we so often reiterate 'crofting must pay or crofters will not croft'.

## Scottish Crofting Foundation vision for crofting

**C**ROFTING LEGISLATION needs to be seen in context with the wider picture of food production and rural development in Scotland.

It is a system based on the retention of the indigenous population, of small-scale food production and land management, which is efficient, good for the environment and holds rural communities together. This type of land-based culture is advocated by many internationally as the sustainable way to produce the world's food. The SCF believes that crofting essentially needs the following:

- 1 protected heritable tenure
- 2 viability
- 3 new entrants
- 4 protection of the arable in-bye
- 5 defined boundaries

Our evaluation of the draft crofting reform bill used these criteria as the benchmark against which the efficacy of the bill was measured. To elaborate on each point:

### 1 Protected tenure

The draft bill does not affect the protection of tenure afforded by existing crofting legislation but it does seek to limit heritability. The rationale of not assigning to absentees is acknowledged but needs to be dealt with in such a

way as to not alter this fundamental right. We made suggestions regarding this in the response.

### 2 Viability

We define this as 'the well-being of family, community and public assets without financial detriment to the individual'. If crofting is not viable crofters will not croft. The draft bill does not increase viability and seeks to address the current marginal situation with increased regulation. This will not work. If crofting is to be a regulated system for the benefit of the common good, which we assume is the desire of the Scottish Government, then regulation (which on the whole limits an individual's freedom) needs to be balanced by public investment that non-regulated producers/land managers do not get.

### 3 New entrants

It is accepted by all that new entrants are the future of crofting and that we need more people coming into crofting. Whilst the aims in the draft bill of making more crofts available could help this, available crofts will only be taken up long term if crofting is viable. We believe that the provision of incentives and payments making crofting

viable is what will attract and keep new entrants.

### 4 Protection of arable in-bye

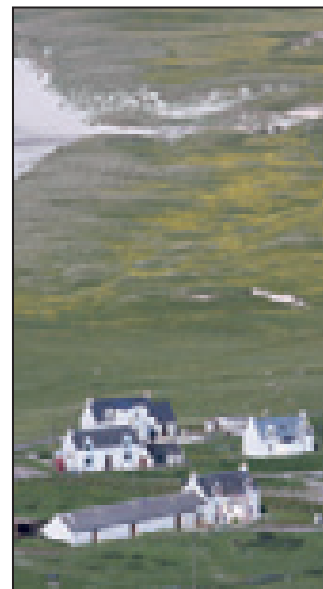
Good quality land is a scarce and valuable resource in much of the crofting areas and the failure of the Scottish Government to protect this resource is lamentable. The Crofters Commission is impotent whilst the local authority planning departments grant inappropriate planning consent on croft land and the Scottish Land Court (SLC) directs the Commission to allow serial and multiple de-croftings of in-bye. Building developments on in-bye and the associated speculation in croft land is seen by many to be symptomatic of a failing regulatory system. Making the Crofting Commission a statutory consultee in planning decisions affecting croft land is essential, but the effectiveness of this will be compromised unless local authority planning departments and the SLC are directed by ministers to operate a presumption against building on arable quality in-bye.

### 5 Defined boundaries

It is accepted that defining croft boundaries will be a good thing. It is important that it is done in a sensitive way as this has the

potential to cause conflict and bad feeling if done inappropriately. Using participatory community mapping exercises may bring a positive benefit to this. Expecting crofters to pay for failure of successive governments and the Crofters Commission to have a register based on defined boundaries is completely unacceptable.

The SCF believes that if these five conditions are met then crofting will prosper.



Martin Benson

## CROFTING REFORM

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mainstream Scottish agriculture, this scheme was withdrawn in 2004.

The replacement Croft Cattle Quality Improvement Scheme, after repeated molesting by the Scottish Government, was withdrawn in 2009 (to be then reinstated for a limited period whilst under review). The claim that it is expensive does not hold up against the revenue generated from surplus heifer, silage and barley sales from the stud the farms and lack of investment in the scheme does not reflect the capital generated from the sales of bull stud farmland. As major disease problems have demonstrated, the value of this scheme to national biosecurity is considerable.

**Scotland Rural Development Programme (SRDP)** Despite a recent review of the programme, it still is perceived to offer little to crofters and is seen as inaccessible.

**Crofting Counties Agricultural Grant Scheme (CCAGS)** Despite being considered the bedrock of investment in crofting, this scheme has been constantly eroded with the removal of support to replacement infrastructure and Standard Costs. The placement of the scheme within the SRDP makes it time-bound and unlikely to continue beyond 2013.

**Crofting Communities Development Scheme (CCDS)** Despite this scheme being well subscribed and seen as very progressive, it was withdrawn in 2008.

**Agri-environment schemes (ESA/RSS)** Despite most of the high nature value farming areas of the UK being found in the crofting counties, there are no longer any meaningful agri-environment schemes for crofting.

**Highlands and Islands Croft Entrant Scheme (HICES)** Despite this very modest scheme being the only explicit support for new entrants to crofting, it was closed last year.

With all these in mind, the question has to be asked – what does the Scottish Government want for crofting?

If it genuinely wants crofting to fulfil its potential in food production, land management and community strengthening, the Government must recognise that crofting needs investment, firm and proportionate regulation, stability and equity. Or is the intention to let crofting wither on the vine? The logical conclusion from the evidence above is that the Government is not willing to provide the necessary incentives and is therefore driving crofting (as we know it) into oblivion.

**Is this Scottish Government willing to be the government that ended crofting as a regulated system?**

## Commitment of Scottish Government called into question by Reform Bill

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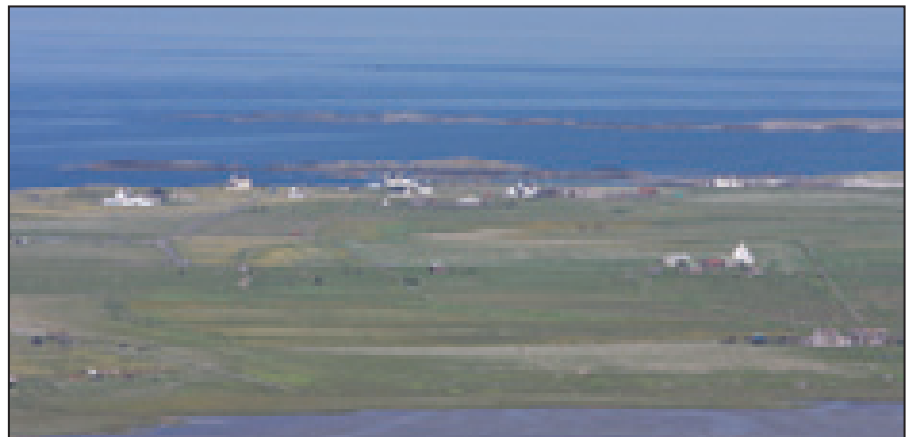
in final form without consulting crofters on the draft. After releasing the final report the ColoC was disbanded before it had the chance to ask crofters what they thought of it. Furthermore, it is our understanding that the former members of the ColoC were not consulted by the Scottish Government in the drafting of the bill, which appears strange given the depth of current knowledge of crofting the (ex) committee possesses. And the SCF has on many occasions offered to try out proposals for legislative reform on its members prior to them becoming a draft bill, but these offers were not taken up.

Why has this happened again, through two different governments? The constant in both cases is the civil service. The SCF has questioned before who runs our government, the elected politicians or the civil servants (Is the tail wagging the bull? *The Crofter* issue 82 March 2009) Have the officials yet again made a mockery of our elected representatives? This begs the fundamental question – what really is our Scottish Government?

The SCF has also voiced its concern on many occasions on inexperienced urban-based officials drawing up legislation and policy that effects rural populations. It is not surprising that many crofters conclude that Scottish Government officials think they know best and have the arrogance of a 'top-down' colonial government.

However, SCF believes it is more likely to simply be inexperience in development practice and a lack of understanding of rural issues. This is not the participatory development advocated by the recent Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) report and by the ColoC. It is why, regrettably, the SCF has to conclude that the second attempt at a Crofting Reform Bill has failed the critical test of listening to those who have the right diagnosis of what is wrong. Development, not remote regulation, is the key to the future of crofting and this needs investment.

That was true in 1886 and is just as true today.



Martin Benson

## Moving from stick to carrot

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or increased support to croft housing is absent; and conversely additional charges to crofters are proposed.

- There is nothing in the bill to encourage or support new entrants, vital to the sustainability of crofting and core to the ColoC recommendations. In fact the whole ethos of the bill is seen as a deterrent to new entrants.

- The bill therefore needs a comprehensive overhaul to be acceptable to our members (and, we believe, the wider crofting population) and we suggest amendments where possible, though only redressing the balance between reward and responsibilities will make the bill fit for purpose. The SCF believes that a bill is necessary to achieve some of the desired outcomes suggested.

- **Governance** The Crofting Commission should have a majority of elected, area-based commissioners and should elect its own convener.

- **Crofting Register** A map-based register is needed and the Scottish Government should meet the cost of this. It should be compiled using community mapping exercises and be kept by the Crofting Commission.

- **Support for Croft Housing** Using the croft tenancy as standard security is unacceptable. Croft housing needs investment, best achieved through a re-introduced GBGLS.

- **Occupancy Requirement** Using crofting to attempt to address the failure of rural housing policy is unacceptable and should not feature in this bill.

- **Crofting Regulation** Treating tenants and owner-occupiers alike is fair. Tackling long-term absenteeism is welcomed but discretion is needed as not all absenteeism is bad. Subletting needs to be improved. The emphasis should be on dealing with neglect. If regulation is desired it should be enforced, matched by realistic incentives.



## CROFTING REFORM

# Developing the law of crofting

*We asked Derek Flynn, who recently became an SCF director, to write for The Crofter. Derek has had a professional interest in crofting law for more than forty years. In this article he has chosen to go 'back to basics' in an effort to stimulate further discussion following the recent ColoC (Shucksmith) Report and the Consultation Paper on the Draft Crofting Reform Bill.*

**C**ROFTING LAW has long been considered too complicated.

This has been recognised by lawyers since its inception in 1886. To them crofting law is even messier than it looks to a layperson, for it is primarily part of the law of landlord and tenant, which itself by 1886 was already a complex corner of Scots law (involving as it does complementary (or competing) rights in the property of a landowner).

The first goal in 1886 was to give security to the crofter tenant. His dealings with his landlord were made to appear relatively simple. An annual rent is paid. A written lease is unnecessary. Instead the crofter and his landlord are provided with "statutory conditions", which are now contained in the Crofters (Scotland) Act 1993 as updated. There need be no agreed plan of the land involved and this is still true of many croft tenancies.

More than 120 years from its introduction therefore, it can be surprising to learn how little we know about the detail of the land affected by crofting law. Despite legislative attempts in 1911, 1955 and 1961 to have a proper register compiled and maintained, there are still no definitive maps. Crofters frequently do not know the exact boundaries of their own land or where to get these boundaries confirmed. Landlords are often unwilling or unable to help. Their common response is that any plans showing the original croft boundaries have been lost or destroyed many decades ago, often in what has been elsewhere described as the "traditional" estate office fire.

Since 1976, in recognition of the permanent nature of their rights in their land, crofters have been permitted to seek an owner's title. Those who wish to do so require a plan of their land for presentation to their landlord. Only then is their landlord put on the spot of agreeing boundaries, thus ignoring the obvious: that it is the landowner who should identify the land for which he receives rent (and

not the other way about).

Of course, many crofters remain tenants. They have chosen to retain their landlords, for better or worse, and, to many outside observers, it is not clear why they have done so. Some crofters have taken the opportunity to rid themselves of their respective landlords, sometimes with good reason.

Meanwhile crofting law developed a second goal. The amount of land available for crofting should be preserved and protection is given to it against all comers but specifically against landlords. Any landlord wishing to take crofters' land away from them must persuade the Land Court that it is for a reasonable purpose. The word used for this taking is "resumed", indicating the restoration of the land to the control of the landowner, free of crofting restraints. Such restoration is of course frequently fictional, the land never having been freely in the hands of the landlord or his predecessors.

Since 1976, again recognising the crofter's strong connection with his land, landlords resuming croft land for their own purposes have had to give half its market value to the crofter involved. By another process, land could also be lost to crofting by direction of the Crofters Commission, but again only for a reasonable purpose. From 1976 until 2008 no increase in the number of crofts was possible (except by division of existing ones). This meant that the stock of croft land was seen to be continually diminishing.

Crofting law has thus protected crofters and croft land since 1886. Re-settlement schemes earlier last century provided some additional tenancies. And there are high hopes that recent changes will result in the creation of many more crofts. Whilst it is likely that the tenants of these new crofts will have only limited rights to purchase, it is to be hoped that their lands will be clearly shown on modern plans.

The next goal of crofting law now presents itself more forcibly than ever before: that proper use be made of the land itself. The SCF has called for "effective, rigorous and fair regulation of tenanted and owner-occupied croft land by the Crofters Commission, working from an authoritative map-based register". We must all try to make it happen.

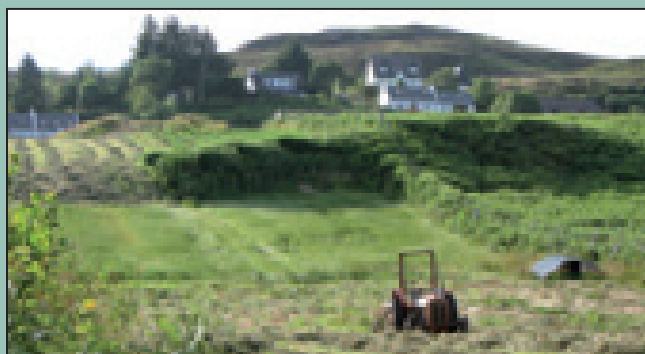
## The state of crofting – a report from one township but common to many?

**A** REPORT LAUNCHED this month which examines in detail the state of crofting in one small township on the Isle of Skye shows a high level of failure in the regulatory system.

The authors of 'The State of Crofting in Camuscross', a township in the peninsula of Sleat in the south of the island, say that if their findings are replicated in other communities the crofting system of tenure is now in a parlous state.

Eighteen months ago crofters from Camuscross asked the regulatory body, the Crofters Commission, to take action on absenteeism and neglect of croft land in their township.

This summer, with no sign of action forthcoming from the Commission, two members of the Camuscross community began research on the regulatory issues and other challenges facing crofting in the township – and timed its publication to coincide with consultation into the draft Crofting Reform Bill.

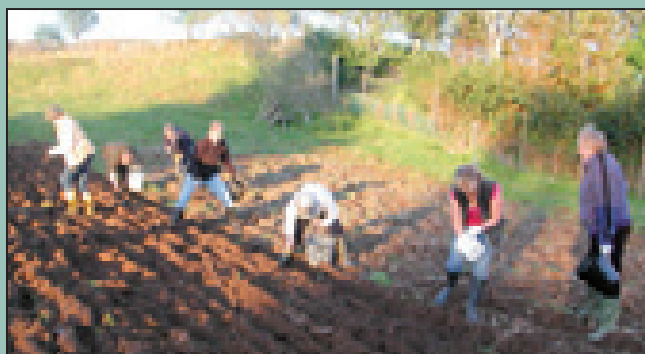


Productive croft beside absentee croft choked with weeds

The report 'The State of Crofting in Camuscross' gives a comprehensive description of crofting activity in the township and fulfils, at a local level, a recommendation made by the Shucksmith Committee that a report on the state of crofting should be produced by regulators each year.

Among its findings, the Camuscross report shows that in the 39 croft township:

- the owners or tenants of almost one third of the township's crofts are absentees;
- three-fifths of the township's crofts are neglected;
- slovenly decrofting procedures have left one family without direct vehicular access to their croft;
- one croft has been absentee occupied for three generations;
- the Crofters Commission has replaced one absentee tenant in the township with another, in spite of local interest in the croft;
- houses built on apportionments in the township are being used as holiday homes;
- one absentee, who has never lived in the village and has no family connection to it, has been using a croft as a holiday home business for more than 20 years – making around £50,000 gross a year on it.



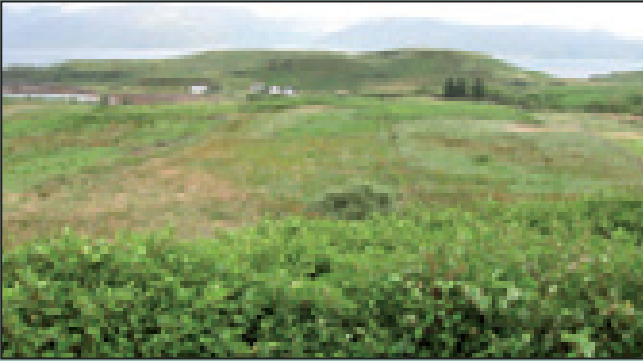
Planting tatties, Camuscross May 09

## CROFTING REFORM

## The state of crofting contd

One of the report's authors, Iain MacKinnon, said: "It is a fairly dismal catalogue of regulatory failure we've found and as we wrote up the report we began to wonder if what is going on in our township reflects the general picture in the crofting counties. If it does, then crofting is in a pretty parlous state."

"We hope that by highlighting the scale and range of regulatory system failure in Camuscross, we will be able to focus legislators' minds on ensuring that this latest reform bill achieves something positive so that active townships will be able to access better



Weeds, Japanese knotweed, ragwort, bracken, rushes

bureaucratic support to further their potential."

The report's co-author, Susan Walker, said that it was not all doom and gloom in Camuscross, but that they needed support to ensure that a recent resurgence in crofting can keep growing.

She said: "We have become, in recent years, a more active and vibrant township again, and there is a good and lively community in the village. The report reflects that too. It shows the resurgence in livestock keeping, in growing, in communal working and a host of other activities. But we feel that for our community to fulfil its potential in the long term we need, for example, to ensure that more young people are able to get a foothold in the place."

"One of the issues that we reflect on in the report is that there are younger people in the community, who want to stay here, some of whom actively want to croft but are unable to get access to land. Meanwhile, there are many empty houses in the place, many crofts are rank, and many of the tenants are living far away."

"We still hope that the Commission will be able to support our community. We also hope that the crofting activity that we are achieving in Camuscross, and which we describe in this report, might show legislators the potential that there is for crofting if it is given appropriate regulatory and development support."

SCF chief executive Patrick Krause commented: "The fact that the report exists is testament to the winds of change and is itself the inspiration. It is hoped that it will inspire policy makers and regulators to address the problems raised, to support crofting with a will. It is also hoped that it will encourage other townships to do their own 'state of crofting' research and report. This is a model for other townships, an inspiration."



## A radical vision

THE COMMITTEE of Inquiry on Crofting, chaired by Professor Mark Shucksmith, outlined a radical vision which recommended rebalancing individual crofters' interests in favour of the wider interests of crofting to help sustain rural communities in the Highlands and Islands.

This is tricky ground to navigate in policy terms but the proposals contained in the bill indicate that the Government appears – on the surface at least – ready to tackle the elephant on the croft; namely, whether crofting's future is to be dictated by the narrowly defined interests of communities of crofters or the potentially wider interests of crofting communities.

Crofting's demographics in the early 21st century are not those of 50, 20 or even 10 years ago. Changes to EU subsidy rules have obliterated the economic case for livestock management as a staple of crofting activity. And in some locations crofters are now a minority compared to non-crofters in the community. But it is the removal of land from crofting tenure for sale on the open market, coupled with absentee crofters not putting their crofts to purposeful use, which has had the most damaging impact on the cohesion and vitality of crofting communities. Proposals in the bill are designed to squarely address these issues.

The Crofters Commission, which the Committee of Inquiry recommended for abolition, would be granted a stay of execution under the bill's proposals. Renamed the Crofting Commission, it would have new governance arrangements with six area committees, of up to 12 members each, responsible for regulatory decision making in their regions. As well as devolving regulatory responsibility from the current eight commissioners, the area committees would also broaden such responsibility, by including a majority of crofters and non-crofters as members.

The bill also proposes beefing up the reconstructed Commission's approach to regulation by requiring it to take action on absenteeism 'unless there is good reason not to'. Good reason may be something of a moveable feast, however. And what constitutes acceptable and unacceptable absenteeism merits further careful consideration.

While the bill's proposal to establish a new and definitive Register of Crofts seems a sensible step in providing legal certainty regarding the extent and interests in crofts, the hackles of crofters

have been raised by the prospect of having to pay a £250 registration fee to complete the paperwork. Worse still, the proposal to enable a standard security to be taken over a croft tenancy to secure a bank loan is viewed in some quarters a direct threat to the ethos of security of tenure on which the crofting system is founded.

Further proposals relate to the thorny issue of occupancy requirements, recommended by the Committee of Inquiry as an antidote to absenteeism and second home syndrome by tying croft houses to residency. The bill envisages responsibility for regulating these requirements being held by the local authority in the relevant area; a scenario unlikely to fill these organisations with unbridled enthusiasm given its resource implications and potential difficulties in enforcing what some are already calling a snoopers' charter. The proposed option of lifting the occupancy requirement as a matter of housing and planning policy would offer local authorities a get-out clause but does little to address criticisms of inconsistent enforcement levelled at the current Crofters Commission.

As civil servants sift through the consultation responses to the Crofting Bill they are likely to find crofters implacably opposed to the majority of its proposals. That's scarcely surprising at a time when incentives to croft are in steep decline. However, such views shouldn't obscure the larger truth that unless the forces of absenteeism and market-driven speculation on croft land are quelled, crofting's future looks bleak. Equally, the Scottish Government's soft-focus rhetoric about the need to preserve a unique crofting way of life should be backed with tangible policy measures adding substance to warm words. In that respect, the proposed legislation must not represent the last stop on the journey towards crofting reform.

*This article by Calum Macleod and Nicole Busby was first published in The Scotsman.*

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## CROFTING REFORM

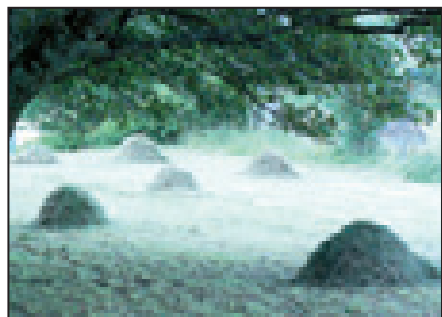
### Land tenure



*Andrew Humphries, chairman of the Foundation for Common Land, comments on the importance of land tenure*

**T**HE CURRENT debate on the Crofting Reform Bill in Scotland may seem like yet another example of the relentless torrent of legislative and regulatory changes that pervade agriculture.

Seeming to divert our attention from what we regard as our primary aims, energy is dissipated in argument. Yet our memories reveal that neither the state nor the market alone is capable of enabling farmers to sustain the long-term productive use of land. Communities have successfully developed their own organisations to optimise and sustain resource use in ways that are more appropriate.



Claire Nicolson

Land tenure, the basis on which property is held is central to progress. The dramatic changes in Scottish tenure that accompanied the emergence of modern crofting put in place a new form of tenure that in itself provided some security, but did little to develop prosperity or sustain communities and their resources in the longer term. Elsewhere in Britain the impact of enclosure legislation had direct and long-lasting effects. Only when the experience and understanding of practical people demonstrated that the extension of leases brought greater security of tenure – a basis for investment and improved productivity – did the situation improve. Land reform through tenure presents a crucial challenge in sustainable agriculture worldwide.

I recently visited the Scottish Parliament, which strengthened my impression that your relationship with the executive is more open and engaged than in England in particular. The potential to learn from your experience is one that I hope can be achieved since our situations have much in common. The diversity that common grazings embrace is a strength that demonstrates that through local custom and practice, farming communities have adapted to local circumstances in ways that agencies cannot hope to replicate, but need to understand. External influences must respect and learn from those who deliver.

Policy makers and agency staff are surrounded by an ethos of changing farms rather than changing farmers and have little training in dealing with communities. At the grassroots bodies like SCF and the Foundation for Common Land with their unique understanding and experience of their own environments can make a real difference. The Crofting Reform Bill is particular to Scotland and The Commons

Act 2006 to much of England and Wales. The details are different but the issues have much in common. Success in the legislation depends on adapting and improving it to fit the diverse range of practical circumstances of which practical farmers have a unique experience and understanding. Intelligent partnership demands that we see the opportunities that change offers, provided we can be an influence. Looking at the horizon is sometimes better than simply putting your head down and working harder.

Leadership is a key to influencing change by linking an understanding of grassroots practice and concerns, with an equal understanding of external stakeholder interests. Through SCF, other regional groups and umbrella support networks like the Foundation for Common Land, the complexities of practice can be used to foster mutuality. From this knowledge, understanding can develop the wisdom to recognise that reciprocity and respect are the



glue that will sustain agriculture as a worthwhile activity in difficult environments.

The Foundation has already benefited from the experience of SCF, encouraging us to hope that we can continue to build a wider community of experience and understanding. Our aim is not to respond to change but to influence and shape it. Vision, leadership and a willingness to participate in adapting tenure to changing circumstances are the essential elements that should characterise the aspirations of all those interested in those who sustain unique farming systems strongly influenced by land tenure.

### Far-reaching implications

**P**ROPOSALS CONTAINED in the Draft Crofting Reform Bill include a Register of Crofts to be maintained by the Register of Scotland.

As the land register provides legal certainty over titles, the proposed new register will provide the same guarantees over the extent and interests in crofts allowing for standard security to be recorded against the tenancy in a similar way to the land register.

The proposals, if accepted after consultation, will trigger registration of the land when any changes are made to the title of the croft or the area of the croft. The triggers include creation of a new croft, enlargement or division of a croft, change of ownership through assignment, bequest or tenure, also if crofts become vacant, are decrofted or resumed.

The legislation will also allow for voluntary registration of land by croft tenants, owner occupier or landowners. Registration will secure the legal extents of the croft and also it is proposed that the electoral roll for area committee elections will be taken from the crofting register and only those on the roll will be able to stand for election or vote in elections.

The assumption must be that if these proposals are accepted the maps that need to be supplied with the application for first registration will be of a similar standard to that currently demanded by the land registry and by the Crofters Commission when applying to decroft land. This is Ordnance Survey based showing the areas involved and other important features along with grid references and scales.

These proposals make knowing the accurate area and having an up to date map of your croft in a format that is acceptable to Register of Scotland essential.

Landmaps have been at the forefront of the use of GPS (global positioning system) in land surveys and have a wide experience ranging from IACS mapping, forestry maps

*Continued on next page*

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

**All types of area measurements**  
 Ordnance Survey maps  
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 Property sale plans and land registry maps  
 Croft, Farm and Estate management maps  
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## CROFTING REFORM

## Far-reaching implications

contd

and quarry plans to title deed plans, golf courses plans, wind farm and land use surveys.

Accurate GPS allows Landmaps to record points, for example boundary fence lines, on the ground and show these points in the correct location in relation to Ordnance Survey data. This accuracy has been essential in producing maps for title deeds to a standard required by the land registry. GPS also allows Landmaps to place with accuracy boundaries where there are perhaps no fences or there are disputed boundaries.

It is proposed only to allow challenges to croft boundaries at first registration. Therefore if agreements can be reached between neighbours and any other interested party as to the extent of the croft and location of boundaries this must help smooth the passage to registration. If several adjacent crofts were to be surveyed and mapped together this would make the maps more accurate by eliminating possible gaps between boundaries and enables costs to be shared and reduced.

The proposals for the crofting register have far-reaching implications for crofters, owner occupiers and landlords. The practical application of the proposed system depends on good quality mapping to allow first registration to proceed as smoothly as possible. Landmaps can help by providing GPS surveys, Ordnance Survey mapping, aerial photography and experience in rural mapping and surveying.

Contact Archie Stewart  
Landmaps Ltd  
archie@landmaps.co.uk

## Changing face of the Commission

by Nick Reiter, chief executive,  
Crofters Commission

IN OCTOBER 2008 the Government published its response to the findings of Professor Shucksmith's Committee of Inquiry on Crofting.

Some of the Government's proposals have resulted in further public consultation on a draft Bill, but several measures began to be put in place during 2008-09 which impacted significantly on the Commission. Chief among these was the decision to focus the Commission's efforts firmly on its regulatory role. This led to the transfer of our development role to HIE and in the coming months our grant scheme administration to SGRPID (Scottish Government).

To meet the increased emphasis on using our powers and duties to best effect, staff resources freed up by the transfer of other roles have allowed us to establish a Strengthening Crofting team. The team will work with communities and key partners to increase the contribution crofting makes to rural communities. A key element of this team's work will be to increase croft occupancy and use of the land with a view to helping promote sustainable rural communities.

In April this year the Commission, among other bodies, became a "Key Agency" for planning purposes. We are working closely with the planning authorities to determine what this new duty

entails, but it is already clear that it will provide the opportunity for crofting to be taken more fully into account during the preparation and consultation on local authority development plans. With this in mind the Commission will only become involved in specifics of individual applications under exceptional circumstance.

Crofting regulation itself changed considerably with the introduction of the Crofting Reform etc Act 2007. Apart from decrofting, crofter forestry and apportionment, all other application types are now subject to new rules. The Commission previously had to actively consider each application on its merits but now if the application does not result in local objections or invokes the newly specified criteria for Commission intervention, it gains approval. The other major change has been the extension to parties with an interest in an application of a right of appeal to the Scottish Land Court against the Commission's decision on an application. As well as providing a further recourse for those who have legitimate objections to a Commission decision, the court findings will create precedents to guide future decisions on similar applications.

The Crofters Commission has always been primarily a regulatory body, a reality of which is that press attention focuses on unpopular decisions or a mistake. This

position in turn will always run the risk of the organisation becoming over-cautious and unwilling to try new approaches. I would like to pay tribute to our staff and commissioners, who in a time of so much change and uncertainty have been ready to adapt and to look at how we can make better use of our existing powers and duties; how we can further improve our communications and relationships with crofters and other key partners, without ever forgetting that first and foremost comes the need to deliver fair, effective and active regulation that is legislatively sound. No doubt there are many more changes ahead, but I feel confident the Commission will rise to the challenges.

I would also like to mention two members of staff who retire this year. Keith Aitchison who will be known to many readers, retired at the end of June after 17 years with the Commission. Keith's profound knowledge of crofting legislation was an invaluable asset to the Commission. He was always willing to take time to explain the finer detailed aspects of casework both to staff and commissioners. Also Penelope Hamilton will leave us at the end of October. Penelope played a key part in developing the Commission's role in Planting to Plate, predecessor to Crofting Connections, and our forthcoming Gaelic plan. We wish both Keith and Penelope a long and happy retirement.

## Càite bheil an taisbeanadh?

THA THÌDE aig na croitearan ualach a ghabhail airson an cùisean fein.

Tha h-uile coltas nach soirbhich leis a' Bhille ùr. Tha sin a' fàgail na ceistean – de tha croitearan ag iarraidh agus de tha Riaghaltas ag iarraidh air croitearachd? Tha aon rud cinnteach, chaneil croitearachd mar a bha e. 'N uair a bha mise fàs suas, bha croitearachd na bhuannachd. Bha h-uile croitear a dh'aithnichinn ag obair air rud eigin eile - an iasgach, air a' chlà, a's na muilnean, aig a' Chounty agus an uairsin aig a' Chomhairle, no feadhainn aca bha nan tìsearan. Bha tuarasdail a' tighinn a-steach a bhiodh air an teaghlach a chumail, ach bha croitearachd a' toirt dhuinn rud eigin a bharrachd. Nam biodh prìs math air na h-uain 's air na muil, bhiodh airgid a bharrachd againn. Bha sinn a cumhachd airgid cuideachd leis na bha sinn a' cuir do bhuntata agus lusan eile, agus na bha sinn a' buain do mhòine.

Nise, chaneil ach gle bheag, mu 'tha duin' idir, a' deanamh uighir do dh'airgid a croitearachd an diugh, agus g'eil iad an urra ri croitearachd gu h-iomlan. Mar sin dheth, tha e fhathast na rud eigin a bharrachd. Dhan an fheadhainn a tha dìchiollach, tha e toirt cosnadh math a-steach, ach 's e gle bheag a tha'n urra ri croitearachd a-mhàin. Tha feadhainn a' deanamh airgid mòr a bhith reic piosan fearainn, agus tha'm buaireadh mu Bhille na Croitearachd a' nochdadh nach eil croitearan ag iarraidh an cothrom sin a chall. Tha tòrr air a radha mu chroitean bàn agus tighean falamh agus tighean airson saor-laithean. Ach chaneil a sin ach toradh nach eil cosnadh eile ann a chumas na daoine bu choir a bhith furachd a's na tighean sin. Chaneil fiughs tòrr dhan an fheadhainn a tha furachd annta ag obrachadh an fhearainn a chionns nach eil teachd a-steach ri dheanamh as, agus tha'd air fàs ro chleachdta ri obraichean eile agus diomhanas, no gnothaichean eile a's na feasgair.

Mar sin dheth, de tha croitearan ag iarraidh? Tha tòrr dha radha mu thearainteachd a' bhidhe, 's g'eil barrachd dhaoine nise cuir 's ag àrach am biadh fein. Nan deadh airgid a chuir ri goireasan geamhrachaidh bheathaichean, agus giollachd bàrr is feol ann a sgìrean iomallach, co-chomuin airson cosgaisean a' ghearradh, agus marcaidean ionadail a bhrosnachadh, 's tocha gun tilleadh daoine gu obrachadh an fhearainn. Ach ro na sin, feumar cosnadh maireannach, agus sin far am biodh cumhachd ath-nuadhachail, air a dheagh stiùireadh, feumail. A-thaobh tighean agus croitean falamh, 's e cheud rud bu choir fheuchainn, toirt air daoine leigeil dha nabadhean feum a dheanamh dhan an fhearann, biodh na tighean mar a bhitheas iad. Ach tha eagal orm gur e gle bheag do dh'oiridh an diugh a tha dha rìreabh am beachd croitean obrachadh. Tha'n obair ro chruaidh agus tha biadh na butha ro fhrusd' fhaighinn. Mu tha'd ag iarraidh làrach tìghe, ghabhadh sin a dheanamh air dòighean eile.

De mu dheidhinn coinneamh a chuir air dòigh, te a's am biodh na chumhachd bho thoiseach gun tìgheadh molaidean cruaidh aiste? Dheadh cuireadh a chuir gu oifigich Choimisean na h-Eòrpa, Westminster agus Dhun Eideann, a chùil air riochdairean ughdarrais ionadail na sgìrean croitearachd, a h-uile clàrc baile, agus luchd-leasachaidh. Dheadh co-dhùnaidhean na coinneamh a chuir gun a croitearan gu leir le trì miosan airson beachdachadh orra, agus rùm molaidean eadar-dhealaichte thighinn as gach sgìre. Dheadh na riochdairean a ghairm comhla trì miosan as deidh sin, dheadh ionmhas aontachadh, agus thoisicheadh na molaidean dhan cuir an gnìomh na ceann trì miosan eile. A bheil sinn mòr gun leor airson an ualach a ghabhail?

Aonghas Domhnullach

## CROFTING RESOURCES PROGRAMME

### Introducing the Crofting Resources Programme

**SCOTTISH** Crofting Foundation's new initiative, the Crofting Resources Programme, is now underway.

The programme is a natural successor to the Sustainable Crofting Land Use Programme which ran for the three years ending June 2008. That programme highlighted the opportunities for sustainable exploitation of the phenomenal land resource that exists in crofting tenure – 25% of all agricultural land in the Highlands and Islands. As well as promoting the most economically significant output from crofts, store and breeding livestock, the programme drew attention to alternative income streams for crofters such as forestry (and woodland crofts), horticulture and tourism. A very successful strand of the Land Use Programme was development of and support for crofting producer groups.

The development of the new programme is in tune with current trends in niche marketing of food, emphasising local/regional, natural, low input, low food miles and sustainability. The local food sector in the Highlands and Islands alone is worth £200m annually. An important effect of the development of crofting producer groups and resultant co-operative working is the raising of self esteem

and community capacity amongst crofters as well as an appreciation of the quality of what they actually, and potentially can, produce.

Store livestock is, and will continue to be, the most economically significant output from crofts, so the programme will promote collaborative working and added-value activity in this sector also, drawing on best practice from existing producer and marketing groups, and seeking to form links between producers and purchasers of store and breeding stock.

In a feasibility study for the programme carried out by food marketing specialist David Lamb of Scottish Agricultural College, market research gave a favourable response to the principle of developing crofting products. A high incidence of retailers, hotels and restaurants as well as producers indicated that they felt a collaborative venture could be successful. As crofters are geographically fragmented, a network of crofting producer groups will be built up to develop the potential for collaboration.

Crofter-led producer groups have considerable capacity to contribute to the aims of Scottish Government food policy. The Crofting Resources Programme will continue the theme of developing and supporting producer groups and collaborative

working. The programme will also assist crofting communities to make best use of the resources available to them in order to sustain the cultural heritage of crofting, its people and practices, and the rich environment and cultural landscape derived from low-intensity crofting land use.

The specific aims of the programme will be:

- Development of standards and implementation mechanisms

Research quality assurance, environmental and welfare standards and consider applicability to crofting. Produce summary of possible standards and consult with a view to adopting criteria for Scottish Crofting Produce mark.

- Awareness raising of qualities of croft-based production

Design and write consumer education material and develop links with journalists, food writers etc.

- Formation of and support for new producer groups

- Support for existing producer groups

Assess and address training and development needs. Organise training and information events. Provide general advice on SRDP for producer groups.

- Produce and publish horticultural manual for crofters
- Promote best use of

township assets

Assist a number of townships to identify and develop the resources available to them.

- Assistance in food chain issues affecting croft produce

Investigate and mitigate where possible issues constraining croft-based production, such as abattoir provision.

- Advice provision for innovative producers

Provide reactive advice and guidance to innovative producers.

The Crofting Resources Programme will employ an equivalent of two full time staff divided amongst a number of part-timers. The programme manager will be Gwyn Jones, the well-known former SAC consultant at Portree. Crofter and former SCF employee Donald Murdie returns as project co-ordinator. They will be assisted by four highly experienced field workers; Sue White in Shetland, Yvonne Richardson in the Outer Hebrides; Ann MacKay will cover the north mainland and Orkney, and Alan Boulton the south mainland plus Argyll Islands.

The Crofting Resources Programme is funded by the Scottish Rural Development Programme, the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and Highlands and Islands Enterprise.



Alan Boulton grew up in highland Perthshire, and after agricultural college moved north to work in areas such as Balmacara, Achnasheen and Spean Bridge. He worked variously as a gamekeeper, stalker, shepherd and estate manager before taking a tenancy at Achnasaul on the Lochiel estate where he farmed sheep and cattle for 13 years. He moved into advisory work with Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG) seven years ago, and since the demise of the organisation in Scotland in March has run an environment and land use advisory service under the name of Huntaway Consulting from his home in Torlundy outside Fort William.



Sue White spent several years working as a field archaeologist then researched the impact of grazing on maritime heath and the Scottish primrose and worked on botanical and ornithological projects. In Shetland she worked with Historic Scotland advising farmers and crofters on management of ancient monuments. She joined Shetland Crofting Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group in 2002 and while there she widened its scope to include rural development projects. The Farmers 4 Nature project encouraged farmers and crofters keeping traditional breeds of cattle, researched the biodiversity benefits of cattle and gave local farmers and crofters the chance to take part in trans-national meetings.



Yvonne Richardson comes from an agricultural background. She has been an active crofter in Lewis, keeping cattle and sheep, and has been active in local producer groups for a number of years, including working as the co-ordinator for the Lewis and Harris cattle producers group. She also has experience of agri-food marketing and quality assurance schemes in the food sector and currently works as an auditor/advisor for farm assurance, SALSA and BRC standards. Until last year she was the Crofters Commission development manager for Lewis and Harris.



Ann MacKay was born and grew up in Caithness on the family farm just outside Kiess, then Murkle. She has worked in various roles from marine biologist in Alaska and in the north of Scotland followed by FWAG in Perthshire, followed by Highland Council countryside ranger, community forestry facilitator for Highland Birchwoods, primary teacher and self-employed ecologist doing CPS, RSS and SRDP applications and carrying out wildlife surveys. Ann has always kept in touch with farming people and work, doing lambings every year and sheep work as and when needed and working on the hill for a couple of summers gathering and trying to work various sheep dogs of her own! Ann lives in Altass, Sutherland.



## ON THE CROFT

# Preparing your rams for mating

**U**NDER natural mating conditions, achieving a satisfactory fertilization rate depends on good ram management and breeding soundness.

Preparing rams for the breeding season should take place at least two months in advance and should take into account nutrition, general physical soundness and disease prevention measures.

## Ram Breeding Soundness

A useful preliminary assessment of the breeding soundness of otherwise healthy rams can be made by palpating the scrotal

cords should be free from nodular defects or hard swellings. Most mature rams should have a scrotal circumference at its widest point between 30 and 40cm. Studies have shown that rams with large symmetrical scrotal contents free of defects are likely to produce large quantities of good-quality semen, while those with small soft testes or other palpable defects are likely to produce poor-quality semen. Rams which are identified as being of questionable breeding soundness may be further investigated by the collection and evaluation of semen samples.

## Management of Purchased Rams

Replacement rams should be acquired at least eight weeks before the start of the breeding season, to allow them to adapt to their new environment and diet. Introduced rams should be dosed with a combination of a yellow (levamisole) drench and a clear (ivermectin/doramectin/moxidectin) drench on arrival and housed or placed in an area not intended for subsequent grazing for 48 hours, to reduce the risk of introduction of anthelmintic-resistant nematode parasites. Introduced rams may require further treatment for sheep scab. If rams are bought in from potential fluke areas, they should be treated with a flukicide to remove adult and immature flukes. Ideally, introduced rams should be separated from the main flock for about four weeks, during which period they should be closely monitored for signs of disease. Problems such as lameness and skin diseases should be managed during this period to avoid spread to the main flock. Introduced animals should be vaccinated against clostridial disease. Where flock vaccination against

pasteurellosis and louping ill is required, the introduced rams should also be included in these vaccination programmes.

## Nutrition

Rams often lose about 0.5 units of body condition per week during the mating period, so must be in body condition score 3.5-4 (on a scale of 1 to 5) at joining. It is also important that they are in good body condition and free of disease for at least two months before mating, during which time sperm production occurs. Nutritional preparation for the mating season requires long-term planning and simply turning the rams away to a bare field outwith the mating period is usually inadequate. Care should also be taken to ensure that rams do not become excessively fat as rams with body condition scores greater than 4 (on a scale of 1 to 5) have reduced libido.

*Moredun runs a membership scheme which aims to keep farmers and their vets up to date with the latest developments in animal health research. If you would like a copy of the full eight page newssheet on this subject, or are interested in becoming a member of the Moredun Foundation, please contact Maggie Bennett on 0131 445 5111 or [margaret.bennett@moredun.org.uk](mailto:margaret.bennett@moredun.org.uk). More information can also be found on our website at [www.moredun.org.uk](http://www.moredun.org.uk)*



Lorgbaw indexed tup

# Shetland Cattle from Shetland Breeders Group

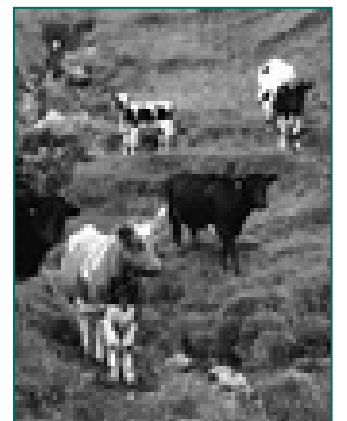
**T**HE BREEDERS of Shetland Cattle in Shetland have for some time been working to ensure that Shetland cattle never again come near to extinction. In February 2005, therefore, this former loose working relationship among interested parties was formally constituted as a charity.

Since then the group have taken this commitment forward by organising a fact-finding mission to increase their knowledge and understanding of small rural businesses in Orkney and northern Scotland, investigating best practices which would subsequently be useful to their members and their businesses. This fact-finding mission was jointly funded by Go4Volunteering and the Crofters Commission and, as a byproduct, resulted in a lot of interest in the cattle with our members subsequently selling 17 pure-bred animals to new breeders.

With the centenary of the Shetland Cattle Herd Book Society coming in 2010, the group decided to produce and publish a memorial book to celebrate this occasion. The A4 book, "A Pictorial Daander Trowe Shetland's Crofting Culture", will be launched in September. 'Daander Trowe' means wander through.

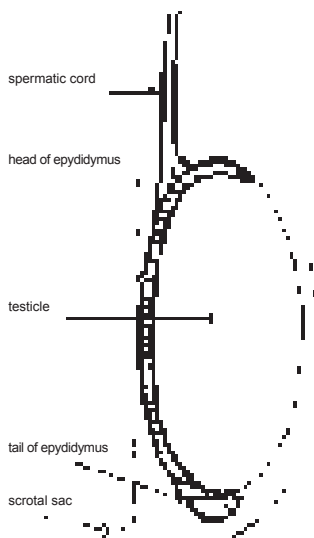
This 230 page edition includes the history of the society and the cattle and shows how pivotal this living heritage was to the very existence of the Shetland people. From the title you will realize that there are many photographs illustrating traditional crofting life which are not only relevant to Shetland but all the crofting counties.

This group is presently chaired by Mrs Eleanor Arthur from Whalsay who joined the SCF board at the AGM.



Shetland kye

Diagramme of scrotum and contents



contents. Sound rams during the breeding season have two large, firm, freely mobile testes, which are similar in size and feel neither soft nor hard on palpation. The tails of the epididymes should be firm and smooth and heads of the epididymes and spermatic

## Late payments

*Am I the only one to be caught in a SGRPID trap, asks Russell Smith*

- In December 08 we were notified that there were some overlaps between the land declared on our IACS forms and our neighbour's so the SFP and LFASS payments for the disputed areas would be withheld.
- In January 09 I was told by our local office that details were just about to be issued.
- In April 09 maps showing the overlaps were actually issued and we were instructed in bold type to answer within 21 days – after they had sat on the information for three months (and they sent the letters out to coincide with the start of lambing).
- I replied at the end of April 09 showing our actual boundaries marked on maps.
- In June 09 I received notification that the areas had been agreed.
- In July 09 I queried payment of the outstanding amounts and was told "at the moment we don't have the software to do this. Once the programme has been written your SAF and LFASS payments will be made." This is six months after it was known that there would be a need for late payments. The more cynical amongst us may think this is a deliberate attempt to delay payments but is more likely to be "cock-up" than "conspiracy".

If there are lots of us in this position, we should be pushing for interest to be added to payments plus a fine for late payment – or is this a precedent that I can quote when I pay my income tax late!

## ON THE CROFT

## Working together brings success

**C**O-OPERATION is not something that crofters do, according to their stereotyped image.

"They can't even agree the date of the fank." was a cynical response heard from some quarters to early crofting community buyout proposals. Where crofters do co-operate, and form themselves into production, marketing or purchasing groups, or manage their land as a community, the results can be impressive – individual crofters' incomes are increased, capacity and confidence are built, local demand for such produce as lamb, beef and vegetables starts to be met and financial assistance for crofting and community projects becomes more accessible.

We are currently aware of fifteen producer groups in the crofting areas from Shetland to

working on the supply side.

While on the subject of co-operation we must not overlook the many sheep and cattle stock clubs that operate successfully throughout the crofting areas. These have generally been more successful in maintaining stock on the hills and are better placed to take advantage of such measures as Land Managers' Options for summer cattle grazing, moorland management, animal health and welfare, and skills development.

So co-operation will be a strong theme of Scottish Crofting Foundation's new Crofting Resources Programme. We will assist where required existing crofting producer groups with their training and development needs and help to set up new collaborative groupings of crofters where there is a demand. We will work with a



Lifting golden wonders at Camuscross, Isle of Skye

Lochaber that are either crofter-led or have a substantial membership of crofters. These groups have brought such benefits to their members as training, marketing, mutual assistance, bulk purchasing, machinery sharing, publicity and insurance. For example, it is thanks to the sheep producers group in Lewis and Harris that lamb from those islands is available in the Co-op supermarket in Stornoway as well as being marketed on the internet.

In Shetland, breeders of the islands' native cattle are working together to safeguard and promote the breed and also to secure much-needed abattoir facilities for cattle.

The local meat supply group in Skye and Lochalsh has formed a trading relationship with a local butcher ensuring supplies of locally produced lamb and beef in Portree and Kyle. The group is actively seeking ways of re-establishing an abattoir in the area.

These are just a few examples of successful co-operative working amongst crofters. Elsewhere in this issue is an article on that excellent co-operative institution, Lewis Crofters Ltd, which for over half a century has been meeting the needs of the crofters of Lewis and Harris, highlighting the benefits of collaborative

number of townships to form development plans and publicise examples of the best co-operative practice in crofting.

We would like to hear from existing crofting groups and from those seeking to establish collaborative groups of crofters whether for production, marketing or supply. Please contact SCF Head Office or email Donald Murdie [donald@crofting.org](mailto:donald@crofting.org).

## Home slaughtering – is it legal?

*Russell Smith explains*

**T**HE FOOD Standards Agency Scotland has recently brought out guidance on home slaughtering of livestock. You can contact them on **01224 285164** or [www.food.gov.uk](http://www.food.gov.uk)

But here is summary for sheep and cattle as I understand it.

You can slaughter livestock yourself on your own premises if it is for the consumption of yourself and your immediate family living in the same household – because you are not placing the meat on the market. You cannot resell the meat or use it in a B&B or similar. Nor, it appears, can you give it to your family or others who do not live with you.

The traditional itinerant slaughterman who kills and dresses carcasses is illegal. It may be lawful to have someone kill the animal for you if you dress and butcher it yourself. The guidance says "the issue is far from clear" – if you want to risk going down this road.

Killing must be humane, of course, according to the Welfare of Animals (Slaughter or Killing) Regulations. You don't need to be licensed if it is for your own consumption. The Humane Slaughter Society website [www.hsa.org.uk](http://www.hsa.org.uk) has details.

Sending your own animals to an approved slaughterhouse and getting the carcasses back for butchering at home is legal but the slaughterhouse must be approved. Getting them killed anywhere else is illegal. Only meat from an approved slaughterhouse can be sold on the market.

Under the BSE regulations specified risk material from sheep, cattle and goats must be stained and disposed of. For all sheep this is the spleen and ileum along with the skull, tonsils and spinal cord of animals over 12 months. For cattle it is the tonsils and intestines for all animals plus the skull and spinal cord if over 12 months and a whole lot more if over 30 months (check the regulations in detail). Cattle over 48 months must be tested for BSE.

Poultry and rabbits can be lawfully killed at home and placed on the market "under some circumstances" so selling oven-ready turkeys and geese at Christmas appears to be OK.

Good luck

Lewis And Harris Sheep Producers  
A successful crofters' group

For a number of years Lewis and Harris Sheep Producers have supplied lambs to the Co-op supermarket in Stornoway under the Heather Isle Meats brand. The quality of lamb and mutton from the Outer Hebrides has long been recognised, but the market and subsidy regimes had developed in such a way that the vast majority of island-produced lambs went to the mainland as stores or into the southern European light lamb trade.

At the same time, butchers on the island were buying in supplies from mainland wholesalers. The Co-op contract makes available local lamb for local consumers while assuring a fair-trade return for the producer. It also raises welfare standards by avoiding unnecessary transport of animals, reduces food miles and provides work for the excellent Stornoway abattoir.

Last year the producer group started direct marketing through their website [www.heatherislemeats.com](http://www.heatherislemeats.com) and now supplies customers throughout the UK.

## ON THE CROFT

## Electronic Identification

**E**ID, UNFORTUNATELY, is still on the cards, writes SCF parliamentary spokesman Norman Leask, but there have been some significant interpretations of the legislation that mean we are not up against a brick wall on December 31st this year. Electronic tagging looks very serious for the sheep industry in the Highlands and Islands.

At this stage it appears that nothing that is staying on my croft will be required to be electronically tagged, even those born into 2010, as all lambs intended for slaughter within

I must encourage you all to use your common grazings or have someone else use them for you otherwise your Single Farm Payment and Less Favoured Area Support Scheme payments are seriously under threat.

I do not think that the Government realised when they started the SFP and LFASS review that it would probably move money from the Highlands and Islands to the lush more productive parts of Scotland but that is certainly what will happen if we stop using our common grazing shares. We must hang in there and

put pressure on our politicians to continue making sure that people can make a living on the periphery.

When negotiating with Europe it was a bad mistake for our representatives to say that Scotland would stop keeping sheep if, on top of all other regulations, EID was put in place. EU farmers thought that was good as they would therefore make more money from their stock. We should have fought on the environmental fact that sheep coming off the hills would cause severe depredation to the environment which in turn would mean that the population of the Highlands and Islands would decrease, leaving it a less desirable place for holidays and destroying the fragile eco system that has been developed over the centuries.

It should also have been explained to the environment committee in Brussels that if the price of sheep meat goes up then Lowland farmers will increase their sheep and instead of the 70% produced in the hills they would produce 200% lambing. The Scottish sheep meat sector would not necessarily be less, however the hills and the communities built around them will be decimated.

Use all your grazing rights and persevere as we are fighting on.



Claire Nicolson

one year of their birth will not require electronic tagging. If the Brussels bureaucrats are still in the mind set that they are now in, come April 2011 I will have to see what is left of the 2010 crop of lambs and the females will then have to be electronically tagged for my replacements.

We have an agreement that there will be a re-examination of the legislation for 2012 so by April 2011 we may well have at least the minimum acceptable move that only electronic tagging as they leave the croft is obtained. So I am very hopeful that my 2010 crop of lambs will not need electronic tagging until they leave the croft.

Much has been made of the derogations we are fighting for. It is correct that all the membership organisations are all trying to do their best for the Scottish industry as a whole but the only concession received so far really only helps the marts and slaughter houses and little or nothing has been gained long term for store producers on the hills.

I have asked the Cabinet Secretary to chair a meeting with all Scottish MEPs along with representatives from SCF and the two other main membership organisations representing the sheep sector, so that we can all pull together to help those in the hills. At the time of writing I still await a reply from the Cabinet Secretary.

## New sheep Autotagger® from Ritchey Tags

**R**ITCHHEY, leading manufacturer and supplier of products to the agricultural, equine and pet market, has launched a new automatic tagger for sheep to trade customers.

The Ritchey Autotagger® takes 10 tags at once, which reduces tagging time considerably when compared with a standard applicator, explains Ritchey marketing manager, Pat Mangion. The Autotagger® applicator uses a staple gun action, which eliminates the need for a blade. This system is less stressful for livestock, and reduces the risk of operator injury. The product has been launched to trade customers, and will be on sale to farmers from 19th October 2009.

"The Autotagger® has performed exceptionally well in practical trials," says Mrs Mangion, who is based at Ritchey's head office in Masham, North Yorkshire. "Feedback from farmers who have tried and tested the product has been very positive. There have been few innovations in sheep tagging since it became compulsory. The vast majority of the 25 million plus ministry tags purchased each year are put in using a manual applicator.

"A great deal of resource has been put into the design and development of the Autotagger®, with particular emphasis on speed and ease of loading," she adds.

Although Ritchey has always been opposed to compulsory sheep EID, the company is committed to assisting farmers wherever possible. Therefore, in order to comply with new EID tagging regulations effective from 1st January 2010, a version of the Autotagger® that can handle electronic identification (EID) is under development.

"Compulsory EID will create more red tape, and increase the financial burden on sheep farmers, who are already struggling to cope after a sustained period of poor profitability. It is important for us to develop a system that is easy to use, as well as one that is priced as realistically as possible to the end user," says Mrs Mangion.

To find out more about the Autotagger® get in touch with your local agricultural merchant for more details. Alternatively, Ritchey can be contacted direct on 01765 689541 or through the website, [www.ritchey.co.uk](http://www.ritchey.co.uk)

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## ON THE CROFT

# Lewis Crofters

## a crofters' co-operative, serving the community

*Kenny MacLennan recognises and celebrates 50 years of successful co-operation*

**L**EWIS CROFTERS has been nothing short of a success story and the last 50 years have seen the venture develop from an idea to a vision, to an achievable target and then into a flourishing business vital to the crofting community in Lewis and Harris.

In February 1955 a small group of men met in Stornoway to discuss the idea of setting up a co-operative that would supply materials and animal feed to crofters. We must never forget these men of vision and purpose that we should try and emulate today. Their initial idea was to set up an egg packing station and the co-operative would deal in eggs.

A second meeting was held in September 1955 where representatives from the Scottish Agricultural Organisation Society (SAOS) were present who gave an extremely positive perspective on the benefits of such a co-operative. The meeting closed without being able to elect a chairman, but did propose to commence operations in the spring of 1956. It wasn't until January 1958 that the final funding package was in place and subsequently the company came into being and was registered on July 11, 1958 – over 50 years ago.

The first company premises were officially opened at Inaclete Road in 1959 by the then Agriculture Minister, Matthew Campbell. He was visiting the islands to inspect reseeding schemes and he stated that high freight charges should encourage more local production. This was echoed by Angus MacDonald of Bernera, chairman of the Lewis District Council. He said: "There should be more effort to produce carrots and potatoes for the Stornoway market from the sandy soils of Uig and Ness, which are comparable with anything in Ayrshire".

Charles Macleod of Ballantrushal said that the premises were too small, and on the opening day there were 200 tonnes of fertilizer in the yard.

In 1959, the highly respected Donald Stewart, provost of Stornoway and later to become

the islands' MP, saluted the work of the pioneers who had the vision to set up the business in Stornoway. Although dealing with the rural areas, it would have a huge impact on the town. The official opening must have been a very interesting evening. Mr Cadzow of SAOS thanked the "doubters and debunkers" whose opposition had spurred on the backers. In any business there will be doubters and debunkers, but Lewis Crofters has risen above these. We are confident and positive that what we do is right and to the benefit of the greater community.

In the past Lewis Crofters have been blessed with strong-willed, purposeful, and optimistic chairmen like Donald Murray of Shawbost, Colin F MacDonald of Barvas, Dr Alasdair Fraser of Breasclete, Angus "Ease" MacLeod of Calabost and Murdo MacDonald of Back. The present chairman is Kenny John MacLennan of Callanish.

In June 2004 the management committee of Lewis Crofters decided to make major refurbishments to the store and yard. The bagging plant was removed to create additional storage during the winter feeding season and an area for a wider gardening section during the summer months. The shop was totally refurbished; its size nearly doubled to give greater display space and a new counter and office area with new toilets and staff facilities. The yard was also resurfaced in asphalt giving a clean workable area for staff, delivery vehicles and customers. The overall cost of these renovations was £100k and has proved to be money very well spent.

In 2006 Lewis Crofters purchased the hydraulic and bearings business of HEB Engineering which has proved to be a most worthwhile acquisition. This provides a much-needed service to crofters, contractors and the wider community. In 2007 the equestrian equipment business of Boots and Saddles was acquired and is now in a position to serve an ever-increasing equestrian need. The shop, which at one time only sold animal feeding stuff, now caters for a wide range of goods covering animal health, outdoor clothing, camping, boots

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and shoes, tools, hardware, household, gardening and a lot more. The company has adopted a bi-lingual signage policy within the store and supports 11 full-time-equivalent staff. Lewis Crofters has also achieved Investor In People status.

In 2007 the AGM reported a turnover figure of £1.95m and forecasts for the current year show that the business may break the magic £2m mark. This is a huge achievement for a company which started from humble beginnings, but with a genuine desire to succeed. That desire which was present in 1955 is still evident with this vibrant company. There is a passion and enthusiasm around the board table and a policy of expansion, improvement and

investment in the business for the benefit of its customers.

Last year at Lewis Crofters Ltd's 50th Anniversary chairman Kenny MacLennan looked to the future and stated: "We look back with thankfulness on where we have come from, where we now find ourselves and we must now look forward with optimism to the future. We are the custodians of an inheritance that has been generated through genuine hard work and we must pass it on to our successors in a better way than we received it. We have to continue to promote and progress this company to even greater heights and promote the ethos of the company by re-investing any profit into the improvement of services for our customers".

Aldersyde  
Lodge Road  
Inverness IV2 4NS

A chàirdean

Harry Ferguson

I am working on a Gaelic television documentary programme on the life of Harry Ferguson, the inventor of the famous Ferguson System – but maybe best remembered for the TE20 "little grey Fergie".

The tractor is well known and loved by agriculturalists (and collectors) all over the world, but the man responsible for the ingenuity of the invention is perhaps less well known. We intend to put this right in the production of this programme, and we hope your readers will be among many who will enjoy watching it.

The grey Fergie will obviously feature strongly in the programme and we are keen to find anecdotes, film or pictures which demonstrate the extraordinary affection so many families had for the tractor and the extent to which it became a multi-purpose part of life.

Was the Fergie part of your family? What was it used for over and above farm work? Was it used for social transport to dances, weddings, shopping, or even going to church? Anecdotes don't have to be in Gaelic, although I will be particularly pleased to hear from Gaelic speakers.

I look forward to hearing from anyone who can help us and assure you that all photographs etc will be treated carefully and returned.

Mòran taing Allan Campbell [allancampbell@madasafish.com](mailto:allancampbell@madasafish.com)

## ON THE CROFT

## Side effects of Blue Tongue vaccination

*Alasdair MacMhaoim seeks more information*

**F**ROM TIME to time there are reports in the news about alleged side effects related to the Blue Tongue vaccine.

In all cases these have been discounted by authorities, but still the stories persist. Any perusal of the internet will lead to numerous examples and one site in particular, [www.campaignforliberty.com](http://www.campaignforliberty.com), has some very interesting points; among them that our own midges may be different from foreign ones and our native breeds may have a resistance. Apparently all cases so far have involved imported animals.

My own interest began when I was speaking to a fellow Highland breeder who, for the first time, experienced unusual problems. As he told me, he has been raising cattle for years in the same area, Easter Ross, and this past calving was the first time he encountered two unusual problems.

The first problem was that one of his calves had a malformation in its jaw. The breeder said he had never seen this before in his stock, so it is natural that he wondered why. The other problem he called "brittle hoofs". It was as if the calf's hoofs were too delicate to walk on.

Again, he had never encountered this problem before and wondered why it should suddenly arise. In both cases, the only new factor was the administration of the Blue Tongue vaccination.

I mentioned the problems to a local vet who discounted them immediately. However, it occurred to me that if possible indications of problems are ignored in the first instance, then there will never be an accurate record of possible side effects which may then be investigated. For example, I believe that it is acknowledged that GPs under-report drug reactions within their yellow card system.

Consequently, I thought it might be interesting to invite readers to contact me if they suspect that the vaccine may be causing problems. I'll collate whatever responses I get and see what can be made of them. Names need not be mentioned if preferred.

Please let me know if you suspect any problems at:

[alternatives.clinic@toucansurf.com](mailto:alternatives.clinic@toucansurf.com)  
or post to **Alternatives**  
39 High Street, Tain, IV19 1AE.

Government announced that limited modification of the vaccination rules came into force on 07 August 2009. These are:

1 Provision has been made to permit lambs on the islands which are being moved to the GB mainland via a communal collection point to be vaccinated at the collection point, rather than before leaving their holdings of origin. This has been permitted because of the minimal impact in disease risk caused by a few hours delay in vaccination when compared to the practical advantages of bringing animals together in a controlled situation where vaccination may be carried out more effectively. It remains the responsibility of each keeper to ensure that their animals are vaccinated before departure from the islands.

2 Sheep or cattle that are being kept for the purpose of scientific research where vaccination of those animals would interfere with that research may be exempted from vaccination. Such exemptions can be applied for by writing to Animal Health and Welfare Division at the address below, and will be granted on a case by case basis.

The updated vaccination declaration, which sets out all the requirements and exemptions, is attached below. It will shortly be available on the Scottish Government website at: [www.scotland.gov.uk/BTVvaccination](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/BTVvaccination).

The compulsory vaccination campaign against BTV8 has been a great achievement. As we may now be in the period of highest risk, we should remind livestock keepers to:

a keep up with vaccination of young stock. The main requirements are that all lambs and calves (except those on Shetland) must be fully vaccinated by the age of 6 months if remaining on the holding of origin. If a lamb or calf over the age of three months is moved off its holding of birth, it must be fully vaccinated before this is done. (However, if they are going directly to slaughter or to slaughter via a market at less than six months of age, then vaccination is not required). In addition, any unvaccinated animal over three months of age brought into Scotland should receive a full course of BTV8 vaccine within two weeks of their arrival.

b source animals responsibly. It remains vital that care is taken when sourcing animals.

c any suspicion of notifiable disease to the local divisional veterinary manager for investigation.

## Crofting Supplies

**E**STABLISHED earlier this year, Crofting Supplies aims to provide a one-stop shop for all your crofting needs.

The business was developed when we first moved to our croft in Caithness and had difficulty accessing services such as agricultural contracting, fencers, feed supplies, planning advice etc. We therefore came up with the idea of creating Crofting Supplies to cover all these needs under one roof.

With our eyes ever on the environment we try to source products that are made from sustainable or recycled means wherever possible. For example, a 100% recycled plastic material that we have acquired has been developed into a range of products which includes sheep and calf pens, hen houses and pig arks.

On the construction front, Crofting Supplies can supply deliver and erect a wide range of agricultural buildings from small field shelters and sheds to timber frame outbuildings, stables and steel framed buildings. All can be designed to suit your specific requirements and we'll even help you with your planning application!

Around the croft we can

supply and erect fencing and made-to-measure gates and will happily advise on and undertake tree and hedge planting.

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Crofting Supplies stocks a wide range of livestock feeds and supplements, including a traditional range of Marriages livestock feed and an organic range of nutrient-rich seaweed-based feeds, fertilisers and plant feeds.

Our new Grazing Finding Service is now up and running... If you have a plot of land that you would be happy to be grazed or if you are looking for grazing land, why not register with us? We aim to match your requirements with land available and hopefully get more livestock living on the land.

And if all that isn't enough Crofting Supplies can even come and shear your sheep!

As the business develops we hope to widen the range of services that we offer. If you feel that you have a product or service that would benefit crofters please let us know and we will be happy to add it to our range.



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## ON THE CROFT

## It's all in the genes

Four members of the North Country Cheviot Sheep Society in Lewis set up a group last year to develop and encourage the use of performance recorded North Country Cheviot sheep, both locally and nationally. They have called themselves The Lewis Recorded Cheviot Group (LRCG) and were successful in applying to the Macaulay Institute's Lewis Endowment Fund for funding to assist them in their aims. Chairman of the group, Calum Macleod, gave us this report.

**H**AVE YOU ever questioned why it is that some of your sheep seem to produce good lambs year on year despite their being relatively small and poor themselves; while others may be big and heavy but can't leave you a decent lamb, or perhaps no lamb at all? Let me try to explain.

It's because there are some "givers" and some "takers". There are some that put all their resources into their lamb, while others are greedy and keep it all to themselves and let the lamb suffer. But how can you predict which ones will be so? Which sheep are you going to have to feed expensive concentrates to, to get a decent lamb? The answer is to record their performance because it's all in the genes.

#### So, what is performance recording?

The fact is that you are probably already doing this subconsciously, in some measure, if you know each individual sheep in your flock. No doubt you will have observed that a sheep that came from a good mother came herself from a good mother and so it goes on down the family line. So you keep them because of that. That's because these traits are genetic. And so we have the adage: keep the best and sell the rest. But you don't always remember who's who and some poor ewes slip through the net.

Performance recording is a management tool that helps sheep breeders select sheep with the best breeding potential, and thereby produce more lambs of the quality required by the market. Essentially, it strips away the environmental and management influences on an animal and looks at their physical traits. This gives a purchaser an indication of how, for example, a ram's daughters will

perform as mothers – something that is impossible to assess by his appearance. How often some have been caught out by a ram that has been well fed and not well bred! He looked big and strong in the show and sale ring, but his daughters can't raise a lamb because they have no milk. Of course by this time, the ram is either sold, or more likely dead, and you are left with the legacy of poor milking ewes for many years to come. And milking ability is one of the most heritable traits that a ram will pass on to his daughters.

#### What is measured?

Several physical traits are measured and presented as an index. This helps you to pick and choose what you want from your sire according to your particular need. For example, you may want lambs that are early finishers, with lots of muscle and little fat for the butcher. You can aim to get ewe lambs that will become milky mothers (who doesn't?) that will have more twins – or singles if you prefer. Or maybe you're getting on a bit and you don't want ewes that will be too big and heavy when mature.

Lambs are tagged and weighed at birth and their parentage is recorded, together with date of birth, sex and if single, twin etc. It takes about a minute and a half to do. This identifies the lamb and its family tree. It's also used to calculate the litter size index. They are then weighed again at about eight weeks of age. This gives an indication of the milking ability of the ewe as the lamb is almost solely dependent on her up to this age. Yes, the mother is just as important as the ram! And a ram from a milky mother is likely to have milky daughters. At about 20 weeks the lambs are again weighed and also scanned with an ultrasound scanner by a trained technician who will measure how much muscle and fat the lamb has.

The only other way to measure this is on a carcass, by which time you cannot breed from this animal any more! You will always find that some have a propensity to lay down fat, while others lay down muscle. Again, this is genetic. The 20 week weight and scan measurements will give an indication of how the lamb itself is

as a forager to convert grass into meat (or fat). All this data is sent to Signet Breeding Services who put it into a computer and an index is produced for each lamb and for each trait.

#### What is an index?

An index is a statistical estimation of how each animal is likely to perform for each trait based on its parentage and of its own growth measurements and those of its siblings and wider family, whether in your flock or in another's. Each trait is given a value, with some being more important than others and each lamb is awarded an estimated breeding value (EBV). The calculation to make an EBV is done using the co-efficient of heritability for each particular trait plus its economic importance. Thank goodness for computers!

#### Does it work?

It most certainly does! The Scottish Sheep Strategy, overseen by Quality Meat Scotland (QMS), has been carrying out trials over several years with different breeds and farms with some astonishing results – up to £20.49 per ewe difference between high and low index sires on the same farm.

Some benefits have already been realised by LRCG members with average lamb weights up by as much as 5 kg and much meatier (with less fat) carcasses. This has been achieved by early culling of non-productive stock that might otherwise have been retained and retention and purchase of high EBV rams.

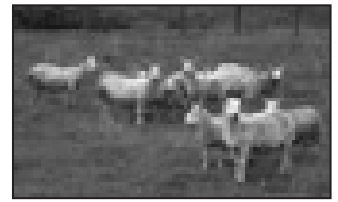
#### But do they look right?

You bet! Members of the group are regular exhibitors at agricultural shows, even the Royal Highland, and frequently feature in the top prizes.

#### Where can you purchase performance recorded stock?

You can purchase them from many flocks from Shetland to the Borders and beyond but, as far as we are aware, we are the only flocks doing performance recording in the Western Isles and Skye. LRCG members will have performance recorded rams for sale this year at Stornoway and Uist. We believe it's only a matter of time before rams at least, and possibly breeding females too, will be selling almost on their performance figures alone.

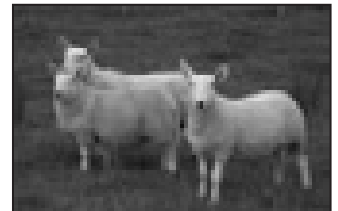
[www.lewisrecordedcheviots.com](http://www.lewisrecordedcheviots.com)



A group of Torravig sheep on a typically wet day in Lewis



Willie Wilson scanning a lamb to measure loin muscle and fat depth



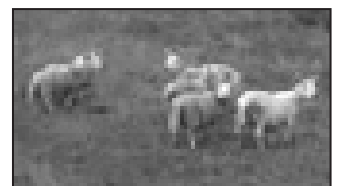
Three Generations (ewe, lamb and gimmer) at Water's Edge



Habost flock



More scanning



Two Torravig gimmers with twin lambs at foot

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Kenneth Maclean (Swainbost, NC 953) Tel. 01851 810 242 Calum Macleod (Water's Edge, NC 956) Tel. 01851 701310

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

## ON THE CROFT

# Proven genetic potential is the key to quality

Rod MacKenzie of the Scottish Sheep Strategy explains

**W**HEN THE Government decided to scrap the Crofter's Commission ram scheme, many people in the more remote areas found it increasingly difficult to source good quality rams to help improve their stock. Distance from the main markets is proving to be a major problem for people, particularly if they have other paid employment.

Many people do not feel confident about going to ram sales and deciding which ram would best suit their needs. It is a difficult job to envisage how a ram will perform when you get him home. The overall look of a ram at a sale can tell you some things about him, but you must ask yourself if these attributes you see are the ones which will help your flock.

By looking you can tell if he has been well looked after, is free from structural faults, eg mouth, skin and legs and you can tell if you like his general appearance.

What you cannot tell, however, is whether his offspring will grow quickly, how big they will eventually become, will they have too much fat and not enough muscle, will his daughters produce a good number of lambs and if they will have enough milk to rear those lambs.

Unfortunately the traits you cannot identify by visual appraisal are the ones which affect the profitability of your sheep enterprise.

All these traits are genetic and therefore

for over 40 years scientists and geneticists have been working with the sheep industry worldwide to identify and measure the traits of economic importance.

This is known as performance recording and it enables commercial producers to select rams which have the proven genetic potential to do what is required in the flock.

The Scottish Sheep Strategy is a Quality Meat Scotland initiative which was set up to help sheep farmers and crofters to understand how using figures can help them select suitable sires.

The strategy has many approaches to fulfil its remit but two of the most important are the focus farm trial and the running of training workshops.

The focus farm work has been well documented and it is now half way through. We are comparing high index rams against

low index rams and also against rams which were bought by the participating farmers in the traditional manner. The trial is looking at those rams as sires of slaughter lambs initially, but also as sires of flock replacements. The results from part one of the trial are most encouraging, showing an average increase in output per ewe mated of £9.16 over low index rams and an even more pleasing average increase of £4.88 over the rams selected in the traditional way. These figures have come from averaging the results of over 1000 ewes over two years on the six farms.

The breeds used in this trial are pure Blackfaces on two farms, pure Lyens on one farm, pure North Country Cheviots on one farm, and Texels on mule-type ewes on two farms.

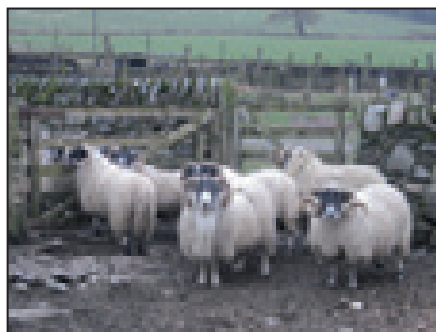
The training workshops which we run take place in August and September each year, prior to the main tup sales.

Each year we try to go to different areas to enable as many people as possible to get the opportunity to attend. We have held workshops in Unst, Orkney, Islay, Melvich, Tighnabruich and Tiree as well as many of more accessible areas on the mainland.

These workshops are held on an evening or on some occasions on a Saturday afternoon.

If you require more information about any of the work undertaken by the Scottish Sheep Strategy, please feel free to contact me, Rod McKenzie, on **01463811804** or visit our website

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



The six rams used at Rotmell Farm, Pitlochry

## Crofter's wife column

**W**ELL, MY inaugural column in the last issue prompted no complaints so here I am, back with the editor's blessing!

It's been a very busy summer here. I suppose it wouldn't be a true crofting life if I wasn't able to say how busy things have been. I often think that the image of life here in the islands is one of a slower pace but between crofting, a young family and running a business (not to mention a new puppy) I seem to be forever chasing my tail and wondering where on earth the day, week, month, or season went!

Take this year's vegetable plot for example: in late spring I opted for the patch in front of the house – with easy access and within sight of my desk I'd never forget or neglect it ... I got the Crofter to plough it for me and my visiting father then kindly took over, broke it up and prepared it for planting with far more care and attention

than I would ever have been able to give it. In went the potatoes, three types of cabbage and a couple dozen leeks, lettuces, spinach. It looked fabulous! All straight(ish) lines, varying shades of green foliage and patches of dark earth. And not a weed in sight. The Crofter (who is rather prone to exaggeration) issued a gloomy warning that the whole place was teeming with rabbits. We have this "discussion" regularly. Last year, I saw ONE rabbit on the back lawn, this year none. Nothing would last, he predicted. He was wrong.

The days passed. Things grew. Life carried on, busier than ever once the school holidays kicked in. I admired it daily in passing until one day I realised with horror that, despite my good intentions, the weeds were determinedly advancing. It was time to rope our eldest lad in as Chief Weeder.

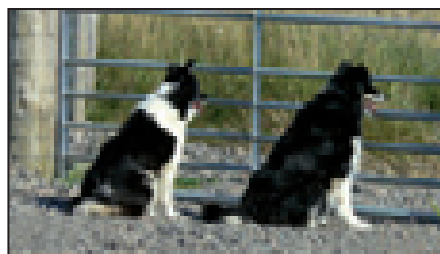
So, all was well... until the day the renegade wedder got into the garden and ate my prize lettuce! After a few years of growing salad leaves, I had decided to go for "proper" lettuce and was pleased at how things were progressing. Complaining to the Crofter got me nowhere: "It won't have harmed him," he laughed. I'm sure you can imagine the thinly disguised threat which my retort carried...

Elsewhere, the strawberries and blackcurrants provided colourful and tasty harvests and the raspberry bushes that I lifted and replanted in the spring came through their trauma relatively unscathed and produced a modest, but welcome, crop.

Autumn is on the horizon now, the soup and porridge pots already back in daily use and a fire has burned on more than one cool evening. Hay lies in the byre, while the Crofter makes the most of the evening light – while it lasts: fencing, walking out to the hill, all the time planning what he'll put to the sale, what he'll bring home from the sale, where he'll winter the sheep, which cows to bring inside. Not to mention wondering how on earth does he go about training a young sheep dog!

Our eldest now spends his days at the high school. I can hardly believe he's of that age, while the baby continues to grow and smile and delight us. And me? Well, I'm now eyeing up the rowan berries and brambles and wondering where on earth I put my Grandma's jelly pan at the end of last year's jam season...

*The Crofter's Wife*



Claire Nicolson



Claire Nicolson

## ON THE CROFT

## Bull Hire Scheme Review

Update by Sarah Allen, chair of Bull Hire Review Group

EARLIER THIS year, Minister for the Environment Roseanna Cunningham MSP appointed an independent review group to look at practical options to encourage crofters to keep cattle and to consider what type of public support would be best from the resources available.

The review group met for the first time in May when we were presented with a history of the bull hire scheme, information about state aid rules and findings of the most recent scheme review. We discussed how we would conduct the review and what information we would gather and examine. This was followed by a visit to the stud farms on the outskirts of Inverness.



The review group decided that an essential part of the review would be to seek the views of potential users of any future scheme and with this in mind a survey was issued in July to all crofters who keep breeding cows (around 1700).

The survey seeks views on why cattle are kept; whether a bull is hired, borrowed or owned; whether AI is used or if cows are moved to a bull. It also asks about overwintering bulls on the croft or locally. The survey results should enable the review group to determine demand for any future scheme and help in defining its purpose.

By the beginning of August around 50% of the survey forms had been returned. Marina Dennis, who represents the SCF on the review

group, comments: **"It is really important that crofters return these forms as it will indicate the interest in any future scheme. We have a lot of skills and knowledge within the review group, but we need to know what is happening on the ground. If you haven't returned your form yet please try and do so. The more information we can collect, the better our assessment and advice to the Minister."**

The review group also decided that it would like to compare the value of progeny of scheme bulls with the value of calves from non-scheme users—to provide evidence of market differences accrued by scheme bulls. Whilst this sort of comparison is fraught with all sorts of other factors that influence calf sales, with the assistance of review group member Ian Tolmie from Dingwall and Highland Marts, we are looking into how best to compare market data.

We are also looking at the costs of operating a scheme, and will be comparing a Government-run facility with other options. I look forward to discussing the review with as many crofters as possible as I visit some areas in the coming weeks. I shall also be presenting the survey results and discussing the future of the scheme at the SCF gathering in Grantown in September and the Crofters Commission assessors conference in November.

The review group is due to report to the Minister in November so we have a busy time ahead. In the meantime, if anyone would like to take part in the survey and has not received a survey form please contact Lynda Marshall on 0131 244 6604 or email [bullhirereview@scotland.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:bullhirereview@scotland.gsi.gov.uk)



## Bull Hire Review Group

The group is chaired by Sarah Allen, who is an agricultural adviser and former member of the Crofters Commission. Its underlying aim is to examine the best way crofters can work together to keep quality livestock in Scotland's remoter rural areas.

The terms of reference of the group are:

- To investigate practical options to encourage crofters to work together to keep quality cattle of high health status in remote rural Scotland.
- To identify those parts of the country where crofting communities would be unable without support to secure the fertilisation of cows at equitable cost.
- To consider what type of public support would best help to overcome such disadvantage.
- To define the outcomes which any such support should be designed to achieve.
- To consider whether, in order to achieve the desired outcomes, support is best provided in cash (by grant to crofting groups) and/or in kind (for example, through the supply of bulls or semen).
- To recommend options to Scottish Ministers by November 2009 to achieve best value from the resources devoted to the interim bull hire scheme.

An hour or so had the antiquity cleaned, sharpened, oiled and fitted with an improvised hand grip. The results have been spectacular. The scythe is not only quicker than the trimmer but is quieter and less tiring. Technical advice on bracken control suggests cutting twice in the first year, and once a year for the following five, so I need to repeat the exercise, and exercise it is indeed, in September.

So, I hear you say, "How am I supposed to get the time to cut bracken with a scythe, what with two full-time jobs, the clipping and silage to do and a B&B to run?" Well, you know when the family comes home for the holidays they always offer to help with the toughest jobs on the croft. Well they do, don't they?

Introduce them to the scythe, give them a quick health and safety briefing and set them to work. When they get fed up, you just remind them that, incredible as it may be, people in the city pay lots of good money to go to the gym for far less beneficial exercise, and without the good fresh air and the lovely view!

Donald Murdie

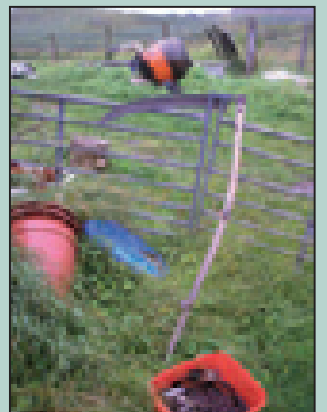
*Bracken Control – A Guide to Best Practice is a very useful booklet obtainable from local SGRPID offices or on the Scottish Government website.*

## The right tool for the job

OCCASIONALLY WE at SCF get accused of wanting to go back to the times when crofting was equated with backbreaking work and poverty. So what follows might be risking such a response, but bear with me...

Like many other crofters, I have a scythe hanging in the shed, a position it has occupied for the last twenty-odd years. The implement itself is at least ninety years old and was acquired when I was working on the railways in the east of England in the 1970s. Gangs of track workers used to keep the line sides, cuttings and embankments cut short throughout the summer, which is hard to believe when you look at the unkempt state of so much of Network Rail's property these days. Anyway, the scythe was a redundant asset and I purchased it from my employers for 50p. I knew it would come in handy eventually – and so it did.

We recently took over a croft with a large area of bracken coverage too steep for any sort of machine access. After spending some hours working at this infestation with a powerful trimmer fitted with a metal disc cutter I was pretty fed up and almost deaf – and very little impression had been made. It was then that the scythe was extricated from the shed; blunt, rusty and missing a hand grip.





## ON THE CROFT

## EU funding boost for machair

**H**OPES ARE high for a new and rewarding collaboration between crofters, agencies and wildlife conservationists.

The European Commission confirmed this week that a funding bid for the conservation of Scottish machair, submitted by RSPB Scotland and supported by SNH, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar and the SCF, has been successful. The EU LIFE+ Nature scheme will fund 50% of the £2 million project.

The remaining 50% funding will need to be met by partners. Discussions are ongoing, with final decisions on financial contributions due over the next few weeks. It is anticipated that the project will go ahead, starting in January 2010, running for four years on the Western Isles and Argyll Islands, and creating three new jobs on the islands.

LIFE+ is the EU funding stream dedicated to the conservation of the most important species, habitats and sites in Europe. Scottish machair is a unique environmental asset, combining all three of these. The extraordinary wildlife value of crofted machair – the breeding waders at higher densities than anywhere, the arable wildflowers now vanished from much of Europe, the rare birds and insects like the great yellow bumble bee – is recognised in the designation of a network of machair sites under EU wildlife law as Special Protection Areas and Special Areas of Conservation. These land designations mean that the area qualifies for the LIFE+ funding scheme.

A number of previous Scottish conservation projects have started very successfully with an injection of LIFE+ funding: peatland restoration in Caithness and Sutherland, for example. Machair is remarkable, however, in that the habitat is created and maintained by crofting agriculture. As crofting and the methods used change, so does the wildlife.

The LIFE+ project will focus on working closely with farmers and crofters to develop, implement and promote machair agriculture that is financially viable, practical for the crofters and simultaneously secures the wildlife in the long term. Involvement from crofters will be voluntary and the project will work alongside the SRDP and help to develop new measures to be integrated with government schemes in the longer term.

For example, the project will aim to increase the area of machair arable crops that is harvested late, rather than as arable silage. Late harvesting benefits wildflowers as they set seed before being gathered and seed-eating birds like the corn bunting, which prefer to eat ripe seeds. To achieve this, the factors that encourage early harvest will need to be addressed. In some areas this will include goose impacts – so the project will extend funding for goose management under the local goose management schemes. In other places availability of contractors and machinery will be issues, so the project will employ agricultural staff and will purchase machinery for crofters or contractors to use. An agricultural advisor will also be employed to help co-ordinate implementation and share techniques and good practice. Moreover,

spin-off benefits are anticipated, in terms of a higher public profile for machair and increased tourism.

On the machair, the coastal environment, the culture, wildlife and agriculture combine to create a uniquely appealing and valuable asset. This new money from Europe gives us an exciting opportunity to promote machair management that retains this value and keeps crofting at the heart of the landscape.



Species-rich grassland

## A welcome boost for RDC applicants on the Isle of Skye

**E**VERY LITTLE helps when it comes to accruing points towards entry into the SRDP Rural Development Contract programme, the government's latest agri-environment scheme that replaces the Rural Stewardship Scheme.

The new Skye Crofting and Corncrake Partnership launched in Waternish at the start of July 2009 should provide a welcome boost for applications sympathetic to the plight of the vulnerable corncrake. By combining the knowledge and experience of participating crofters and the partnership organisations (SCF, SAC and RSPB), this initiative aims to enhance applications, co-ordinate delivery and maximise the benefits of SRDP funds on the island.

Once common throughout Skye and Wester Ross, the corncrake has become almost as scarce as hen's teeth on Skye and it is seldom heard on the mainland. It is not surprising therefore that it has been identified as a priority species for targeted action within the Rural Development Contract programme. However, to ensure that an application is successful and that management will provide habitats that attract corncrake, an approach that is both collaborative and strategic is essential.

Concentrating initially on the Waternish and Trotternish peninsulas, (although outlying areas with calling birds will also be considered),

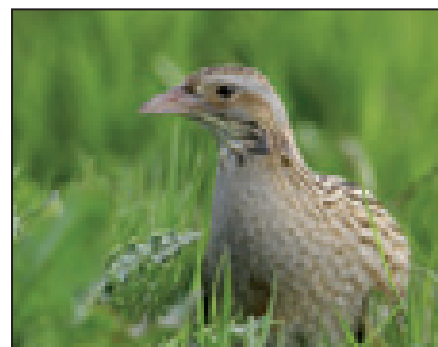
the partnership will take a strategic approach to co-ordinating collaboration between townships or individuals adopting corncrake management options. It will advise on the best combination of options for the suite of species present (not just corncrakes); integration with other management on the croft and, where desirable, opportunities for additional management that may further enhance the status of an application. All of the above will raise the standard of an application and maximise its assessment rating to increase its chances of success in the highly competitive SRDP scheme. At the same time, the process will ensure that we do the best we can for corncrake and other wildlife – and all at no extra cost to the crofter.

The scheme contains four key management options aimed at addressing the corncrake's habitat requirements, although others may also be of benefit if used in combination with these. Since corncrakes need tall vegetation to hide in when they return from Africa in April/early May and after grass crops are cut in late summer, the scheme provides an early and late cover management option for a payment of £162/ha for fields between 0.15 hectares and one hectare in size. Where it is necessary to create early/late vegetation cover, this option attracts a payment of £800/ha. For the adjacent mown grasslands, stock must be excluded from 15th May until after cutting, with the payment rate ranging from £271/ha for 1st August cutting to £691/ha for 1st September cutting. Fields managed by grazing (between 15th July and 1st March) that contain a high proportion of vegetation suitable for cover in the spring may be entered into the Management of Grazed Grassland for Corncrakes option, for a payment of £313/ha. All in all, this could make a significant contribution to the management of a croft over the five year period of the contract.

At the launch of the partnership in July, Donald MacDonald, SCF board member from Skye, warmly welcomed the new initiative saying, "It is a good example of how crofters and a conservation body can work together to their mutual advantage. Crofters, whether as a township or as individuals, can benefit from an enhanced possibility of an SRDP application being successful, while the RSPB benefits from the managed habitat for the corncrake."

Establishment of the partnership is, in itself, recognition of the concern for the future of crofting and corncrakes on Skye and the desire to ensure that high conservation value farming attracts the support and financial rewards it deserves.

*Alison MacLennan  
RSPB Conservation Officer Wester Ross,  
Skye and Lochalsh*



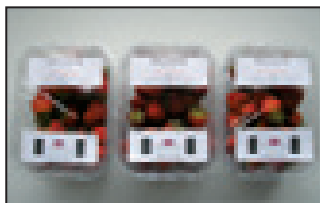
## Scottish Crofting Produce Mark – the next steps

**T**HE SCOTTISH Crofting Produce Mark, officially launched by the Minister in Watersay last year, currently has thirty four members.

Staff resources are now in place to develop, publicise and promote the mark and to increase membership. The working group will be re-established in order to review the operation of the scheme, review existing criteria for joining, and set new criteria for produce not already covered.

The SCF web pages relating to the mark will be expanded and updated and publicity material will be built around case studies on SCP mark members.

All existing members of the



mark will be contacted during the autumn and will be fully consulted on any proposed changes to the scheme.

**Anyone interested in joining the SCP mark working group, or with any questions about the scheme, should contact Donald Murdie, [donald@crofting.org](mailto:donald@crofting.org), or SCF head office.**



Scottish Crofting Produce

Highlands and Islands Croft Origin

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## SAC Consulting



SAC Consulting provides leading edge, independent and impartial advice throughout the crofting counties.

Our consultants combine local knowledge with extensive experience and are supported by our team of renowned specialists.

Among the services we can provide are

- general agricultural and business advice
- assistance with IACS, SRDP and CCAGS
- soil and fodder analysis
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- livestock enterprise planning.



Contact your local SAC office:	Lerwick	01595 693520	
Balivanich	01870 602336	Oban	01631 563093
Campbeltown	01586 552502	Portree	01478 612993
Inverness	01463 233266	Stornoway	01851 703103
Kirkwall	01856 872698	Thurso	01847 892719

See our website [www.sac.co.uk](http://www.sac.co.uk)

SAC is a charity registered in Scotland, No. SC003712

## MEMBERS' PAGES

## SCF AGM 2009

**T**HE EIGHTH SCF annual general meeting was held in Dingwall Auction Mart on 23rd June 2009. There was a very good turnout and lively discussion, particularly in the afternoon session on the draft Crofting Reform Bill consultation.

SCF Chair Neil Macleod presented his report and opened by paying tribute to all those involved in the Scottish Crofting Foundation from the chief

year had a shown an overspend on the Croft Land Use Programme which reduced reserves but new funding for SCF development work had been secured and will enable a full programme to be implemented. All funders were acknowledged.

The SCF Board and Council recommended that Eleanor Arthur and Derek Flynn be appointed as directors and that John Macleod be re-appointed as a director and this was unanimously agreed.



executive down to each individual member. He referred briefly to the crofting reform discussions and looked forward to the opportunities for members to contribute to the debate following the Government response to the Shucksmith report, urging members to make sure that their voice was heard.

Neil commented on the heartening news from John Bannister and Calina Macdonald on the SCF training programme, noting with some satisfaction the increasing number of young people participating in and expressing an interest in the training courses run by the SCF.

SCF chief executive Patrick Krause presented a summary of the accounts and reminded members that a full copy of the accounts could be obtained from HQ. The

The following special resolution, in accordance with Section 77 (1) (a) of the Companies Act 2006, was adopted unanimously by members present: "That the name of the company be changed to Scottish Crofting Federation with effect from the date on which the new certificate of incorporation is issued." The chief executive was therefore actioned to implement procedures to enable a name change to take place.

The formal meeting closed and a presentation on the draft Crofting Reform Bill consultation by Iain Dewar, Scottish Government, was followed by a wide ranging discussion and questions being taken by Iain. Opinions of members were noted for incorporation in the SCF response to the consultation.



## SCF HQ staff change

**O**UR MEMBERSHIP administrator Marion MacLeod, who many of you will have got to know over the past few years, has left to take up a post with Community Energy Scotland as the Community Power Down officer for the Orkadian island of Stronsay. Our best wishes.

Our new membership administrator is Karen Campbell who lives in Dornie, Lochalsh. Karen hails from Ratagan, further down the glen and graduated last year from Aberdeen University with an honours degree in animal science. Since then she has worked in Dornoch for the meat processor Dunbia and has taken the opportunity to come back to her home area to settle. She has gained work experience from part-



time positions whilst studying and various voluntary placements. Karen is also a silver medal winner in the Scottish University boxing championships. Welcome Karen.

## Foundation for Common Land

*Gwyn Jones reports on progress*

**A**S REPORTED in a previous issue of *The Crofter*, SCF is involved in taking an active part in the setting up of a new organisation to raise awareness of various types of common land at a UK and international scale and to bring common graziers together to share their concerns and helpful experiences.

Since then, a shadow board has been constituted to bridge the gap between the idea and the eventual incorporation of the new organisation. For the time being Scottish interests are being represented by Patrick Krause and myself.

The shadow board is now trying to draw up a proposal for funding the start-up of the new foundation and our plan is to do this through Leader, with match-funding from other sources.

The Leader group in Cumbria

have agreed to fund a small pilot project to carry out the work of developing the main proposal. This will include consulting crofters on how the interests of common graziers could be best addressed and supported.

Shadow board chairman Andrew Humphries will be speaking at the SCF conference in Grantown, giving us a vision of what the foundation could be and providing members an opportunity to discuss this directly with him.

Further details about the method of consultation, which will take place in October, will also be available then.

Scotland has about one third of the common pasture in the UK and a quarter of the total in Britain and Ireland. We have a lot to teach and to learn from other graziers and our combined voice can really make a difference at UK and EU level.

[Dgl\\_jones@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:Dgl_jones@yahoo.co.uk)



Gwyn Jones



## MEMBERS' PAGES

## Chance of a lifetime

**W**OULD YOU like to have some help on your croft next summer, get some new blood into your community and give a young person the chance to learn about Scotland and about the crofting way of life?

Are you a young crofter who would like the chance to go to America to learn about life in the rural Midwest? Xchange Scotland in conjunction with the Scottish Crofting Foundation and the 4H programme of West Virginia in the United States are looking for a family to host a young volunteer from America for 2/3 months in summer 2010 and also a young person (18-25) from a crofting background to send the other way!

Xchange Scotland is a registered Scottish charity that sends and hosts volunteers on any one of thousands of international volunteer projects and exchanges across the world. Last year we sent and received over 100 volunteers including bringing almost 50 to become involved in community activities across Scotland. For our latest venture we are proud to link up with the SCF and the well-established, America-wide 4H programme.

4H takes youngsters from an agricultural background and gives them the chance to play a fuller part in their community by involving them in a host of activities such as summer camps, state fairs or international exchanges and other voluntary activities. The young volunteer would spend 2/3 months leading Xchange Scotland summer projects as well as 2/3 months working on your croft in return for board and lodgings. As they are from a farming background they should be well used to rural life and also to hard graft and as well as receiving the experience of a life time, will really be able to help round the croft. The same will be expected of the young Scot that will lead summer camps for 4H in West Virginia before helping out on a Midwest farm.

For more information about Xchange Scotland or West Virginia 4h please see [www.xchangescotland.org](http://www.xchangescotland.org) or <http://www.wvu.edu/~exten/depts/famyou/4h.htm> or if you are interested or have any questions contact either [martin@xchangescotland](mailto:martin@xchangescotland) or [patrick@crofting.org](mailto:patrick@crofting.org)

**Don't miss out on the chance of a lifetime!!!**

## Woodland creation: go native

**I**F YOU'RE THINKING about planting a native woodland but haven't got the time or not sure where to start – then Woodland Trust Scotland can help with MOREwoods.

MOREwoods is a simple scheme to help you create beautiful new native woodland with free advice and help from the Woodland Trust Scotland, part of the UK's leading woodland conservation charity.

Native woods and trees are important for an increasingly wide range of reasons. Almost 50% of all native woodland that was left in Scotland in the 1900s has been destroyed or damaged; now only 4% of land area is covered by native woodland. The trust wants to work with individuals or groups who wish to plant more native woodland. Imagine, in around 12-15 years, you could be walking under the canopy of your own flourishing young forest of native trees – oak, ash, hazel and rowan.

## Why Plant?

Native woods are a haven for wildlife and critical for our own health and well being. In addition they can also provide excellent game cover, produce valuable products such as timber and wood fuel, help with



Woodland Trust

Can RSABI help you?  
Can you help RSABI?

**R**SABI is the Scottish charity helping people who have depended on land-based occupations and who now face hardship.

Many will recognise the name RSABI, previously known as the Royal Scottish Agricultural Benevolent Institution, but most will probably think that the charity is only there to help retired farmers.

RSABI does indeed help retired farmers, but the charity can also help anyone who has worked on the land, as well as their dependants. This includes stalkers, gamekeepers, ghillies and crofters, along with farm workers, forestry workers and estate-workers, plus a range of people who supply services to such trades. The majority of beneficiaries are elderly and include many widows, but the charity also supports a significant number who, through illness, accident or disability, are unable to work to normal retiring age.

RSABI offers financial and practical support, in confidence, to anyone who has worked for more than ten years in a land-based occupation in Scotland. Each year RSABI helps some 600 individuals around Scotland, tailoring its assistance, financial or otherwise, to make as meaningful a difference as possible to someone's quality of life. This may mean providing regular long-term payments to those on limited incomes or making single grants to help individuals meet a particular crisis in their lives. One-off payments typically help with home repairs and modifications, essential transport costs, television licenses or even respite holiday breaks, and the charity also operates a fuel poverty fund to help those experiencing hardship heating their homes.

As well as charity support, RSABI welfare staff ensure that individuals receive their full entitlements to any other benefits due to them and will help and advise with other difficulties such as care services, housing or other such matters. In two cases recently, individuals' incomes have almost doubled as a result of RSABI identifying their eligibility for additional benefits.

Too many of those who the charity may be able to help are either unaware of RSABI or are perhaps too proud to ask for help. RSABI treats everyone applying for assistance in total confidence, so there's no one need to worry about others finding out.

If you would like to help the charity in some way, or if you or someone you know needs a little help, please contact RSABI (telephone 0131 472 4166) or visit the website [www.rsabi.org.uk](http://www.rsabi.org.uk).

Further information: Rosemary Walker, Playfair Walker PR, 0131 445 5570 or Maurice Hankey, RSABI, 0131 472 4166

pollution control, reduce soil erosion and make an important contribution to addressing the challenges of land management in the face of climate change.

## MOREwoods – How it works

MOREwoods has been designed to be simple with minimal paperwork and bureaucracy. The trust wants to help as many people as possible to plant new native woodland.

The trust will offer advice and support to every applicant. For successful applicants the trust will arrange for an agent to visit and advise and agree the design of new woodland, prior to applying for a woodland creation grant. A contractor will then be employed to plant the trees and maintain them for five years.

## MOREwoods brings many benefits

- It's simple from the start. Filling in the application form will only take a few minutes. You don't need any specialist knowledge at this stage and there is no legal commitment.

- It stays simple. If the application is successful, the trust will do everything from doing the grant application to planting the trees and maintaining them.

- It's risk free; if for reasons beyond your control the grant application is unsuccessful then, although the planting won't be able to proceed, it won't cost you anything in agents' fees.

MOREwoods is available throughout Scotland for those who wish to plant a minimum of one hectare (2.5 acres).

The closing date for applications is 31 December 2009. For more details and an application pack you can call the trust on 0845 293 5689 or visit [woodlandtrust.org.uk/MOREwoods-scotland](http://woodlandtrust.org.uk/MOREwoods-scotland).

## CROFTING HEROES

## John Murdo Kerr

**T**HE VILLAGE of Barvas, on the west side of Lewis, encompasses some of the most fertile land on the island, with a hefty bank of rolling machair-land running from the main road down to the sea's edge about a kilometre away.

This was the domain of one John Murdo Kerr, whose name needs little introduction

which John Murdo most certainly did.

He instinctively knew his business and it would be hard to come across any individual more knowledgeable on livestock rearing in this part of the world. The bedrock of his 40-strong herd of cattle were hardy Aberdeen Angus, who could easily survive the windswept winters of the Atlantic coast. They were crossed to a

the limelight or the media spotlight, but it would be hard to come across any other individual who has done more at a very practical level to help his fellow crofters.

He was a founding member of Lewis Livestock, the local branch of Highlands and Islands Livestock Limited, who up until last year operated a collection of lambs from village fanks. Only now when the firm has stopped trading does their real worth become clear.

Many years ago, John Murdo and a few faithful friends gathered in his living room to thrash out the formation of Lewis Livestock and so began a long association with that particular organisation which lasted up until his untimely death. He was the last chairman of the organisation.

And he was involved in much more besides. He was chairman of the Lewis and Harris Cattle Producers' Group, a director of Lewis Crofters Limited and one of the founding members of the Lewis and Harris Sheep Producers' Association.

When it came to initiatives to help the world of crofting and crofters John Murdo was more often than not found in the driving seat and at the same time quite content to let others bask in any limelight.

Very often when an individual is at the centre of a lot of the type of organisations mentioned it can attract the derision of other less proactive individuals. But no-one ever had a bad word to say about John Murdo. He was revered, respected and held in high regard wherever he went.

No-one knew the real worth of John Murdo more than his fellow crofters and neighbours on the west side of Lewis. In times of crisis, he was the go-to guy, whether it be a problematic lambing or calving. It didn't matter what time of day or night, he was always more than willing to lend his expert hand in his usual modest and graceful manner.

John Murdo is sorely missed by the entire crofting community, but no more so than by those who knew him best and, in particular, his family.

To end on a more uplifting note, it looks very much as if his legacy will live on, in the form of sons Alan and Norman who have inherited both their father's work ethic and aptitude for livestock rearing – no doubt from learning at first-hand from the great man himself.

*Our thanks to Murray MacLeod for this article.*



to the crofting fraternity of Lewis and, indeed, way beyond.

John Murdo passed away suddenly last year at the age of 68 and the sense of loss, particularly as you drive through that part of the world and glance at the sizeable steading and beautifully manicured fields which were his personal hallmark, is still acute.

He had access to good land, certainly, but the quality of his livestock, both sheep and cattle, was exemplary and proved that it is still possible for the crofting counties to compete with anyone – as long as you focus your energies in the right direction. And you are prepared to work hard,

Charolais bull and the store calves annually sent over to Thainstone where they attracted a premium price, even when going head-to-head against stock from arable-rich Aberdeenshire.

In addition to this, he had a flock of some 200 sheep, mainly Blackface, but also a number Cheviot crosses put to a terminal sire to try and tap into the fat-lamb trade. So not only was he a renowned cattle-man, when it came to sheep he more knew his stuff as well.

However, what really made John Murdo stand out against his peers was his unselfish attitude and modesty. He was not interested in

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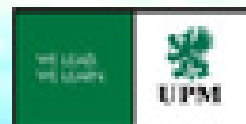
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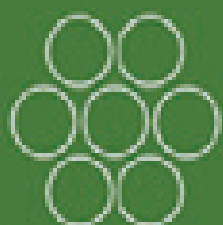


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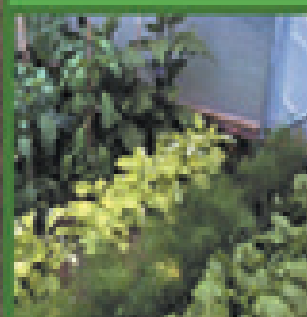
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# Emergency Medical Retrieval Service

**THE EMERGENCY**  
Medical Retrieval Service (EMRS)

has recently completed the first year of an 18-month pilot service covering an area which includes a large part of the crofting regions.

Based in Glasgow, the service currently covers remote and rural areas of western Scotland from Stranraer to Stornoway. Coverage of other remote areas including Sutherland, Caithness and the Northern Isles is to be considered as part of the appraisal of the pilot project. EMRS uses the Scottish Ambulance Service (SAS) helicopter and plane based in Glasgow with air paramedics an integral part of the team. On occasion the service may use the Royal Navy sea king helicopter based at Prestwick.

EMRS seeks to improve equity of access to critical care services for patients in remote and rural areas. EMRS has a rota of 14 NHS consultants from intensive care or emergency medicine available 24 hours a day to support health services in remote and rural areas in dealing with critically ill patients. The four pillars of the service are: telephone advice, air transfer, education and the website.

The service provides advice to rural health staff regarding the resuscitation and management of critically ill patients and the need for urgent air transfers. For patients requiring transfer, whilst 90% can be transferred perfectly well by ambulance paramedics, the 10% who are critically ill can benefit from the additional skills and interventions of a critical care consultant. EMRS is aware of the pressures on colleagues in rural areas when dealing with an emergency case, and for critically ill cases once the EMRS is contacted the service will make the necessary further arrangements for transport and agree the destination for the

patient. One of the service aims is 'optimal triage', to try and transfer the patient directly to the most appropriate hospital and avoid the need for later transfers on to another hospital (eg serious head injuries will go directly to a hospital with a neurosurgical unit).

EMRS consultants have been involved in a number of teaching programmes across rural areas, standard hospital based-resuscitation courses (such as advanced life support ALS), teaching on courses run by BASICS Scotland ([www.basics-scotland.org.uk](http://www.basics-scotland.org.uk)) and EMRS has run a number of 'Working with the retrieval team' courses in hospitals throughout the catchment area to introduce the role and practicalities of the service.

The service began as a voluntary rota in 2004 when ten consultants from the Southern General Hospital, Glasgow and the Royal Alexandra Hospital, Paisley sought to improve the resuscitation and transfer of critically ill patients from remote areas of Argyll and Bute. Several of the staff had previously worked in other medical retrieval services eg in Adelaide, Queensland or London (HEMS). The service initially covered six community hospitals in Argyll and Bute and continued on a largely voluntary basis until June 2008.

From June 2008 the service began an 18-month pilot, funded by the Scottish Government and covering an extended area including three rural general hospitals (Oban, Fort William and Stornoway), twelve community hospitals and seventeen remote general practices. Appraisal of the pilot service will determine whether the service is able to continue to offer aeromedical critical care support to remote and rural Scotland.

For further information and contact details for EMRS please see the website [www.emrs.scot.nhs.uk](http://www.emrs.scot.nhs.uk)



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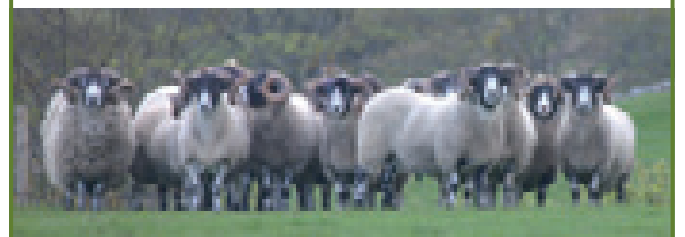
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# Crofting Connections – Ceanglaichean Croitearachd

Lillian Kelly, development officer with Soil Association Scotland, reports on an innovative new project.

**C**ROFTING Connections is a ground-breaking new project that will inspire over 1,000 young people aged 5-16 living in communities throughout the Highlands and Islands about crofting past, present and future.

They will learn traditional skills



from crofters, create their own climate-friendly food-growing projects and help safeguard the history, culture and heritage associated with their crofting communities.

The aim of Crofting Connections is to encourage young people to sustain a way of life that promotes shared environmental, economic and social goals, vital for sustaining vibrant and healthy rural communities in the 21st century.

To date over 30 schools and communities have signed up to participate in Crofting Connections. The project is led by the Scottish Crofting Foundation and Soil Association Scotland with the support of the Heritage Lottery Fund, Scottish Natural Heritage, LEADER, Argyll and Bute Council, Cairngorm National Park Authority, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, Highland Council, Orkney Islands Council and Shetland Islands Council.

Crofting Connections is

modelled on a highly successful pilot to celebrate crofting in the Year of Highland Culture 2007. A report of the pilot by Health Promoting Schools (now part of Learning and Teaching Scotland) demonstrated that in learning from crofters, young people developed a sense of belonging to the land and the community, whilst



older people enjoyed passing on their knowledge and skills.

Young people also grew enthusiastic about the food production skills and traditions associated with crofting, and became more confident individuals with increased knowledge and pride in their heritage. Many also expressed an intention to live and work in their communities when they completed their education.

Involving the community and promoting inter-generational

relationships are key themes. Young people will learn traditional skills from crofters to create lazy-beds/rigs, grow and harvest heritage crops such as bere and Scots kale, learn how to cook recipes that were once the mainstay of a crofter's diet and share them with the community at harvest celebrations. They will also

try out traditional crafts such as weaving, boat building and fiddle-making with local craftsmen and learn more about the history, culture and geography of their local area, as well as the environmental and health benefits of crofting.

Safeguarding the history, culture and heritage special to local crofting communities is a key outcome. As part of Crofting Connections, schools will undertake local history and oral tradition projects to record



the memories and stories of older generations. Records will be made available to the public through an interactive website, and local museums and heritage centres.

Through Crofting Connections, young people will learn about the influence of crofting in sustaining their heritage, which is reflected in a rich legacy of music, song, dance, poetry, storytelling and literature.

A unique aspect of Crofting



Connections is that its programme of activities directly link to the Curriculum for Excellence, and will contribute to a range of environmental, cultural and social objectives.

SCF chief executive Patrick Krause commented: "We are delighted to be able, in conjunction with our colleagues, to be launching this new project. Crofting makes a major contribution to healthy communities and the environment – and our young people have a great deal to offer. We need to invest in them for the future of crofting."

Hugh Raven, director of the Soil Association Scotland said: "Set against the twin challenges of climate change and peak oil, crofting with its low-input, low-impact farming practices and strong cultural identity has a unique role to play in inspiring today's younger generation about the environment and the need for sustainable lifestyles."

**crofters commission**  
ughdarras nan croitearan

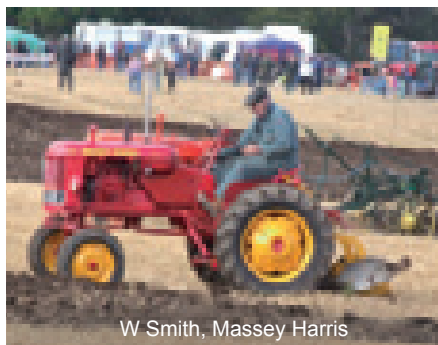
Crofting is a vital element in the economic, environmental, social and cultural structure of our rural communities.

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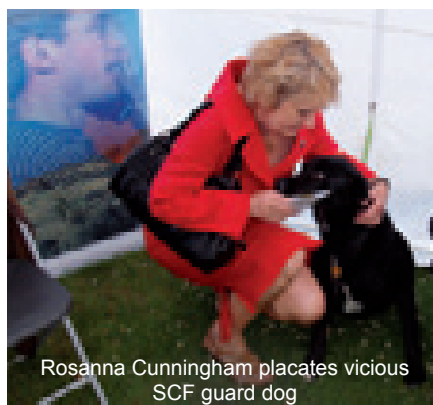
See farming over the last hundred years – binding, thrashing, trailing ploughs, scything, hand sowing, stoking, horses working etc.

19th September at Daviot Farm, Inverness admission £5 children and parking free



Dave Thomson, Abernethy

## Scottish Crofting Foundation at the shows 2009



Rosanna Cunningham placates vicious SCF guard dog



SCF political spokesman Norman Leask on the job



Shadow minister for Environment Sarah Boyack and SCF director Eleanor Arthur



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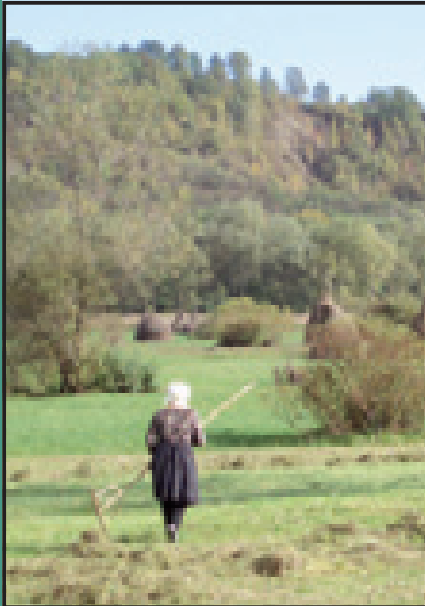
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## SCF GATHERING 2009

### Small farmers: backbone of rural development or barrier to efficiency?

**A**RE SMALL AND part-time farmers inefficient peasants whose land should be amalgamated into larger businesses or multi-tasking entrepreneurs who are the future of most of the EU's countryside?



Gwyn Jones

Romania Small farms dominate both the Romanian mountains and the crofting areas. Is that a problem or a strength?

Is their mix of agriculture and non-agricultural activity a rational and desirable policy goal or just a way of making them subsidise their own management of the land that is the start of the slippery slope to abandonment?

As the new CAP is being discussed in the corridors of power, the SCF's gathering focuses on the role of the small farmer in the agriculture of the future.

The conference, with a very European feel, takes place on September 28-30 in Grantown on Spey and has been supported by DG Agriculture of the European Commission and Highland and Islands Enterprise.

With a mix of speakers from Scotland and a range of European countries, the event will focus on the role of small farmers as actors in the rural economy, as stewards of the countryside and natural and cultural heritage and as providers of quality, healthy food.

Discussions will consider how small farmers might orientate themselves in order to benefit from changes introduced to the Common Agricultural Policy from 2013 and explore the rural development mechanisms best able to assist in this process.

Highlights of the gathering will be:

- Keynote Speaker Rosanna Cunningham, Minister for Environment
- Sessions on:
  - CAP outlook post-2013
  - opportunities for small farms
  - small farms in rural development
  - small farms and quality products
  - land management study visits
  - quality products study visits

Now a popular feature of the SCF's gathering, the Angus MacRae Memorial Debate will also consider the issue "Small farms are the backbone of rural development".

Don't miss this important event for some though-provoking discussions combined with the usual good craic. Get in touch with SCF HQ for more details and a booking form or go to [www.crofting.org](http://www.crofting.org)

This event has been supported by the European Commission DG Agriculture and Rural Development, Highland and Islands Enterprise and Cairngorm National Park Authority.



Highlands and Islands Enterprise  
Iomairt na Gàidhealtachd 's nan Eilean



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

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## SCF at the shows



Minister for Environment Rosanna Cunningham and Patrick Krause



SCF member and Shetland kye rancher Paddy Zacharia, Westminister candidate Alasdair Stephen, Patrick Krause, Dave Thompson MSP



Busy SCF stand



SCF policy spokesman Norman Leask with Soil Association and SCF Crofting Connections project manager Pam Rodway