

# THE CROFTER



The journal of the Scottish Crofting Federation, the only member-led organisation dedicated to the promotion of crofting and the largest association of small-scale food producers in the UK

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## Did the 2010 Act equalise availability of crofting grants?

**C**ROFTING-SPECIFIC grants, namely CCAGS and CHGS, were expected to be extended to owner-occupier crofters by virtue of the Crofting Reform (Scotland) Act 2010.

The former scheme provides grants towards agricultural developments such as sheds, barns, fencing and other permanent improvements; the latter towards the building of a croft house. As one would expect, myriad regulations control the provision of each, but there is little doubt that these grants are still a major draw for those wishing to build croft houses and/or carry on agricultural activities on their crofts. Before 2010, it was the case that both types of grant assistance ceased to be available to owner-occupier crofters, and therefore this was a major reason to remain a tenant crofter.

The Crofting Reform (Scotland) Act 2010 was intended to equalise owner-occupier crofters and tenant crofters, both in terms of the regulatory framework to which they were subject, and also the financial assistance which was available to them. However, the regulations which are required in order to facilitate the extension of financial assistance to owner-occupier crofters have only been passed in respect of CCAGS, not in respect of the CHGS.

Eilidh Ross approached the Scottish Government for a comment on this matter

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## Questions on Scottish Government land sale policy

**F**OLLOWING THE Scottish Government's decision to withdraw part of its Rosal forest estate in Sutherland from open market sale after public criticism, the SCF asked the government to examine its policies on the sale of public land, community ownership and the creation of new crofts.

SCF chair Derek Flyn believes the Rosal case demonstrates some of the problems caused by the manner in which the Forestry Commission conducts the process of land sale. He said: "There is no surprise that local communities did not come forward

expressing an interest in the land, when, as the sales particulars were keen to point out, communities were cleared from this land and it is a deserted wilderness.

Putting this land on the market in this way is simply perpetuating a system of land ownership concentrated into few hands, a system the Scottish people want to see changed."

He continued "A great deal of effort and public money has been invested in reforming crofting. The SG has pledged its commitment to the crofting system and has legislated to

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*and much more*

## Crofters' voice heard in parliament on goose petition

**T**HE SCF appeared before the Scottish parliamentary petitions committee to defend its call for the government to do more about the escalating numbers of geese devastating crofters' crops.

SCF director Roddy MacDonald and chief executive Patrick Krause defended the SCF petition, calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to address the problems created by increasing populations of wild geese in the crofting areas as a matter of priority; reassess its decision to stop funding

existing goose management programmes; and assign additional resources to crop protection and adaptive management programmes to ensure this threat to the future of crofting is averted.

Roddy said "The MSPs were very attentive and sympathetic to the issue and in an unusual move for this committee, apparently, referred the petition directly to the committee for rural affairs. This is a very good outcome for crofters. There is a way to go yet but we are seeing progress, in that the parliament is taking this very seriously."

# Message from the chair...

Derek Flyn



**O**UR ANNUAL gathering in September took place in Stornoway Town Hall and was well attended.

The theme was "Common grazings: utilizing potential" – with the intention of stimulating activity on this extensive resource. Common grazings make up a large proportion of land covered by crofting tenure and can play a

significant role in the lives of many crofting communities. You will find full coverage of the event in the centre pages.

SCF has been encouraging crofting community mapping as a way to develop a collective approach. The new national Crofting Register will provide a definitive map-based record of all land within crofting tenure and we have worked closely with Registers of Scotland in its preparation.

There is now a clear demarcation between the regulation of crofting, which is in the domain of the Crofting Commission in Inverness, and the registration of crofts in the Crofting Register in Edinburgh. From now on, all actions triggered by a regulatory application to the Crofting Commission for approval, such as assignation or decrofting, must be accompanied by an application to register or update

the boundaries of the croft in the Crofting Register.

Observers will be aware that a glitch in the law required to be rectified this year and an amendment was passed at Holyrood with the active support of SCF. Having heard what we had to say, MSPs were sufficiently persuaded to recommend to the Scottish Government that further plans be made to ensure crofting law is clear, consistent and fit for the 21st century.

A well-supported SCF petition calls on the government to do more about the escalating numbers of geese devastating crofters' crops. This required our chief executive Patrick Krause and director Roddy MacDonald from South Uist to attend the petitions committee at Holyrood to state our case.

In October, Patrick and I visited Shetland and found it basking

in sunshine. The SCF meeting at Lerwick was well attended by members. The topic was the introduction of the Crofting Register. I was pleased to have the opportunity to present honorary life membership of SCF to Norman Leask in the company of his own folk. A pleasant task indeed.

As we go to press, the Crofting Commission is consulting on a new grazings regulations template and the duty to report form. Much discussion has already taken place on the duty of a grazings committee to report on both their common grazing and on the crofts of the shareholders. The hope is that, with refreshed regulations, crofting communities will become more self-reliant and business-like.

We were calling for this at our gathering in Stornoway so it is something that we must support.

## Our man in Brussels

**W**E CONTINUE TO FIGHT on several fronts for you in Brussels.

By the time you receive this, the CAP figures will be presented by the Scottish Government. I do hope that they and the Westminster government will put their ideological differences to bed at this time and use what we have made possible when negotiating in Brussels. It looks like we will have a ceiling of 8% for coupled support, so I hope that the calf scheme that SCF won back in 2004 for the benefit of crofters will be strengthened – Mr Lochhead is minded to use the full allocation of coupled support for the beef sector.

As you will have heard by now, the German shepherds' case against the EC on EID was all but lost in the court. But we cannot accept complete defeat yet. The EC is revisiting animal health and welfare rules, so this gives us a chance to change a few words in the EID legislation to allow EID to be voluntary until the sheep leaves the jurisdiction of the keeper at birth.

We need our politicians to get the court of auditors to accept

that as machinery and tags do not produce 100% accuracy it is unfair to expect the crofter to have 100% results, thus meaning that cross-compliance records should not require 100% accuracy. EID will never be fit for purpose until we get back to the batch system that stopped the 2001 foot and mouth outbreak at the borders of Scotland and sorted out the 2007 outbreak.

The re-defining of eligible land continues to cause hardship. As you will recall, Scotland was fined by the EC for allowing claims to be made on land considered not grazing. We can accept that rock is not grazing, but to take out rocky areas, or low-density bracken or foreshore, is simply not right as sheep do graze these areas. We continue to press for a fairer implementation of this rule, and hope to win more back, as we did with heather.

I do hope that as we approach another election, politicians of all parties will not forget the needs of small-scale agriculture, the heart and soul of every country in Europe.

Norman Leask



Derek presents Norman with honorary life membership of SCF.

## Crofting acronyms

These acronyms are used throughout *The Crofter*.

BnG	Bòrd na Gàidhlig
CAB	Citizens Advice Bureau
CC	Crofting Commission
CCAGS	Crofting Counties Agricultural Grants Scheme
CHGS	Scottish Croft House Grant Scheme
CLS	Community Land Scotland
CnES	Comhairle nan Eilean Siar
EBV	Estimated Breeding Value
EC	European Commission
EFNCP	European Forum for Nature Conservation and Pastoralism
EID	Electronic Identification Device
FCL	Foundation for Common Land
HIE	Highlands and Islands Enterprise
HLF	Heritage Lottery Fund
HSCHT	Highland Small Communities Housing Trust
IACS	Integrated Administration and Control System
JHI	James Hutton Institute
LFASS	Less Favoured Areas Support Scheme
LMO	Land Managers' Options
NFUS	National Farmers Union of Scotland
NGPRG	National Goose Policy Review Group
RBST	Rare Breed Survival Trust
RoS	Registers of Scotland
SAS	Soil Association Scotland (Crofting Connections)
SBS	Scottish Beef Scheme
SCU	Scottish Crofters Union
SEPA	Scottish Environmental Protection Agency
SFP	Single Farm Payment
SG	Scottish Government
SGRPID	SG Rural Payments and Inspections Division
SIC	Shetland Islands Council
SLE	Scottish Land and Estates
SNH	Scottish Natural Heritage
SPICe	Scottish Parliament Information Centre
SRDP	Scotland Rural Development Programme
SRUC	Scotland's Rural University College
STFA	Scottish Tenant Farmers Association
UHI	University of the Highlands and Islands
WCP	Woodland Crofts Partnership



## Did the 2010 Act equalise availability of crofting grants?

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and received the following statement:-

**"It is the Scottish Government's intention that the CHGS scheme should accurately reflect the equality intention of the primary legislation, which would mean making CHGS assistance equally available to both tenant and owner-occupier crofters, irrespective of who the croft had been bought from and the length of time the croft house site had been the private property of the crofter. In order to do this, the Scottish Government is required to amend the CHGS regulations through the Scottish Parliament. This is under active consideration and, following the parliamentary process, the scheme would then apply equally to all."**

The effect of the current lack of new CHGS regulations is that crofters who purchased a short time ago, or who have not yet purchased their crofts, must hope that the regulations are indeed passed before the seven-year period expires.

That may not happen. Furthermore, crofters who purchased their croft in the mid-noughties are increasingly likely to run out of time.

*Eilidh Ross, Inksters Solicitors*

## Questions on Scottish Government land sale policy

*Continued from page 1*

enable crofts to be created. We have called on the government to be proactive in its policies. *Here is an opportunity to restore people to the land. We urge the SG to take the brave and historic decision to repopulate the cleared crofting communities of Strathnaver."*

The call is part of a wider request for the government to investigate the potential for transferring control of the Forest of Rosal to community interests in Sutherland. The SG claimed there was no community interest registered in the 6,356 acre estate and as a result they put the forest on the market, before subsequently withdrawing it from sale after criticism on social media.

Derek concluded "We must question the adequacy of the consultation the government currently holds when disposing of forest land. We believe the process is focused on delivering financial targets with the least possible hassle to Forestry Commission land agents, rather than as a proactive opportunity to diversify ownership and get more people on the ground, either as individuals or through community projects. This is a golden opportunity for the Scottish Government to show that they believe that the people of Scotland should have first call on the land."



## Progress on CAP reform

**R**EFORMS of the CAP have never been simple but this one is by far the most complicated and difficult to follow.

The implications for individual farms and crofts are likely to be far more dramatic than anything we have seen before. The move from a historic-based payment to an area base will mean that payments will change for everyone, with some going up and some going down.

During a debate in the Scottish Parliament, rural affairs secretary Richard Lochhead set out his thinking on how CAP reform could be implemented in Scotland. Considerations currently include:

- how much coupled support should go to the Scottish beef sector – if Scotland's coupled support ceiling is set at eight per cent, serious consideration is being given to devoting the full allocation to beef;
- managing the transition from historic payments to area-based payments for those currently receiving high payments, such as some beef and dairy farmers, while ensuring hill farmers,

new entrants and deer farmers receive appropriate support;

- having either two or three regions for the Pillar 1 basic payment scheme, in line with the emerging consensus;
- setting minimum activity levels in Scotland that keep out slipper farmers but provide support for genuine extensive hill farmers;
- taking into account the impact of greening on the arable sector, with judgement being reserved on the merits of setting up a Scottish-specific scheme – also known as an equivalence scheme – especially in relation to carbon.

Arguments for and against degressivity – the system of reducing big farm payments – and whether additional measures will be needed in Scotland to address the issue of very large individual payments.

Information gleaned from stakeholder groups includes a consultation on figures which will go out near the end of the year. The figures are still all very hazy as they are basing models on unknowns – eg they estimate

that there will be 2.78 million ha of eligible rough grazing, so are modelling on that, but the reality might be that there is less land claimed (they think less rather than more) so rates per ha could go up. And as you can see from all the tables on the Scottish Government website they are still trying out lots of models.

They haven't fixed a minimum stock rate for activity yet. This is a danger zone for crofting as too high a level could exclude crofters grazing very fragile land.

Scottish Government is saying they are going to be stricter about eligibility. Under LFASS you claim your number of hectares and if they are stocked at under the minimum rate the number of ha eligible are scaled back until the stocking – LU/ha – makes the minimum. So if under the minimum stocking density, you still get paid on adjusted ha. Under the new basic payment, scaling back will not be allowed; you have to claim on all land and it has to be stocked to at least the minimum.

There is talk of using the French redistribution which would put a higher rate on the first 54 ha, which would be good for crofters.

As usual, the small differences on the better land – arable – equate to big differences proportionately on rough grazing. So the arable farmers are arguing for very small differences which in reality make a big difference to crofters. As long as it goes the right way it will be good for crofters – ie arable loses a wee bit and that goes to rough grazing where it gives a significant proportional lift.

There is going to be an external convergence uplift to UK of around 220 million euros which will be spread over the period (2015 – 2020) in increasing stages, so first year uplift will be 11m going up incrementally to 60m in the last year. There will also be a small transition uplift for 2014.

And finally, the greening payment seems to favour those who actually do the least for environment. Some things don't change.

## Common grazings and CAP support

**I**N THE current CAP reform, a key desire on the part of Scottish government has been the removal of the controversial naked acre situation where payments were made on unused land.

The Scottish Clause, or the ability of a member state to insist on a minimum level of activity on rough grazing land, has now been enshrined in the proposals as a mandatory feature. It is worth considering the effect this may have on the use of common grazings.

At present crofters who have single farm payment entitlement can use that entitlement on their croft and on their share of the common grazing. However under the new regime in 2015 it may be the case that crofters will only be entitled to new entitlements on the common grazing if they meet the minimum activity level.

The Commission is keen to

see the regulation matching the reality on the ground so it would be prudent to assume that stock kept on the croft will not count as activity on the common grazing if they never use it. This is likely to mean that unused common grazing shares will attract no further direct payments and as the replacement scheme for LFASS, ANC (Area of Natural Constraint), will also have minimum activity as an eligibility criteria there may be no further support from this scheme on these shares either.

Unused common grazings are one of the tragedies of modern day crofting and this is even more so where there are active crofters using common grazings who are restricted to limited stock numbers while the rest of the land lies idle. Where the land is not providing anything for the township or the community and there are people willing to use it, then it would be logical to

study any opportunities created by the new CAP to improve this situation?

There is no particular reason why the grazings have to be physically divided for the purposes of support. Stock clubs work effectively managing the whole grazings for common benefit and agri-environment schemes operate effectively with the grazings committee as the applicant. Why then could we not take the same approach with the new direct payments and ANC scheme? If the shareholders in the grazings relinquished their right to individual entitlements, which the inactive could not access anyway, and allowed the grazings committee to become the applicant, then there is the potential to unlock more support than is currently achieved.

The grazings committee would have to meet the minimum activity requirements for both the

direct payments and the ANC scheme, but should be able to allow the active shareholders to carry enough stock to meet these requirements on behalf of all. There are obvious issues to resolve in covering costs and dividing payments but these should not be insurmountable if there is a benefit to all. Currently there are many grazings delivering no benefit at all to townships and many where the benefit is restricted to a limited number of active shares. This could be a way back towards common grazings and grazings committees functioning for the common good.

We have yet to see the implementing regulations which might or might not allow this to happen, but the potential benefits are such that SCF is pressing the Scottish Government to consider this and would like to hear from townships interested in exploring this model.

## Outrage over UK decision to keep CAP cash

**T**HE SCOTTISH Crofting Federation joined widespread calls for justice over the allocation of CAP uplift funds which rightfully belong in Scotland.

Following the UK government's November decision to keep additional CAP cash, SCF parliamentary spokesman Norman Leask said, "This decision by the UK government is a political heist. The Scottish Government, with cross-party support, made the reasonable claim that the convergence uplift, as it is known, should come to Scotland. The only reason that the UK qualifies for

the uplift is because of Scotland's very low payments in the upland areas which bring the UK average down."

Addressed to the UK Government's rural affairs secretary Owen Paterson and copied to Scottish secretary Alistair Carmichael, a cross-party letter followed a recent debate in the Scottish Parliament where MSPs agreed that the UK's full uplift should come to Scotland in its entirety. The announcement by the UK government rejects this claim.

Norman added: "We just want what is rightfully ours. Passing the uplift payments

on to Scotland does not incur any deductions to farmers in the rest of the UK. Allowing the money to come to where it is needed, the areas that bring the average payment down and therefore qualify for uplift would be fair. There is simply no argument that can justify keeping this cash (which is meant to bring average payments up to somewhere closer to the European average) in UK areas that are already at that level or above. The Scottish upland areas have earned this uplift and this is where it should be spent."



## CROFTING LAW

# Crofting law problems to be investigated

# Owner-occupier crofters

*In 2010, legal recognition was belatedly given to owner-occupier crofters. Who are they? Derek Flynn explains.*

**M**Y EXPLANATION should not be taken by anybody as legal advice. The definition is now found in the new section 19B of the Crofters (Scotland) Act 1993. This provides that a person is an owner-occupier crofter if three conditions are all fulfilled.

The first condition is that the person is the owner of a croft.

For this purpose, the croft appears to mean (1) the site of the dwelling-house (if any) and (2) the croft land. A crofter who has acquired his entire croft (but not necessarily his right in pasture or grazing land or any apportionment) becomes an owner-occupier crofter. Since 1976 any grazing right or share or apportionment that has not been acquired is deemed to be a separate independent croft in tenancy. That being so, the person who now owns the entire croft – stripped of that which was not acquired – must be the owner of a croft.

There is nothing to suggest that the person must be a singular natural person. It has been normal for a purchasing crofter to take title in joint names, for instance himself and his spouse. Where this is the case, it seems that more than one person can be the owner-occupier crofter of a croft, but those persons must own the entire croft jointly and their title must be in their joint names.

If an entire croft has been acquired but any part of it has been conveyed away without decrofting taking place, the

person is not the owner of the croft, only of the remaining part. Persons who own only part of a croft are not owner-occupier crofters because they cannot satisfy the first condition. They must be regarded as landlords of part of a vacant croft.

The second condition requires that the person (already identified as the owner of the croft): (a) was the tenant of the croft at the time of acquiring it (or is such a tenant crofter's successor in title); (b) acquired title to the croft as nominee of a crofter (or is such a nominee's successor in title); or (c) purchased the croft from the constituting landlord (or is such a purchaser's successor in title).

The third condition is that, since it was acquired, the croft has not at any time been let to any person as a crofter.

In some cases the crofter who acquires the landlord's interest in his croft nominates another person or persons to take title, thus avoiding the loss of tenancy. Only where that tenancy cannot be held to have continued beyond the date of acquisition can the person who became the owner of the croft claim to be the owner-occupier crofter.

Where all the conditions are fulfilled, the croft can be identified as an owner-occupied croft, but only if the owner-occupier crofter gives notice of that fact to the Commission. It seems that unless or until an owner-occupier crofter gives that notice, he will not be recognised as such by the Commission.

*This is a shortened version of an article Derek Flynn submitted to the Crofting Law Group.*



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of this year and should be sent by e-mail to: [sump@croftinglawgroup.org](mailto:sump@croftinglawgroup.org) – or can be tweeted to @croftinglawsump.

The Crofting Law Group is open to anyone who has an interest in the subject of crofting law. The membership consists of lawyers, surveyors, land agents, crofters, land owners and others interested in crofting law. The objects of the group are:

- to promote the knowledge and understanding of crofting law;
- to promote a forum for consultation and for making proposals to the EC, government and other bodies, in relation to the law reform as it affects crofting interests;
- to create a forum for discussing, in particular, crofting law issues but also related UK and EC legislation which has an impact on crofting estates and communities; and
- to produce and circulate a newsletter on a regular basis giving relevant details.

See [www.croftinglawgroup.org](http://www.croftinglawgroup.org)

**T**HE Crofting Law Group has announced its crofting law sump, which aims to gather details of the significant problem areas within existing crofting legislation.

During the recent passage through the Scottish Parliament of the Crofting (Amendment) (Scotland) Act 2013, MSPs were informed by practitioners about many problems in the existing legislation causing difficulties for crofters, landlords and others.

Paul Wheelhouse, minister with responsibility for crofting, gave an undertaking that his officials would investigate, in consultation with stakeholders, the best method for dealing with these outstanding issues. The sump has been set up to assist the government in this process.

It will be administered by retired crofting lawyer Derek Flynn (now chair of the SCF board) and Keith Graham, formerly principal clerk of the Scottish Land Court. They will collate the issues and problems that are causing difficulties, prioritise them and indicate how the problem can be resolved.

Submissions to the crofting law sump will be taken up to the end

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## A commissioner's view

*The five-year tenure of the first-ever elected Crofting Commissioners has reached the end of its first quarter. I G Macdonald, commissioner for Skye and West Highlands, reflects on whether he and his colleagues have begun to make a difference.*

**F**OR ONE was fired up, after my surprise election victory, and keen to right the wrongs of crofting, as I and my constituents saw them. We commissioners were not unaware of the difficulties that lay before us, but were not prepared to cushion ourselves with the usual excuses. There are plenty of administrative, resource and legal reasons why progress has been slower than we would have liked, but I would prefer to focus on the positive issues.

My most positive experience so far came when I attended the launch of *The Crofting Year*, a new crofting course backed by the Scottish Qualifications Authority, at Plockton High School. The original course was developed and trialled at Sgoil Lionacleit. Enthusiasm from the young people for this course was infectious and was matched both from the teachers, the crofters on whose holdings practical work is to be undertaken and the landlords, National Trust for Scotland.

Getting young folk into crofting must be high on the agenda of all bodies and individuals involved in the crofting industry. Young folk; yes, but also the not so young were to the fore when I presented certificates to an equally enthusiastic bunch of students on completion of the SCF's crofting course for Skye and Lochalsh. Meeting people desperate to become active crofters stirs up the emotions as I go around parts of the crofting counties and witness much neglect and misuse by those fortunate to have crofts.

Another time of shared optimism came when the Commission board visited the North Harris Trust and West Harris Trust. Both these bodies are community land owners who are providing enthusiasm, energy and employment for their shareholders.

In discussion with assessors, clerks and ordinary crofters, I find that many are unaware or uncertain of what the Commission actually does and expect us to be a lobbying body. The Crofting Act specifically excludes us from that. To lobby the Scottish, UK or European Governments on crofting issues you need to

get SCF to listen to your needs and speak on your behalf.

The prime functions of the new Commission are somewhat different from the previous body and these are spelled out in the amended Crofting (Scotland) Act 1993.

They are to:

1. regulate crofting;
2. reorganise crofting;
3. promote the interests of crofting;
4. keep crofting matters under review.

Regulating crofting involves doing what the Crofting Act (ie the law) requires. As crofters, we are privileged people; privileges gained for us by our predecessors. As such we have responsibilities to them, to the land and to the crofting system.

There are three statutory duties:-

- a residency duty;
- a duty not to neglect or misuse; and
- a duty to cultivate and maintain our crofts.

Any crofter who is in breach of all, or any, of these duties ought him/herself to rectify the situation as soon as possible – ie self-regulate. There will then be no need for the heavy hand of the Commission. Completion of the annual notice for the first time in 2013-14 and the five-year report from grazing committees will inform the Crofting Commission of progress – and the very landscape itself will provide visible confirmation. This self-help is the best reorganisation that crofting could possibly have.

In the past, active crofting was a necessity but now is seen, by some, as a lifestyle choice. Due consideration needs, however, to be given to the sustainability of our communities, the environment, the culture and the crofting landscape. The Crofting Commission cannot make crofting into a lucrative business, but we can co-operate with others to achieve better conditions for crofters.

Discussions with all the major stakeholders and the cross-party group in parliament, to provide relevant information to the Scottish Government on the issues for crofting in the context of the current SRDP review, and to present recommendations for a future programme, was led by the Crofting Commission and much valuable consensus



was achieved. It remains to be seen if a crofting support scheme will provide for crofting's needs in the near future.

Dealing with applications to make changes to croft land is the day-to-day casework which requires Commissioners to allow, or to allow with conditions, or to refuse applications made by crofters. These decisions are guided by our policy plan which has recently been accepted by Paul Wheelhouse, the Scottish Government minister. Up until that time we were guided by an interim plan set out by the Crofters Commission and perhaps we felt unduly restricted.

The main key to our decisions rests in the question: **Is this application for the good of the croft, the crofting estate and the crofting community?** In answering it we must pay attention to the desirability of retaining population in the crofting counties, pay regard to the overall area of land in crofting tenure and to the sustainability of crofting. Each application must be considered on its own merits but be looked at within the overall policy framework.

Yes, much has been done in a short time, but there is a long road ahead if we are to make a noticeable difference before the new Commissioners take office in April 2017.

*I G Macdonald  
Crofting Commissioner*

## Marina takes over as commissioner



**F**ORMER SCF board member Marina Dennis has joined the Crofting Commission to represent the East Highlands constituency.

Her appointment will run until March 2017 and follows the resignation of Donnie Ross.

Marina has been involved in crofting all her life, living on and working the family croft in Strathspey, serving as an assessor for over 30 years, a director of the SCF and also

representing crofting interests on the north board of SEPA and on the board of governors of the MacAulay Land Use Institute. From 1996 to 2005, she was a board member of the Crofters Commission and from 2005 until 2012 was on the appeals panel on EU subsidies for the Department of Agriculture.

Speaking from her croft in Inchdryne, Marina said, "I'm excited to be joining the Commission at this time of challenge and opportunity.

This is still a new body and I hope I can play a valuable part in its development, working with fellow commissioners to help secure a long-term future for crofting."

Marina participated in the election to the Crofting Commission in 2012, recording a close second place to Mr Ross.

*SCF is pleased to welcome Marina as a worthy addition to the commission board and we look forward to working with her.*

# Government failing to provide answers to Torridon planning controversy



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**T**HE SCF IS CONCERNED that the Scottish planning system is undermining crofting law, after the government said it would not intervene in the case of a Wester Ross woman who is trying to build a house on her croft.

In August, government planners rejected an appeal by Torridon crofter and SCF member Elaine Holmes against Highland Council's decision to refuse a planning application for a small single-storey house on her croft at Fasag at the head of Loch Torridon. There is no house on the croft at present. Ms Holmes, a mother of three, is currently unable to stay in Torridon and lives nearly ten miles away from her croft.

After government planners rejected the appeal the SCF wrote to the planning minister,

Derek Mackay, asking him to reconsider the decision. The SCF argued that the planners' justification for refusing the house on landscape grounds went against the advice of the statutory landscape authority SNH. Mr Mackay replied that he has no intention of taking the matter further.

SCF director Fiona Mandeville said: "Sadly, the minister's response shows that he and his planning officials are still unable to provide a satisfactory answer as to why the advice of SNH, the locally-based expert body on landscape issues, was not properly considered in this case. They also failed to address our concerns about the apparent lack of any serious effort by the planning appeal official to quantify the social impact of Ms Holmes' presence in Torridon, despite the

fact that this is a requirement of the planning process.

"By this decision, the Government has demonstrated, unequivocally, that Scotland's planning system regards the dramatic appearance of the west coast as more important than its people."

The case also raises concerns about broader attitudes towards crofting among planners. Crofting law provides a presumption that every crofter has the right to a single dwelling-house on their croft. Where is regard taken of that in these decisions?

We are compiling a list of planning appeal decisions which do not properly consider the crofting interest and we would like to hear from anyone with further examples. Please get in touch with SCF HQ.



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



## LET'S LIBERATE DIVERSITY

# Let's liberate diversity...

**T**WO SCF REPRESENTATIVES were in Basel in Switzerland in September to attend the annual Let's Liberate Diversity (LLD) forum.

LLD is a gathering of farmers, activists and academics with an interest in maintaining what is called agricultural biodiversity. This term is used to describe the wide variety of crops and livestock which have been adapted to their local environments over the course of many centuries.

Members of LLD also support the rights of farmers to maintain these varieties against restrictions imposed by legislation on seeds. LLD says this legislation favours commercial seed breeders and runs the risk of outlawing informal seed-saving practices.

Last year's LLD forum was hosted by SCF in Strathpeffer and the focus there on native breeds and seeds made it clear that the Highlands and Islands holds a wealth of the United Kingdom's native agricultural biodiversity, both in cereal varieties and in livestock. This is particularly true in the islands, where saving and exchanging seed from each year's cereal crop is a vital part of the local agricultural economy.

Many delegates to the Swiss event said that working with local varieties could be an important means of responding to challenges facing agriculture from the impacts of climate change and from the rising cost of inputs such as fodder, fuel and fertiliser.

Ena MacDonald from North Uist was a speaker at a workshop on livestock diversity, in which she described how she and her family keep a herd of pedigree Highland cattle which are fed in the winter on fodder from cereals grown on the island. At the heart of her presentation was the importance of young people acquiring traditional knowledge about farming and of older people passing that knowledge on to the young.

One of the issues raised by different nationalities at the workshop was electronic tagging of sheep, felt to be an unnecessary bureaucratic interference in husbandry. Ena told delegates that it "is destroying the bond that exists between people and their animals – one man in the islands told me it was the last straw. He felt they were no longer his animals, they were being constantly monitored".

The other SCF delegate, Iain MacKinnon, helped organise a workshop on seed saving and exchange as an intangible cultural heritage (ICH). The workshop was initiated by Bela Bartha, the head of ProSpecieRara, a Swiss organisation promoting and maintaining native varieties of plant and livestock, which was hosting this year's LLD.

The United Nations has passed legislation to protect knowledge, practices and skills which people have transmitted over generations as part of their cultural heritage. The idea of having seed exchange established as ICH would be to give organisations greater leverage with governments when seeking support for some of the shared knowledge and practices involved in traditional farming systems.



Young Swiss crofter



Apple harvest in the Swiss mountains



Pro Specie Rara conservation garden in Basel



Delegates gathering for the LLD forum in Basel



## HUNGRY FOR RIGHTS

# Food sovereignty, Vía Campesina and SCF

**T**HE IDEA OF food sovereignty was developed in the early 1990s and presented by an alliance of small food producers named La Vía Campesina at the 1996 world food summit.

The concept of food sovereignty has evolved and grown since then. It can be summarised as a movement for a democratic, sustainable and fair food system. It is about fair control of the food system or, in the words of Professor Tim Lang, food democracy. It links in with the programme of the UN special rapporteur on the right to food, Olivier de Schutter.

The principles adopted to re-organise food and agriculture on the values of food sovereignty are:

1. that food is more than a commodity;
2. the central role of small-scale food producers;
3. localise food systems by bringing consumers and producers closer together;
4. more local control over food production and resources such as land, water, seeds;
5. building on local knowledge and skills;
6. using ecologically-friendly, low-input methods.

The involvement of Vía Campesina has recently been acknowledged in an agreement of co-operation with the food and agriculture organisation of the United Nations. Also, Vía Campesina has been the driving force behind the recent UN declaration on peasant rights. Although the declaration is not binding, it can become a template for national law, in the same

way that some countries have incorporated principles of food sovereignty into their national law with important consequences for the position of small producers in these countries.

### Europe and UK

In Europe the Nyéléni movement brings together farmers, consumers, NGOs, trade unions, environmental and development organisations to build common strategies in order to reorganise food and agriculture on the principles of food sovereignty. The UK has recently started a network for food sovereignty.

ECVC is Vía Campesina in Europe, an important proponent of small and family farmers within Europe and the EU. It brings together 27 farming bodies from 17 countries across Europe, including SCF. Through its membership of ECVC, SCF has access to the following EU advisory groups:

**Sheep-meat**  
**CAP – Post 2014**  
**Beef-meat**  
**Family farms**  
**Renewables**  
**Permanent and natural pasture**  
**Bio-fuels**  
**Rural development**  
**Research and innovation**  
**Integrated biodiversity**  
**Animal health**  
**Next 50 years of CAP**  
**Shepherd Net**

ECVC has direct contact with MEPs, European Commission and the European Council. In a recent example of lobbying, ECVC has been campaigning

persistently, with expertise and at high level – in direct meetings with DG Sanco – to have the interests of small seed companies and small-scale farmers' seed savers addressed in the new EU seed directive, to be voted on next year in the European Parliament. It is thanks to ECVC's efforts that there is increased recognition of and willingness to exempt small farmers maintaining traditional varieties such as *coirce beag*, small oat, and bere, the traditional Scottish barley.

### More information:

European Coordination Vía Campesina: [www.eurovia.org](http://www.eurovia.org)

UK network: <http://foodsovereignty.org.uk>

UN Right to Food : [www.srfood.org/index.php/en](http://www.srfood.org/index.php/en)



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For advice on Crofting and Agricultural Law call **David Findlay** on 01463 239393, or email [david.findlay@macandmac.co.uk](mailto:david.findlay@macandmac.co.uk)

**David Findlay is one of only four Specialists in Scotland in Crofting Law who has been accredited by the Law Society of Scotland**



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



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## SCF ANNUAL GATHERING 2013

### Commons grazings - utilising potential

The SCF's annual gathering in September brought the potential of common grazings into sharp focus.

Welcoming attendees, SCF chair Derek Flynn said "Common grazings make up a large proportion of land under crofting tenure, extending to nearly 600,000 hectares. Today they still play an important part in the livelihoods of many crofters and provide a significant amount of public benefit, environmentally as well as aesthetically."

But, for a number of contributing factors, common grazings are being under-used and even abandoned in many areas. The conference

looked at how this vast resource can be utilised, providing income for the crofters who manage it, generating development revenue for crofting communities and delivering public goods.

The conference, opened by the Scottish Government's deputy director for agriculture and rural development David Barnes, explored how the CAP and development initiatives such as community renewable energy projects could help to revive the use of common grazings and realise their huge potential for crofting communities. Below and in the following pages we summarise the various speakers' presentations.

The attractive venue of Stornoway Town Hall saw an enthusiastic group of crofters and others with an interest meet to hear a varied range of presentations. Workshops, led by the speakers, allowed opportunities for discussion of topics and sharing experiences.

A buffet dinner in the evening, prepared by chef Dede MacGillivray from Skye, was thoroughly enjoyed by all.

SCF is very grateful to HIE, Registers of Scotland, the Naturesave Trust, Norbrook Laboratories, the Foundation for Common Land and Comhairle nan Eilean Siar for their support of this event.



### Keynote speech

*David Barnes, deputy director for agriculture and rural development, Scottish Government*

Common grazings are crucial for high nature value farming and maintenance of traditional breeds. Other benefits include renewable energy; peatland carbon sinks; custodianship of designated sites and the natural environment; tourism and housing.

Legislation requires grazings committees to report every five years on the use made of their land. The Commission produced a template to assist grazing committees in this duty.

Eighty three new crofts have been created since 2007. Legislation supports population retention by ensuring that crofters live on or within 32 kilometres of their crofts. In 2010, the Commission contacted several hundred croft tenants and owners, but so far has only had to terminate 35 tenancies. The remainder returned to the croft or assigned it to someone else. Three years on, 314 of

these crofts have resident crofters.

The crofting register opened for voluntary registration on 30 November 2012. 30 November 2013 introduced triggers requiring registration on land subject to a regulatory application. The Commission has been consulting grazings clerks and landowners on mapping and registering common grazings.

HIE's development role complements the Commission's regulatory work. SG officials will be discussing the delivery of crofting development, including utilisation of grazings, with the Commission, HIE and Registers of Scotland. HIE can support a range of activities – renewables, housing, etc – that can deliver benefits for entire crofting communities.

CAP provides vital support through CCAGS, SFP, SBS and SRDP. SFP and SBS will remain in place for 2014. In 2015 a new system will

be introduced with a basic payment, greening payment, and the successor to the beef scheme. Crofters will be eligible to claim SFP on in-bye and common in the new basic payment scheme. One decision for SG is whether to have a small farmers' scheme giving a fixed lump sum, instead of payment per hectare.

The EU's aim was less form-filling. But crofters who want to claim LFASS and agri-environment will still have to fill in all the same forms. And it would deny them access to coupled support. SG will consult later this year and will also consult on the new SRDP that will run to 31 December 2020.

The programme will be launched on 1 January 2015, so 2014 will be a transition year for SRDP. LFASS will continue without interruption and SG is aware of the importance of continuity for agri-environment contracts and CCAGS.

## SCF ANNUAL GATHERING 2013

### The new SRDP: opportunity or threat?

*Bill Slee, senior researcher, James Hutton Institute, Aberdeen*

The new SRDP is now in preparation.

Responses to the Scottish Government's consultation were generally supportive of a crofter support scheme. But would crofters still be eligible to apply for other RDP schemes or would what was available be ring-fenced? A ring-fenced scheme might be too small and there may be no provision to spend more, should demand arise.

The new RDP looks likely to encourage collective action, but it must be to deliver a public good (habitat improvement) or avoidance of a public bad (eg diffuse pollution) to be justified.

Common grazings may be under-grazed or un-grazed and grazings committees may be not functioning well (or at all), but the funding

should be based not on the idea of reinstating a committee but on delivering a public good or avoiding a public bad.

Crofting can be seen as a cultural ecosystem service which could be viewed as a public good. This is a strong argument for supporting crofting if the public funds for public goods argument is used, but crofters may not want to be seen as museum pieces and rather as something delivering a unique contribution to Scottish cultural diversity.

According to the European Commission, climate change should take up 20% of the new RDP budget. Recent activities on renewable energy have largely taken place outwith the SRDP, because of the better support under the feed-in tariffs system. However, peatland

restoration and tree planting are both land-management activities which, in most cases, will sequester additional carbon. It may be wise to think about whether pilot schemes could be pursued. SNH is currently promoting a scheme outwith the SRDP, but it is not impossible that the new SRDP could have such a measure when it is fully up and running.

If the desired outcome on common grazings was increased grazing to support particular biodiversity outcomes (such as particular flora or bird populations), it would seem fair to reward those with grazing animals proportionately to their stocking where this is delivering public goods. If the desired outcome was peatland restoration, then all shareholders might be deemed to be legitimate beneficiaries.





## SCF ANNUAL GATHERING 2013

### Learning from each other

*Julia Aglionby, chair of the Foundation for Common Land*

The Foundation for Common Land was established to promote and ensure future public benefits from pastoral commons. It is a gathering of those across Great Britain with a stake in pastoral commons.

Pastoral commoning makes a significant contribution to rural economies. Active grazing of commons provides national benefits to landscape, biodiversity, access and heritage. Commons and common rights are essential to many communities' cultures.

Addressing the challenges of the future, there are many stakeholders with legal rights in common grazings. Research has found that the number of active graziers on commons has reduced significantly and the trend is for further reductions. The risk

is loss of skills and cultural heritage and decline in the provision of environmental public goods.

When people visit the countryside they do not consider the number of people involved in managing it. If we lose graziers our managed countryside is at risk.

FCL works in a number of ways – sharing information through our website; undertaking practical training courses eg hill farm training for conservation professionals; preparation of reports and guidance; and convening meetings and campaigning on policy and programmes with government and non-governmental organisations.

Currently the majority of our work has focused on England, though we do have good

links with the SCF and are keen to strengthen these – and extend to Wales so that the different countries in Great Britain can learn from each other's experiences and share best practice.

Particular areas where we can each benefit are:

- working with government to influence environmental stewardship schemes;
- delivery of training by hill farmers and common graziers to conservation professionals;
- working with common graziers to find synergies to maintain active grazing of common grazings designated as SSSIs.

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



John King



Top (l-r) Alistair Danter, Murdo MacLennan, Keith Matthews



One of the workshops



Julia Aglionby



Bill Slee

### The new Crofting Register

*John King, Registers of Scotland*

RoS was delighted to be able to participate in this year's SCF gathering.

The focus of our appearance was to explain the new Crofting Register, debunk some myths and explain how RoS can assist communities and individual crofters through the registration process.

The Crofting Register went live on 30 November 2012. Through time it will provide a definitive map-based record of the extent of, and interests in, land within crofting tenure in Scotland. Not only does the register show the boundaries of crofts, it also includes common grazings and land held runrig. The register derives from the crofting reforms introduced by the Crofting Reform (Scotland) Act 2010. That act brought about a clear demarcation

between the regulation of crofting, which is the responsibility of the Crofting Commission, and the registration of crofts which now falls to the Keeper of the Registers of Scotland.

The register is free to view online and can be accessed direct on <http://www.crofts.ros.gov.uk/register>.

During the first year of its operation, the Crofting Register has been open for voluntary registration and the emphasis has been on encouraging community applications. A community application involves those within a particular township working together to map crofts as the basis for collectively applying to register their crofts in the Crofting Register. From 30 November 2013, voluntary registration and community mapping will

remain the preferred approach but, in addition, registration will be required on the occurrence of certain events. These events mainly relate to actions requiring a regulatory application to the Crofting Commission for the approval to change some aspect of croft land, such as the assignment or division of a croft.

As well as the guidance on our web-site, further information about the Crofting Register can be obtained from [www.ros.gov.uk/croftingregister/guidance.html](http://www.ros.gov.uk/croftingregister/guidance.html) or by contacting the RoS crofting team at [croftenquiries@ros.gov.uk](mailto:croftenquiries@ros.gov.uk) (or call 0141 306 1510).

We especially welcome enquiries on community mapping and are happy to talk crofters through the practicalities of such an exercise.

## SCF ANNUAL GATHERING 2013

### Management structures and processes

*Alistair Danter, development officer, Business Gateway*

*An overview for common grazings committees considering diversification on common grazings*

The current socio-economic environment for diversification of activities on common grazings is positive, with numerous opportunities for communities to consider.

Two key issues affect successful outcomes of diversification projects – the structures used as vehicles to develop projects and the processes employed to develop the projects.

Concerns around governance – Who is in charge; how decisions are made and recorded; together with levels and standards of reporting have been a major issue in both the voluntary and private sector in recent years. As unincorporated or voluntary organisations, common grazings committees need to pay close attention to their internal management structures if they are to take on a diversification project.

As local institutions, common grazings committees have traditionally been concerned simply with the management of grazings for agricultural or forestry purposes. The move to involvement in other forms of economic activity can throw up significant challenges for organisations that are, in many cases, dependant on a limited number of people, with limited time and knowledge of other business environments.

The processes involved in developing both the project itself and an appropriate

structure can developed through some simple questions. What is the organisation trying to achieve? Who controls what happens? What expertise is required? What makes the organisation carrying out the development legitimate?

Who controls what happens is often the most complicated and difficult question to answer as it involves many players with different perspectives, experiences and capacities. Shareholders may feel that they have control of their common grazings, yet the reality is that there are many other players – owners, public agencies, pressure groups, non crofter community members. Negotiations are often tortuous, time-consuming, energy-sapping and tedious.

As unincorporated institutions, grazings committees are legally limited in what activities they can carry out. Individual committee members have personal liability in the event of problems; committees cannot enter into legal or employment contracts or hold property; all key issues if a business opportunity is to be developed successfully.

Development of an incorporated organisation will overcome these issues and in addition give the organisation credibility as the process of incorporation deals with governance, defines how finances will be raised and managed and most importantly implies formal regulation either through the private sector – Companies House, or

voluntary sector – Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR).

A range of incorporated structures exist that can be used by grazings committees – and while legal support may be required in finalising documentation, an awareness of options, their advantages and disadvantages can help preliminary discussions. A number of information sheets on charitable organisations and company structures can be obtained from SCF HQ. The main options that exist include limited liability companies, community interest companies, industrial and provident societies and Scottish charitable incorporated organisations.

In addition to issues related to structure and governance, any grazings committees considering diversification will need to develop a capacity to manage a range of business development processes such as planning, financial management, forecasting and recording.

Large projects are likely to require external finance. While it seems likely that the days of grant funding may be limited, significant opportunities for loans, from both soft, commercial and crowd funding sources exist. Support for organisations requiring assistance in this area is available from Business Gateway which has a presence both on-line and physically throughout the crofting counties.

A full list of offices and contacts is available from SCF HQ.



A rainbow harvest of fruit and vegetables from pupils at Tong primary school



### Diversifying income streams

*Urras Oighreachd Ghabhsainn commercial development manager, Lisa Maclean*

Galson Estate Trust is a community land trust covering much of the north west of the Isle of Lewis.

The estate was purchased in January 2007 by the community. The estate is 22,260 hectares, with 618 crofts in 22 townships on in-bye land of 2,000ha. The remaining is common grazing land.

The trust has a very clear vision which remains at the core of its work: "To promote rural regeneration, following the principles of sustainable development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."

The trust has undertaken several projects since the buy-out six years ago, the most recent milestone being the installation of a

900kW turbine. The rotor and blades were assembled on the 55m tower in September and this is the result of several years of hard work, most of which was by a small group of volunteers. Funding for the project was secured through BIG Lottery, a Co-op Bank loan and the Scottish Government CARES scheme. The trust holds consent for a 2.7MW development and will start work on a second turbine as soon as possible and a third will be considered after that.

This initial turbine is projected to generate an income of in excess of £100k per year. A community investment fund will be launched in spring 2014, using that income, and groups will be invited to apply for funds. A funding process has been established (based on

community consultations) and projects will be assessed on their contribution to the overarching vision of the community, which is to become sustainable in the long term.

The trust is engaged with a raft of other projects and is working hard to build up the infrastructure – and all the while focusing on capacity building to ensure it is prepared to take advantage of the opportunities that arise through renewables, tourism, conservation, improved land management and crofting. Trustees wish to take account of opportunities for skills development and aim to focus on our youth and how we can continue to engage with them, so they have a voice in how their land is utilised.

For more information visit [www.galsontrust.com](http://www.galsontrust.com) or telephone 01851 850393



## SCF ANNUAL GATHERING 2013

### Community energy generation

*Kirsten Macdonald, development officer, Community Energy Scotland*

Community Energy Scotland is an independent Scottish charity with nearly 400 members across Scotland. We have 17 staff based around the country to provide help on the ground.

We have a long history of supporting locally-owned renewable energy schemes in crofting communities. Recently-installed examples include the turbines in Shawbost, Tolsta and Galson on the Isle of Lewis. Our experience in developments on croft-land and the necessary negotiations with shareholders means that we can give support to the many crofters who are looking to diversify and can help them through the technical and funding

obstacles that they may face. We are also able to draw in specialist advice on the legal aspects of development on croft-land.

Many crofters have access to wet and windy land which is a huge asset when it comes to developing renewable energy projects! There are many challenges facing renewable energy developers, such as the financing of smaller projects, uncertainty over financial incentives and constraints on the grid. We work alongside communities to overcome these constraints, as well as facilitating knowledge-sharing between groups and representing groups at a policy level. By providing information, impartial advice and

practical help we aim to make communities stronger by helping them to generate and use their own electricity efficiently.

Crofters can access our help through our free membership service if they are part of a community group, or through our trading arm on a contractual basis if they are interested in taking forward their own individual projects. We can also advise on the community benefit which you will receive if a commercial developer is taking forward a project on your land.

We can help with projects of all sizes and stages – see our website for some examples and more information on how we could help you: [www.communityenergyscotland.org.uk](http://www.communityenergyscotland.org.uk).



Kirsten (l) and her colleague Rona



CES turbine on croft



Quail and hen eggs from Tong primary school pupils



Rainbow harvest

### Power to the community

*Claire Kemp, Local Energy Scotland*

There are now many community groups and rural businesses across Scotland who are taking full advantage of the opportunities available through renewable energy, proving that community and locally-owned renewable energy is not only possible, but highly rewarding in a number of ways.

Claire Kemp of Local Energy Scotland highlighted some of the many communities who are taking control of their own futures and discussed support available from the Scottish Government to help them achieve this.

Local Energy Scotland believes there is so much more communities can gain from renewable projects, over and above the energy generated and financial benefits. Communities throughout Scotland are experiencing a number

of social and economic benefits resulting from the development of such projects and the subsequent dispersion of income generated.

Local Energy Scotland is a new national consortium made up of Changeworks, the Energy Agency, the Energy Saving Trust, SCARF and the Wise Group. It is dedicated to enabling community and local uptake of renewable energy projects, and is responsible for the delivery of the Scottish Government's Community and Renewable Energy Scheme (CARES), which was featured in September's edition of *The Crofter*.

Though Local Energy Scotland is new, CARES has been around for a number of years and the team behind Local Energy Scotland have been involved with CARES for some

time. They are very experienced in supporting community renewable energy projects.

If you would like to discuss the different ways that Local Energy Scotland and CARES can support community involvement in renewable energy, or how we can assist rural businesses, then please do not hesitate to contact us for more information.

LOCALENERGYSCOTLAND.ORG  
0808 808 2288  
FUNDED BY THE SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT



## SCF ANNUAL GATHERING 2013

### Crofters – pioneers of community ownership

*Sandra Holmes, community assets team, HIE*

Today, in the Western Isles, 70% of people live on community owned land and 40% of the land mass is owned by its communities.

There is a reason why community ownership is being embraced in the Outer Hebrides and for the earlier crofter-led buyouts in Assynt, Borve and Annishader, Tresaig and Achaphubuil, Hope and Melness. That reason is crofting and crofting communities.

Figures are on the rise, with Scalpay transferring into community ownership and Carloway, Barvas and Bays of Harris, to name just some, actively exploring what owning their own land might mean for them.

Ninety years on from the establishment of the first community landowner, The Stornoway Trust, community ownership of land is now recognised internationally as a proven model of rural regeneration.

Since joining Highlands and Islands Enterprise over a decade ago, I've been

attending public meetings up and down the crofting counties. It is not unusual for tenants to be apprehensive, initially, at the prospect of a community buyout. It's a change, there's no denying that, but tenants' rights remain totally unfettered by a change to a community landlord.

It takes courage, clarity of vision and confidence to embrace change. Add resilience and dogged determination together with the land asset and big things start to happen.

Across our region community landowners are generating income from renewables, creating jobs and housing opportunities, maximising the tourism potential of their area's cultural and natural assets. And croft tenants are still able to assign their tenancy, buy their croft, sub-divide etc, in the usual way.

"The difference since the buyout is like night and day. The population has increased and infrastructure improvements have made a

huge difference".

"It has given hope for the future that the local community will be something more than a holiday home resort. For the first time the community is shaping its own future".

These responses are from a recent CLS survey to the question, "What does community ownership of your land mean to you?".

Alex Salmond, when speaking at CLS's conference in Skye this summer, set an ambitious target of one million acres of land to be in community ownership by 2020. In Scotland today, approximately 2% of land, just under 500,000 acres, is community owned.

The vast majority of this is in the Highlands and Islands – why's that I wonder?

*For more info contact Sandra on 01520 722021 [sandra.holmes@hient.co.uk](mailto:sandra.holmes@hient.co.uk) [www.ie.co.uk/communityassets](http://www.ie.co.uk/communityassets) also [www.communitylandscotland.org.uk](http://www.communitylandscotland.org.uk)*

### Community Ownership

*Iain MacIver, Community Land Scotland*

Iain MacIver, former SCU president and long-time factor of the Stornoway Trust, spoke about community asset management in terms of use of common grazings and the kind of issues that came before him as factor.

He explained the use of soumings, grazings shares, apportionments and resumption. Land can be removed from crofting for reasonable purposes and for community benefit.

As an active crofter himself in the township of Laxay, he was well aware of the challenges facing crofters and grazings committees. A major problem now is the limited number of participating shareholders, which makes

grazings management much more difficult, with disproportionate demands on the few who turn out for gathering, dipping, clipping etc. What used to be popular community events which bonded people together and reinforced community co-operation were now less sustainable, with work commitments and aging populations leading to minimal turnout at these important get-togethers.

In times gone by all features of the landscape had names, which aided in gathering and other hill work. Sadly, today, few of these names are in use.

Access tracks, fues, apportionments,

quarry developments, woodland schemes, provision of land for affordable housing – all require co-operation and agreement between shareholders and landlords.

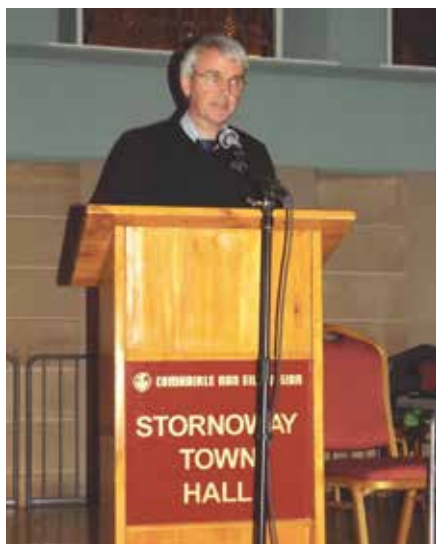
Conservation designations can lead to challenges for crofters when their use of the grazings is restricted.

Wind power generation offers good potential but proposed developments have to be sensitive to the local situation and not dominate the landscape.

Iain concluded by affirming that crofting continued to have a viable future, despite the challenges currently facing it.

### After dinner speaker

*Angus MacDonald*



Journalist Angus MacDonald, after dinner speaker, gave a thought-provoking speech.

Thirty years ago all 30 crofts in his village were worked. Now one of the only two crofters with cows takes hay from them. How many of the next generation have any interest? Very few. And young couples are refused housing grants, as crofting grant schemes are eroded.

What does the government want from crofting? Jobs must make it worth young people's while to work crofts. The crofting community should come up with an economic development strategy.

Renewable energy is the last hope for economic recovery of remote rural areas. Some communities already have their own wind turbines. A few years ago the rule-of-thumb profit from renewables was £100,000 per megawatt per annum. If each of the 280 settlements in the Western Isles was helped

to build its own wind turbine, producing just one megawatt each, £28m extra would come into the Western Isles. What could you do with that in each community, if it was done throughout the Highlands and Islands?

CnES is planning its own power company. If they had so much power from community schemes they could offer island residents cheap or free electricity, and cut-price electricity to industry to re-locate to the islands. The electricity and income could be used to develop crofting agriculture.

There are huge problems to be overcome, with plenty of issues for politicians to tackle. Why is one of the best wind generation sites in Europe left marooned while everyone else forges ahead? Why are fragile communities being denied perhaps the last chance of taking a hold of their own destiny, creating jobs and retaining young people in a vibrant crofting community of the future?



## CROFTING CONNECTIONS

## Shieling – Àirigh

**T**HE ISLES OF Lewis and Harris were hosts to almost 40 rural skills pupils from four Crofting Connections secondary schools: Kinlochbervie, Plockton, Whalsay and the Nicolson Institute, with teachers and crofters who teach these courses.

The visit coincided with the SCF's annual gathering in Stornoway. Pupils participated in a range of activities. At Gearrannan blackhouse village they heard how crofters provided their own food, housing, energy and clothing until the last residents left in the mid-20th century. Some pupils searched the skies at the eagle observatory in Harris; others learned about managing a modern-day croft at Brue Highland Fold, where the Mathesons breed Highlanders for beef and breeding stock.

At the SCF gathering pupils learned how renewable energy can be the way forward for many crofters interested in diversification, as well as providing their own energy. They learned about the Crofting Commission in an engaging dialogue with Catriona MacLean, the new chief executive. It was an authentic experience of crofting past, present and future for our students – just what Crofting Connections is all about.

The highlight was a visit to Cuidhsìadhar shielings in Ness, a rare example of shieling dwellings old and new, many still used today. Residents now come every summer for rest, recreation and peat-cutting, rather than to tend their animals out on the hill as was the tradition.

The visit was led by local Ness crofter Donald MacSween, who works in community education in Lewis and Sam Harrison, who teaches place-based learning in the Highlands and Islands.

Pupils imagined life in the past compared to the present and what it could be like in the future. They recorded this in pictures and stories which they shared – an exciting exercise in outdoor learning and creativity. The general consensus was that many others in Crofting Connections schools would benefit from spending time at this beautiful place.

The Crofting Connections exhibition at the SCF gathering featured excellent projects from three Lewis Primary schools – Lochs, Laxdale and Tong. Delegates were captivated by the range of topics, including model black-houses made of recycled and natural materials, used as a context for Gaelic language acquisition at Laxdale Primary and a rainbow harvest of vegetables and fruit from pupils at Tong Primary, who also exhibited quail and hen eggs.

Other activities included visits to the Callanish stones, Dun Carloway broch, the Harris Tweed Authority, the Hebridean Seaweed Company, the North Harris Trust and Comunn Eachdraidh Nis, Ness Community Centre – all memorable experiences of Lewis and Harris hospitality.

*Crofting Connections Phase 2 is funded by SG, HIE, HLF and BnG, with office space provided by SNH.*



Callanish stones



Cuidhsìadhar shielings



Laxdale pupils



Tong pupils



Carloway broch



Weaver at Gearrannan





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For further information, contact Bill Hall on 01320 366 808 or email [bill@albaairenergy.co.uk](mailto:bill@albaairenergy.co.uk) web: [www.albaairenergy.co.uk](http://www.albaairenergy.co.uk)

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- Completion of Assignations, Decrofting and Sublet applications
- GPS croft maps for Crofting Commission or SGRPID
- Operational Needs Assessment to support planning applications
- Livestock record keeping and pre-inspection checks
- Grassland and crop advice including soil analysis, fertiliser and reseed
- Livestock feed analysis, rationing and animal health planning
- Horticultural advice
- Agri-environment advice
- Forestry scheme implementation and management
- Diversification opportunities
- Marketing advice
- Renewable energy feasibility studies including wood fuel heating systems

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## ON THE CROFT

## Scottish kye – the product

**M**ODERN MARKETS like to differentiate products even if what is being sold is, in fact, mass produced.

One certainty is that beef from the crofting herd is not mass produced, but how much of it currently ends up as an undifferentiated product, sharing shelf space with beef from unremarkable sources? There is an opportunity to consider whereby locally-produced beef of traditional quality can be promoted as crofter-reared. There will be no need for Saatchi & Saatchi for the photographs; the image of low-input cattle coming from the Highlands out of centuries-old production systems is the same model that is used for marketing whisky.

There are a number of ingredients for producing and marketing successfully. First is a good product and it would be naive to suggest that all cattle off the crofts are fit to make top class. But the basis for quality is there: slower-growing genetics, mainly grass-

fed, from low-stress systems located in areas of good health status. A template for reliably producing good quality could be agreed if the desire was present.

The second requirement has been mentioned before: collaboration in the marketplace. This is easier said than done, but the crofting community can work together as well as the next group. The target has to be to link the producer of quality beef with the buyer who appreciates quality and who can add value. With low numbers of cattle spread far and wide it would seem sensible to provide a producer network that buyers can access remotely to find the beef they want, when they want it.

Local production and local sale is efficient and has high value in the drive towards energy efficiency, carbon foot-printing and all the green and welfare signals flown by the major retailers. We have them already; we just need to recognise them and join in. This leads to opportunities for the buyer, as the marketing

of product as local, traditional, good quality and supporting a rural community is a positive market niche. We will never compete on price with fast-grown, grain-finished meat, and we shouldn't bother trying.

Scottish kye is worth keeping but it needs to be helped in the current market. The quality of food in our shops and restaurants has improved dramatically in the last twenty years. There is a place on the shelf or in the menus for traditional crofter beef.

We need to hold steady in the genetics, reduce the variability in quality, provide a network for marketing and purchasing (it is called the internet) and be proud of what we have.

Jamie Robertson  
Livestock Management Systems Ltd

Honorary Research Fellow	Horizons House
School of Biological Science	81-83 Waterloo Quay
University of Aberdeen	Aberdeen
01224 565 020	07971 564 148



© Cecil Pirie, Stockright Systems



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## Crofting Produce Mark to be revitalised

**P**ART OF THE ROLE of SCF is to help crofters and crofting become more economically viable so that we can continue to live and work in the crofting counties.

We can do this by helping to develop markets for croft produce – be it selling meat direct to consumers rather than as store lambs, turning wool into gloves and scarves, boiling up raspberries to make jam or inviting people to stay on your croft and share the wide open spaces, fresh air and traditional culture that we take for granted.

This means that we have to promote crofts and crofting as a brand which has desirable characteristics (natural, sustainable, traditional, healthy) which people want to be part of – and hence are more likely to choose

and will pay a little bit extra for. We can't trademark these terms as they are in common usage but we can introduce a certification scheme which guarantees that products with the Crofting Mark are genuinely from a croft and conform to basic standards. This scheme was introduced a few years ago and continues to attract new members.

We are now poised to expand the brand through a new website to be launched early in the new year. The cost for new members of the scheme will be £20 and is only £10 for renewal of membership. Other marketing initiatives will follow when we know what members want from the scheme.

If you want to know more, contact Sarah at HQ and watch for the press release.





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## ON THE CROFT

# Shed design for animal welfare and reducing pollution

*Janette Sutherland, SAC Portree, reports on a well-received meeting held earlier this year on shed design for animal welfare and reducing pollution.*

**G**UEST speakers were John MacDonald, SRUC Craibstone, and Jamie Robertson of Livestock Management Systems Ltd. The meeting was funded by the SG Veterinary and Advisory Services Programme.

Several key points emerged.

With our high rainfall, guttering and down-pipes need to be properly installed and maintained.

Ensure clean water runs into drains and any dirty water is stored correctly.

Give due attention to temporary dung stores on fields, ensuring storage is away from water courses.

Don't store within 10m of a river, burn, ditch, loch or coastal water or 50m from a spring or a borehole used for human consumption.

Ensure ventilation in your shed works, keeping the amount of moisture created in the shed down to a minimum. Excess moisture increases the risk of bacterial and virus survival and it will also often lower the temperature in buildings. Well-ventilated sheds require less bedding, which is important with the current price of straw.

We asked Jamie Robertson some questions to share with *Crofter* readers. For fuller advice please download his excellent information note at [www.eblex.org.uk/wp/wp-content/.../BRPplus-cattle-housing260913.pdf](http://www.eblex.org.uk/wp/wp-content/.../BRPplus-cattle-housing260913.pdf)

**Q In my shed the young stirks often huddle together. Why do they seem to avoid parts of the shed?**

**A** This could be because of poor air circulation in the building, leaving some areas too draughty or other areas too warm. Follow the building ventilation calculation on page 17 of the above to see if there is an issue for ventilation and what solutions would be possible.

**Q We calf in February in the Highlands and sometimes on windy nights the shed seems very cold for young calves. What would you suggest?**

**A** Younger animals are more sensitive to colder temperatures than older animals. Adequate draft protection at calf height is critical. Ensure there is always dry bedding as wet animals feel the cold more. Make sure there is air circulation as fresh air is important in killing bacteria and keeping buildings healthy.

**Q I am building a new general purpose shed to house livestock, machinery and feed. I have heard different opinions about open or closed roof ridges.**

**A** It is very important that livestock buildings have holes in the roof to ensure adequate ventilation. If a shed has to be general purpose, or if it's in a high-rainfall area, then a covered open ridge is preferable.

**Q What annual checks should I make to ensure my shed is maintained in best condition?**

**A** Before any major changes in the type or number of stock housed it is important to do a building ventilation calculation. Monitor animal behavior daily and note down any illness in case there are building modifications that could be beneficial.

In addition, annually you should check

- gutters are not clogged or broken;
- down pipes are running clearly and not damaged;
- roof and wall fabric intact;
- floors have not become worn so as to be dangerous and slippery;
- manure storage is safe and compliant with legislation.

**In short, it is important that we start to look at our croft buildings from our stocks' point of view.**



Dr Jamie Robertson discusses shed design with Skye crofters



Annual checks on all sheds would be advisable



## ON THE CROFT

## Common infectious causes of lameness in sheep

**L**AMENESS IS A COMMON and persistent disease problem in sheep.

Knock-on effects include failure to gain weight, metabolic diseases in pregnant ewes, reduced lamb birth weight and poor colostrum production leading to increased lamb mortality and poor performance.

There are many causes of the condition and infectious agents are usually involved. The most common are interdigital dermatitis (scald) and footrot caused by bacteria called *Dichelobacter nodosus*. Another infectious disease which is becoming a problem is contagious ovine digital dermatitis (CODD).

Lame sheep should be attended to as soon as possible and infectious forms of lameness must be dealt with on a flock basis. Veterinary advice should be sought to confirm diagnosis and to formulate a plan to treat and control, particularly if lameness is sudden in many animals, persistent or fails to respond quickly to treatment.

There are many types of lameness with different causes, eg infectious agents, environmental and mechanical factors. However it is possible to significantly reduce the most common types – ID, FR, CODD – and to keep other types under control by implementing the following:

**DIAGNOSIS** – make sure this is accurate and involve your veterinary surgeon.

**INSPECT** daily if possible, certainly at not more than three-day intervals, to reduce spread. The key sign is a head nod, an early indicator of lameness.

**TREAT** every individual lame sheep as soon as seen, even when lameness appears mild – don't wait until it has become severe. Ewes

which become lame during late pregnancy should be treated when seen rather than being left until after lambing. Gentle handling should ensure no extra stress is involved.

**FOOT TRIMMING** – do NOT carry out foot trimming on foot-rot-affected feet, as this significantly delays healing.

**SEPARATE** infected animals until they have cured.

**MONITOR** – assess the level of lameness in groups of sheep during routine inspections. **RECORD** which animals become lame.

**CULL** repeat offenders and chronic cases.

**SELECT** animals with sound well-shaped feet.

**BUY** only sound replacements and select those from your own flock which have never been lame.

**ISOLATE** new stock and examine feet.

**IDENTIFY** key control times to prevent spread of infectious causes of lameness – eg housing and turn-out after lambing.

**CONSULT** your vet and make lameness part of your flock health plan.

**CLEAN GRAZING** – allow two weeks break (as long as possible if aiming for eradication).

**FOOT BATHING** – where used, facilities must be in good order, the product used at correct concentration and according to manufacturers' directions and standing on hard (clean) ground after bathing.

*This information forms part of a Moredun news-sheet on sheep lameness written by Agnes Winter and Clare Phythian. If you would like a free copy or are interested in Moredun membership, please contact The Moredun Communications Team on 0131 445 5111 or visit [www.moredun.org.uk](http://www.moredun.org.uk).*



Chronic footrot

© Agnes Winter



© Martin Benson



## ON THE CROFT

## The cocky's coo?

*In a recent article in The Crofter on rare breeds I talked about Shetland cattle, a very ancient breed used widely in the Shetland isles for possibly millennia. I keep a small herd near Ardgay in Sutherland, writes SCF director Paddy Zakaria.*

**U**NLIKE MOST other British native breeds the Shetland cow has no overseas population which means that the breed would be particularly vulnerable to an outbreak of disease. In a worst-case scenario it could even be wiped out.

I have an ex-dairy farm in the cool temperate Otway Ranges of southern Victoria, Australia, where a friend keeps Aberdeen Angus/Hereford cross cattle (Black Baldies), along with a herd of Ayrshires. I had often thought that Shetland cattle would do well in that region and could be a welcome addition in a country where British native breeds are appreciated and widely used. To create an offshore herd of Shetlands there would be an interesting and rewarding thing

to do and could also conserve the gene pool against a disease catastrophe here. The brick wall, however, was the Australian regulations. It is virtually impossible to import live animals there.

However, last year I learnt that embryo transfer is now a more accessible process and that it might be within the realms of possibility for me to create Shetland embryos and send them across to Australia to be implanted in my friend's cows. The Shetland Cattle Herd Book Society approved the idea and I proceeded to investigate how it would be done. Shetland embryos had not been created before but it was worth a try; and if successful we would be on the road to creating the first viable, independent Shetland cattle herd outside this country.

The Shetland, while once numbering thousands in its native home, is listed with the RBST and has less than 750 breeding females. At its most vulnerable some forty or fifty years ago, the breed numbered less than 30 so

the gene pool now, though stable, is small. It was clear that an offshore herd would need to include the whole gene pool in order to be viable and healthy long-term. With help from genetics specialists I spent some time working out a combination of cows and bulls that would give me a very wide gene spread and in August I started seven of my cows on the five weeks of intensive preparation for embryo flushing.

On 19 September Paragon Veterinary Group from Cumbria travelled up and flushed the cows. To our great relief, because there was always the possibility of failure, the cows produced 16 embryos. The first step in the creation of the new herd has been successful.

The next step is to collect semen from suitable bulls, for inseminating heifers born in Australia. Unfortunately, most of the small amount of Shetland semen available through the RBST is not eligible for import into Australia so the future of the herd will depend on further

export-standard semen collection.

Currently I have one bull at the semen collection facility in Kelso, and I have three more bulls lined up to go. When calves are born in Australia and the gaps in the gene pool are identified, more cows will also be flushed.

With an expectation of a 60% success rate with the embryos, and the possibility of half the calves being bulls, the herd will be starting small. But over time, paying heed to the genetics and breed characteristics, the herd will grow and eventually provide a complete gene bank which can be called upon in the event of any emergency in this country.

It will be a much-desired bonus, too, if the hardy, versatile little Shetland cow is adopted in Australia for its many good attributes. Long known as "the crofter's coo", perhaps down under it will become "the cocky's coo" too.

*A "cocky" is an Australian term for a farmer who farms land on a small scale and is therefore usually poor and battling to make ends meet.*



Drumlough Isobel, a rare colour combination of black and red



St Trinians Balou, a rare black brindle bull, purchased for semen



Paddy and some of her Shetland kye

## ON THE CROFT

**SEPA action on dip disposal in crofting townships**

© Donald MacSween

**T**HERE WERE PRESS reports during the summer that a number of townships in Lewis had been summonsed to the sheriff court by SEPA for arrears of fees for disposal of used sheep-dip.

In some cases the arrears amounted to many hundreds of pounds.

Since the EU groundwater regulations were adopted in 1998, there has been a requirement for those disposing of dip on land to have a licence granted by SEPA which is subject to an initial application fee and an annual charge. This charge is supposed to cover inspection of the site and admin costs.

Let us be quite honest here. While we may question the heavy-handed approach taken by SEPA to recover these costs from

townships, and ask what exactly they do to justify the level of charges, the disposal of sheep-dip into a burn, a loch, or the sea, as used to happen in some places, was totally unacceptable and had to stop.

These events also ask some important questions about how township assets, and indeed their liabilities, are being looked after. We understand that the townships being pursued by SEPA had no grazings committee in office, so there was no one responsible for paying the bills. We are all keen to protect our rights as crofters, and so we should be, but we must also take the collective action necessary to safeguard our communal assets, as well as dealing with our liabilities. Without grazings committees, properly appointed and

functioning, we are vulnerable to the sort of situation that has occurred.

It may well be that sheep dipping is no longer carried out by these townships. Many townships and stock clubs now contract out their dipping, in which case it is the contractor's job to dispose of the dip safely and legally. Other townships and individuals have gone over to using injectable treatments for scab.

In these situations it is worth checking whether a license for disposal of dip is still in existence. If so, an annual charge will be payable to SEPA. If a dipper is in disuse and/or disrepair and is not likely to be used again, the best action is to surrender the license and avoid further charges.

## Training

**We are hoping to offer training opportunities across the crofting counties and would like to hear from any members who would be interested in working as self-employed local course directors for the up-and-coming training programme 2014/15.**

**We are particularly looking for folk in the Strathspey, Barra and Moray areas. If you are efficient, organised and good at taking bookings and have some knowledge of crofting, you are our ideal person.**

**Please get in touch with Lucy or Tina: [training@crofting.org](mailto:training@crofting.org)**



## ON THE CROFT

## Communal activities

*SCF member Donald MacSween reports on one of his favourite activities.*

**T**HIS MIGHT COME as a bit of a surprise, but going to the fank is a real social highlight for me.

That statement might say more about me than I care to admit, but it's true! I know people reminisce of days gone by, when everyone helped each other, but these days haven't gone completely. Our wee village still comes together quite often and folk help each other with dipping, shearing, gathering etc. We recently dipped all the sheep in our village and I can't describe how much I was looking forward to it!

I know it's one day when the work isn't too strenuous, there will be plenty bodies to help out and we'll have a good laugh at all the stories from the bodachs. This year was no different; almost perfect weather, sheep all doing as they were supposed to and lots of young lads on hand to help out – and the best thing was the help from the youngsters. At 29, I'm still classed as a youngster myself, in crofting terms, but we had several teenagers giving up their Saturday morning lie-ins to help out. I think you can go on all the courses you want, but there is nothing that can beat hands-on experience in a real working environment. No sterilised work-place here; you are told exactly what has to be done then go ahead

and do it, while under the watchful eye.

Communal activities like this are a window back in time, particularly for the younger lads. Stories about the arguments and characters that used to frequent our fank are common – as are the unrepeatable stories of what they got up to! Young people have so many distractions these days, but I really think communal events like this help crofting lose any fuddy-duddy image it may have.

For people like myself, who are employed full-time, it's not always easy to make time for communal days and it is often easier to soldier on alone, but the long-term benefits are incalculable.

Roll on next year!



North Dell dipping crew

© Donald MacSween

## First round of new entrants' payments

**T**HE FIRST ROUND of payments from the new entrants' scheme started at the end of October.

The fund was set up to provide £2 million over two years to support new entrants who are excluded from Single Farm Payments under current EU rules. A total of 806 applications were assessed for the scheme and up to 637 new entrants will receive a share of two million pounds. Successful applicants receive payments in two instalments – the first was made at the end of October 2013 and a further one will be made as early as possible in the new financial year, in April 2014.

It was the view of the new entrants panel that a single payment could have offered more impactful support, however the Scottish Government's commitment to paying the

second instalment as early as possible in the new financial year offers a reasonable compromise. Each instalment of the scheme payment is made up of a basic payment of £500 per business plus £25 per hectare, up to a maximum of 65 hectares or the maximum *de minimis* payment, whichever came first. The basic payment was agreed to ensure a fairer distribution of payments so that all recipients got a significant level of compensation. This means that the smallest croft would receive £392 per ha with the latter farms receiving a maximum of £70 per ha. Recipients will receive between £1,146 and £4,250 in total.

Feedback from members about these payments so far has been positive, with comments such as "Delighted to be getting the payment at last, after crofting for 10 years

with no SFP". Another member commented that it is not the actual amount the matters, but the recognition from the government after eight years of hard work with very little support.

There was a minimum activity requirement and also a minimum area of 3ha. Twenty one applications were rejected as they were under this minimum size of 3 ha. However the minimum size allowed by the EU is 1ha. The Scottish Government had previously chosen to set the minimum size at 3ha.

This is an issue which the Scottish Crofting Federation has been lobbying to change, as often new entrants will start on a small scale and expand over time.

We would be interested to hear if you have applied for the grant and whether or not you have received a payment. Please get in touch with HQ.

# Co-chomainn ann an Nirribhidh

**M**A GHABHAS tu cuairt gu Nirribhidh, buailidh e ort cho riaghailteach 's a tha coltas na dùthcha.

Taighean is saibhlean sgiobalta, togalaichean le peant dearg orra, air an cumail suas gu grinn. Tha e iongantach cuideachd, ge-tà, cho riaghailteach 's a tha ceannachd agus reic bhon fhearann sa rìoghachd sin. Tha cha mhòr a h-uile rud a' tachairt tro cho-chomainn (co-operatives) agus mar sin tha prìsean cinnteach. Tha bannan ga thogail bho na tuathanasan air feadh na dùthcha agus ga reic gu bùthan le TINE, a tha na cho-chomann anns a bheil na 16,000 tuathanach crodh-

bainne nam buill.

Tha e mar phrìomh amas aig TINE prìs mhath a thoirt do na buill air a' bhainne. Tha co-chomann eile NORTURA a' ceannachd bheathaichean, a' ruith nan taighean-spadaidh agus a reic feòil gu na bùthan fon ainm GILDE. Mar an ceudna, tha co-chomainn ann airson buntàta, airson mil, agus airson fiodh a cheannachd bho na mìltean de thuathanach aig a bheil coille ri gheàrradh.

Nuair a thig e gu tractar, no todhar-gallda, no aodach-dionach a cheannach, tha co-chomann ann airson sin Felleskjøpet, agus sin 's dòcha

am fear a dh'aithnicheadh sinne, 's e gu math coltach ri leithid Croitearan Leòdhais, ach fada nas motha, le corr is 100 bùth aige. Agus ma tha tuathanach ag iarraidh iasad, tha co-chomann ann do sin, Landkreditt. 'S bochd nach eil barrachd cho-chomainn ann an Alba. 'S ann an Alba a thòisich an gluasad leis a' Fenwick Weavers Society ann an Lanark an 1769 ach an-diugh chan eil mòran cho-chomainn ag obair a thaobh àiteachais.

Bha cuid de na co-chomainn choimhearsnachd ioma-taobhach a chaidh thòiseachadh fo sgèith seann Bhòrd Leasachaidh na Gaidhealtachd

an sàs ann an reic do thuathanach is croitearan ach tha an fheadhainn air fhàgail air an gnìomhachasan a shìmplachadh agus chan eil fhios agam a bheil gin an sàs sa leithid. Bha Stoc na Gaidhealtachd 's nan Eilean (HILL) a' feuchainn ri prìsean cunbhalach a thoirt seachad air beathaichean ach tha e nis an-dèidh sguir. Ach an dèidh sin sna dhèidh, tha urrasan fearainn coimhearsnachd a' fàs anns an Gaidhealtachd, 's dòcha gum faic sinn leudachadh sna buidhnean co-chomainn a rithist.

*Gabhan Mac a'Phearsain*



Norway farm buildings – the big building is a byre for a samdrift or partnership farm.



A dairy farm on the shores of the Trondheim fjord.

**Go online at [www.crofting.org](http://www.crofting.org)**

## Membership matters

### Structure update

We have been inviting comments and proposals over the last year to help us improve our communication with members, to ensure our democracy and to offer easy ways to have members participate with the organisation. Following on from our proposal in the last edition of *The Crofter* we can expand on the initial proposal.

### Local group development

Throughout December and January we will be consulting all existing area and branch contacts to discuss what effect the proposals will have on that locality and also what activities and involvement they would like to see happening. We will also be looking for more volunteers who are willing to help the organisation with recruitment, invigorating local activity as well as the more interesting policy and case work,

where possible. This feedback will then be summarised into guidance for local groups.

The intention is that this structure review will culminate with a finalised proposal being submitted to the SCF board before the 2014 AGM. If this proposal is endorsed by board members, the necessary amendments will be made to SCF's memorandum and articles of association to enable these changes to take place.

**We always welcome members' feedback, so if you have a comment on any of the above then please get in touch with HQ.**

### More ways to communicate

Members who have not already signed up to our monthly e-newsletter can do this now by visiting <http://eepurl.com/oWOdr>. You will need your membership number for this.

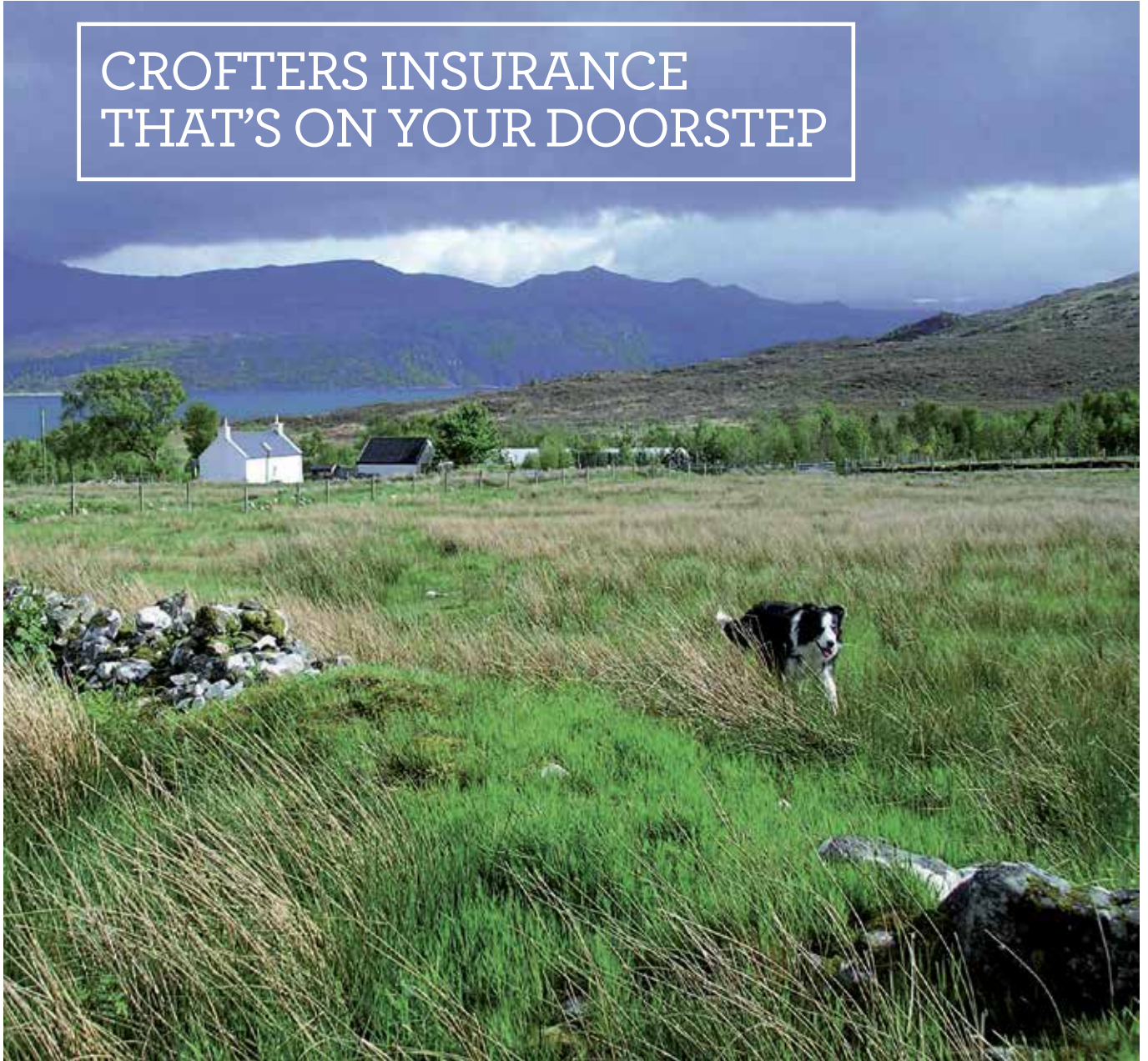
**You can scan the QR code with your smart phone and sign up.**

**You can also keep up to date with us through Facebook (Scottish Crofting Federation) and our latest development – Twitter @SCFHq.**





# CROFTERS INSURANCE THAT'S ON YOUR DOORSTEP



Find out more by contacting  
your local NFU Mutual branch  
at [www.nfumutual.co.uk](http://www.nfumutual.co.uk)



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## The benefits of your SCF membership

As well as the benefits from dedicated political representation, as reported throughout these pages, you get:

- four issues a year of *The Crofter* – this magazine full of useful resources and information for crofters;
- monthly e-newsletters, keeping you up-to-date with the latest news and policy developments;
- access to the SCF crofting advice service;
- a free dedicated legal helpline through crofting specialists Inksters;
- discounted training opportunities;
- the opportunity to promote your croft tourism business on the SCF website;
- free host membership of the WWOOF croft volunteers scheme for a year;
- the opportunity to brand and market your croft produce with our unique Scottish Crofting Produce Mark;
- a wide network of contacts for sharing experiences and sourcing information;
- a skills mentoring service;
- community mediation service;
- assistance and guidance for those wanting to enter crofting;
- discounted attendance at the SCF annual gathering;
- the credibility of being a member of the UK's largest association of small-scale food producers!

All this for less than the cost of a pair of good boots or of filling your car once with fuel.

What good value SCF membership is at £51 for 2014, compared with some other membership subscriptions: NFUS sub for crofters £90, STFA minimum sub £120.

**Can you afford not to be an SCF member?**

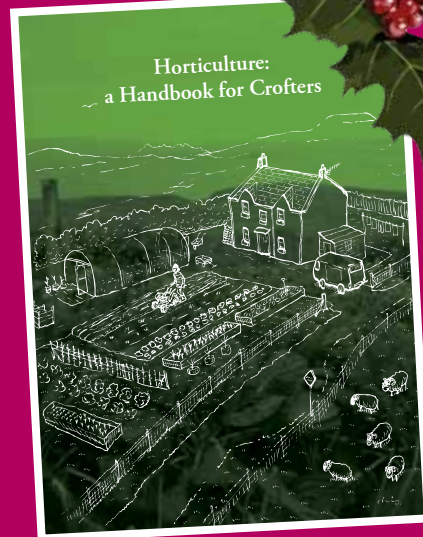
## The ideal Christmas present

### Horticulture – a handbook for crofters

Lots of useful information for new and experienced growers in the crofting areas. Beautifully illustrated, the book comes in a convenient loose-leaf style in a ring binder with space for you to add your own pages of notes, cropping plans etc.

Available to SCF members for £10 and non-members for £15, plus postage if necessary.

**Please contact SCF HQ to order your copy.**



## Annual gathering 2014

Pencil into your diary:

The SCF annual gathering 2014 is planned to be held in October in Lochinver with the theme of **Young crofters: access to land and homes.**

**Watch this space.**



## How to contact us

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visit [www.crofting.org](http://www.crofting.org) for full contact details

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