

## A balance of rewards and responsibility

IT IS WIDELY ACCEPTED that the right to buy introduced in 1976 created a loophole to avoid regulation and started the demise of crofting as a regulated system.

Just as important, and often over-looked, is the fact that the right to assign outwith the family introduced in 1961 led to the free market in croft tenancies and so to the end of a truly regulated, and protected, system.

A regulated system can only work by a balance of rewards and responsibility. A hundred-plus years ago security of tenure, compensation for improvements and controlled rents were the rewards for putting up with the regulations. The Crofting Counties Agricultural Grant Scheme (CCAGS) was specifically set up to help develop holdings in the most remote and challenged areas of Scotland. Now CCAGS is the main part of the reward for regulation but the Scottish Government, with the support of the large-farm lobby, want it to go, to be replaced by a scheme that is open to all farms below 50ha in size, no matter where they are in Scotland. If CCAGS goes, crofters may well feel that there is no justification for the responsibilities and regulation.

Were crofters to ask for de-regulation, the Scottish Government would undoubtedly be delighted, as would their puppeteer the NFUS. Has this been the intention all along? Why has the 2010 legislation turned out to be such a fiasco? With the list of errors discovered in the 2010 act mounting, the question

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## Crofters warned to speak up or get shafted

**C**ROFTING IS under threat, probably as never before.

Time is running out. All crofters are urged to stand united to face this danger. The Scottish Crofting Federation is warning all crofters to respond to the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) consultations or risk being cheated of what is rightfully theirs. By the time you read this the Scotland Rural Development Programme (SRDP) consultation will be closed, but if you didn't respond to it you can still send a letter to Richard Lochhead, cabinet secretary for agriculture. And please respond to the direct payments consultation which is open until 17th March.

Crofters need to wake up to what is being suggested by the Scottish Government. The objective in the European Commission, right from the outset of these protracted negotiations, has been to provide more support to small producers. But gradually the large farmers' representatives have eroded this intention.

In Scotland it is the same. We were led to believe that crofters were to get real and equitable support at last. But in the short time between the first consultations and this second stage, the large farmers' representatives have stepped up lobbying pressure in a desperate attempt to keep the money. The Scottish Government seems to be bowing to this. If crofters don't speak up they will get shafted.

For example, in the pillar one consultation

on direct payments, it is suggested that the rough grazing classification – which most croft land is – should be supported to the tune of 20 to 25 euros per hectare, whilst permanent grassland and arable, where most intensive large farms are, should get from 200 to 250 euros per hectare. Crofters have not been asking for much; just enough to survive. We estimate this to be 30 to 35 five euros per hectare. But the large-farm lobby won't tolerate even this. It is blatant greed. In the negotiations, NFUS have suggested that crofters can survive on 15 euros per hectare!

In some respects, the pillar two consultation, on the SRDP is even more of a slap in the face. It is being proposed that the crofters' agricultural support scheme, CCAGS, will be wound up and replaced with a scheme that will be open to all farms in Scotland of less than fifty hectares. That is seventy three percent of holdings.

The large-farm lobby have always made it clear that they do not like crofters having their own scheme and do not value crofting as a unique way of rural life. In the cross-party group report on SRDP, in which organisations suggested a croft-only support scheme, NFUS stood out as the lone organisation demanding it be open to all. In the phase one consultation many organisations and

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*and much more*



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## Message from the chair...



**C**ROFTING LAW is complicated. A croft is indeed a piece of ground surrounded by legislation.

I recently wrote an article for the *Scottish Law Agents Gazette*. My purpose was to warn any lawyers who may be tempted to deal with property in the Highlands and Islands. The area is known for good reason as the crofting counties and my warning was about crofting

law. It was meant as a simple introduction to a complex subject.

What I wanted to explain is that all land occupied by crofters, including the sites of their dwellinghouses, their individual croft land and common grazings, is subject to crofting tenure and remains so unless and until it is formally removed from crofting controls. This normally requires a decrofting direction from the Crofting (formerly Crofters) Commission or a resumption order from the Land Court. There is no guaranteed, simple way of finding out whether land is under crofting controls. Not, that is, until the new Crofting Register is complete.

That new national register is now fully operational. Until recently, it was open only for voluntary applications. Now each and everyone who claims the right to occupy a croft (be they a tenant

or owner-occupier crofter) will be required to provide a simple boundary map when dealing with their crofts. The register's purpose is to provide a comprehensive public record of all land held in crofting, giving certainty over boundaries and safeguarding crofting interests for the future. Until all crofts and common grazings are recorded, however, the register cannot provide definitive proof that any particular land is free of crofting controls. But the information it holds is accessible, free and online and can be easily checked. Try it.

To protect croft land, anyone who owns it can be regarded as the landlord. If there is no tenant, the landlord of a vacant croft may be required to take a tenant. This does not apply to those who fulfil all the conditions as owner-occupier crofters. Their crofts are not

vacant. They should make sure the Commission is aware of that fact.

Where several owners hold separate title to distinct parts of a croft, the Commission recently adopted a policy that all decrofting applications in respect of crofts with multiple owners must be submitted by all the owners, in their capacity collectively as the 'landlord' of the croft, even in those cases where the application related to a part of the croft held in title by only one of their number. This policy has not yet been tested.

Recent changes have given crofters and their advisers a lot to think about. The lawyers' special-interest group ([www.croftinglawgroup.org](http://www.croftinglawgroup.org)) is getting to grips with a much-altered system.

Anyone with doubts about their situation should consider taking good legal advice.

Derek Flynn

## Our man in Brussels

**I**N JANUARY I attended a two-day conference in Brussels on electronic identification (EID) and other animal health and welfare amendments.

Sunday and Monday were spent collating problems from various parts of Europe on animal health, cross-compliance and the issue of native seeds and animals. Trying to find acceptable words for every country was challenging for the final document. Some people prefer the word peasant, which has poor connotations in English. I learned a new word – disintensification – as extensive farming in France meant they were grabbing land from their neighbours.

At the animal health conference EID was the biggest, but not the only, major issue. Running in parallel was a seed conference with people from Africa, America and various parts of Europe. Big businesses are patenting plant seeds. EC stops payments if seeds are kept from year to year and traded among farmers instead of buying from EC-approved suppliers.

These are real issues for crofters. If anyone has Shetland tatties or Shetland kale or traditional oats or barley they will be contravening cross-compliance rules and are subject to losing a substantial part, or even all, of their Single Farm Payment. To highlight this I joined a peaceful protest outside the European Parliament. These small-time farmers from throughout Europe had already demonstrated in Berlin on the Saturday.

The new animal health proposals seem very benign.

They give an opportunity for amendments such as the one Hilary Burgess asked Alyn Smith MEP to put forward to the agricultural committee. This requested that EID for sheep only be required at the time an animal leaves the holding of birth.

This amendment for the sheep EID derogation for holding of birth passed through the agriculture committee successfully in mid-February, by 28 votes to 12. I do not anticipate that it will be altered in plenary, so this amendment will almost certainly form part of the parliament position on the animal health law. Of course, there is still a long way to go – including negotiations with the EU council and commission. But it is an important first step.

On careful examination, however, the animal health proposals would give wide-ranging powers on disease eradication, with the possible danger that native breeds of sheep and cattle become extinct, as they are susceptible to any new diseases. We saw what nearly happened to Shetland's coloured flock through legislation that had unintended consequences.

I was assured that we had at least one line in the new 120-page document of Scottish Rural Development Programme (SRDP) proposals that would help secure Scotland's native breeds until at least 2020. A very high-profile delegation from Scotland is still discussing some new SRDP rules. The grapevine hints that there is a problem for Scotland's new scheme, due to EC resistance on

minimum stocking densities. In Scotland we wish to see the end of slipper farming.

The EC has delegated this year to family farming, but if they do not give way on seeds legislation and sheep EID there will be very little family farming continuing in the uplands of Europe.

It is with deep regret that I heard of the sad loss of John Farquhar Munro, an ambassador for the Highlands and Islands, a true friend to crofting and a special friend to myself.

Norman Leask



Norman drawing close to young good-looking activists outside parliament



Norman Leask and George Lyon MEP after their discussion on how best to get the EID amendment through the agriculture committee



German demonstration outside parliament

## A balance of rewards and responsibility

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asked with increasing frequency is: "Was this incompetence or deviousness – an example of the wither-on-the-vine strategy favoured by civil servants?"

This is an extremely serious time for crofting. When crofters see no point in being regulated they will ask for de-regulation and we really don't know what the consequences would be. The end of half-baked regulation by a lack-lustre group of civil servants directed by a very poorly-drafted act could be seen as a good thing.

But the danger is that de-regulation would lead to a combination of amalgamation and fragmentation, and to the end of what has made crofting good – its protection. This legislation has protected crofting. Most ills in crofting can be attributed to the opening up of regulation, or to the regulator simply not regulating.

We at last have a Commission with elected members and the possibility of a real regulator, but they and crofting are being undermined at every turn.

**Crofters must fight for their agricultural support scheme. They must defend crofting.**

## Crofters warned to speak up or get shafted

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individuals supported the suggestion of a crofting support scheme, but it appears that the large-farm lobby has turned the government again.

In what is probably the greatest perversion of public support to Scottish agriculture, the Less Favoured Area Support Scheme (LFASS) is to continue to be abused, paying the highest payments per hectare to the better land in the LFA – most of Scotland.

All governments have the ability to move to a new system of Areas of Natural Constraint (ANC) as soon as they wish, the criteria of which favour the fragile areas. But again, one presumes under the lobby of the large farmers'

representatives, the Scottish Government plans to delay introducing ANC for as long as possible, which is until 2018. Furthermore, they will not change the way LFASS pays more to better land 'in the foreseeable future' as Mr Lochhead recently said.

It is scandalous. SCF will certainly be talking to European Commission officials about this.

**SCF is the only organisation dedicated to the representation of crofters' interests and all crofters should be members. It is the only way we can stand up to the intimidation by the farming industry.**

**To shaft: (verb) defeat someone in an expectation through trickery or deceit.**



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



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## INDEPENDENCE DEBATE

### We asked both sides of the debate to outline how a decision either way would affect crofting

Dave Thompson MSP (SNP) makes the case for a "Yes" vote.

**C**ROFTING IS a vital part of our culture and rural support system and is extremely important in my constituency of Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch.

Scotland exports almost £20k (all products) for every man, woman and child per annum and crofters are crucial in this – eg hand-dived scallops, langoustines, grass-fed beef, quality knitwear and other crafts.

But Westminster ignores Scottish farmers and crofters. It doesn't prioritise farming or fishing in the EU: undermining two essential parts of our economy. Witness recent Westminster negotiations. Scottish farm support is the lowest in the EU. Average Scottish Pillar 2 payments are €11pH, the EU average is €76. For Pillar 1 *Scotland's Future* (p 281) states "If Scotland had been independent when the latest Common Agricultural Policy budget was being decided, we would have benefited from a principle that by 2020 no member state would receive less than an average of €196 per hectare. This would have brought Scotland an extra €1 billion (£830 million) between 2014 and 2020."

Adding insult to injury is the €223 million of EU agricultural uplift. This is a direct consequence of Scotland's lower payments; it should all come to Scottish farmers but Westminster is giving it to the whole UK. Considering how Scotland has been treated it is little wonder the recent *Scottish Farmer* poll indicated 47% of respondents will vote "Yes" in the referendum.

Another example is the Scottish Government's wish to use 13% of support for coupled payments

rather than 8%. But this requires Westminster's approval, so far withheld.

Vote "No" and get either urban-focussed Labour or the Tories. Conservative Alex Fergusson MSP has already said that they do not want to "reward 100 hectares of rock in the north-west of Scotland... with the same level of financial support as 100 hectares of hill in the south of Scotland", revealing the coalition view of the Highlands and Islands and the need for independence.

Crofting critically helps rural population retention. The LFASS currently supports 11,500 farming and crofting businesses and is being replaced with Areas of Natural Constraint, ensuring land management that is beneficial to the environment and sustaining our rural communities. This will be crucial in an independent Scotland, so crofting will win a larger share of a bigger pot.

Other policy areas affect crofting too; the UK approach to commercial delivery of mail, mobile and broadband leaves the Highlands and Islands in the cold. Westminster only insisted on 95% of Scotland being covered by 4G – guess where the 5% will be? The Scottish Government wanted greater coverage but these powers are reserved.

I believe independence will give Scotland the power to secure and increase Scottish agriculture's place in the EU and global economy. *Scotland's Future* (p 281) says it will provide a direct voice for Scotland's farmers in Europe, which means the most important decisions about rural Scotland will be taken by the people who care most about Scotland – that is by the people who live here.

That can only be good for crofters.

Drew Ratter, crofter and former Crofters Commission chair, sets out why we should vote "No".

**B**EFORE WE consider whether crofting is better off as it is or in an independent Scotland, we must glance at what we are talking about.

I will discuss two separate but connected croftings – first crofting as a regulated system of land tenure and second as a form of small-scale hill and island agriculture.

All the evidence for the first is that being part of the UK has been the best option. This is easily proved. The major legislation which preserved crofting so that it could be part of hill agriculture, and incidentally retain population where it would not otherwise be, was enacted by a UK government in 1886 and 1955. Everyone would agree that these Crofting Acts were vital and well thought out.

When Scottish Government got involved in 2007 and 2010, the pieces of legislation produced were well meant, but in the end have proved disastrous. The 2007 Act at least had the merit of trying to continue as enabling legislation; introducing the possibility of creating new crofts; and leaving the Crofters Commission with inadequate budgets, but with development powers, and oversight of its own grant schemes.

The 2010 Act is in another class. It is massively prescriptive, woefully drafted (as evidenced by the sundry aspects so far which have proved unworkable), and has shown every evidence of being a poisoned pill which could end up in the upturning of the whole business.

So case for the union is verified there.

On marginal agriculture, in this short piece, I will stick to a few examples. Currently light lambs are being sold through

slaughterhouses in England and Wales, as there's no Scottish outlet, so we are a UK market which does help with producer returns. How would independence help there?

Store cattle and sheep are sold into a UK market. If we were independent that would likely continue but with border costs, and different regulatory regimes on movements. It might be quite manageable, but why take the risk, in the certainty that no benefits can be gained?

The Common Agricultural Policy is vital to us. Currently we are heading towards changes in it which do not look as if they will be at all crofter-friendly. But that is down to the current cabinet secretary. He can make it better. All the power is there under devolution, and has been since 1999. It is how it is used that matters.

Any notion that an independent Scotland would have massive influence over a future CAP, even should it be able to negotiate entry conditions to the EU, is laughable. The major influences on CAP are, and will remain, France and Germany. Ireland has tended to punch above its weight, because it has been a top national priority due to the position of agriculture in the Irish economy. It does not occupy an equivalent position in Scotland.

No. What crofters like me want to see is our governments listening to our concerns and not putting our livelihoods at risk. Putting up a border to our largest market and having a different currency to our biggest trading partner could do irreparable damage to crofting. In Shetland, Edinburgh can often seem as far away as London.

It simply doesn't make sense to risk our industry for the sake of nationalism.

Only by working together across these islands will we sustain our way of life and prosper.



Dave Thompson and crofter Roddy McKerlich



Drew on his croft

## Wildness designation misguided and offensive

**T**HESE DAYS crofters view with great suspicion anything emanating from Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), however innocent it may seem at first glance.

This is especially true for something that could be used to impose a further layer of designation and restriction to land use. The recent consultation by SNH – its wild land map – clearly rang the same alarm bells with many other organisations. Over 400 responses showed the depth of feeling on this issue. Many were from community groups and even common grazings committees.

SCF commented that these areas have been managed and sustained by generations of crofters over centuries, often creating land of high nature value because of the human activity. It can only be considered wild land because of inappropriate land management policies and lack of investment in our rural economy. The current CAP has effectively caused a retreat from the hills,

only for those with alternate interests to now label those same hills wild.

Proposers claim that these changes will not affect future development. In reality, once approved they can have a huge impact on what happens in the future. This is, as yet, not designation but advice. However, once planning authorities have started to use this advice it is a short walk to it becoming guidance, which is mandatory and must be followed by public bodies.

Further designations will erode the influence and local control which is essential if crofting communities are to thrive. Human use can include grazing, peatland, wetland and woodland management and the creation of new crofts. When controlled burning, grazing, peat cutting and various other management regimes are stopped, the hills will be covered in whins and bracken, which is not what anyone wants, not even SNH.

Groups and organisations

including Community Energy Scotland, Bonawe grazings committee, Friends of the Earth Scotland, Keoldale sheep stock club and a number of private estates and renewables companies also expressed reservations on the map. Network Rail even found that long lengths of their railway tracks in the Highlands are designated as wild land.

The Knoydart Foundation said

the map pays no heed to views or perceptions of the people who live and work in the areas covered. Stòras Uibhist added: "The map can kill any potential for Highlanders to make the most of economic opportunities."

Patrick Krause concluded the SCF response by suggesting SNH goes back to its masters to tell them that crofters think its definition of wildness is misguided, misplaced, and offensive.



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## Consultation on CAP pillar 1 – direct payments

**T**HE SCOTTISH Government is consulting on the direct payments regulation and the consultation is now live. In the consultation views are sought on all aspects of direct payments, particularly:

- how Scotland could be divided into payment regions and what the payment rates might be for each region;
- transition to area payments;
- greening and equivalence;

- voluntary coupled support (VCS).

The consultation is split into four sections: (1) basic payments; (2) environmental issues (greening); (3) other measures eg voluntary coupled support, young farmer, national reserve, etc; and (4) a proposed final package.

The consultation is in an electronic format and respondents need only answer the questions they want to. When completing the electronic version,

respondents can complete part of the form, save it and come back to it and work on it later before they submit their final responses. Hard copies are available from Scottish Government on request, or may be obtained from your local SGRPID office.

**If you want to make sure your voice is heard you should take the time to complete the consultation, which closes on 17 March 2014.**

Also let SCF know your views to add to our collective voice. We will issue a briefing paper soon to help you to understand this complex subject – it will be available by the time you read this.

No final decisions will be taken by Scottish Government until after the consultation closes and responses have been analysed.



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## Geese on the menu

**A**FTER A lengthy campaign by SCF to highlight the seriousness of the problem of greylag geese in the Outer Hebrides, and demanding effective control measures, Scottish Natural Heritage recently announced that the geese can now be shot and sold for the first time, under licence, to approved local restaurants and hotels.

Over 10,000 geese have settled over the years in North and South Uist and Benbecula. SCF has long been demanding a change in the law which protects the species, pointing out that what really needs protecting is crofters' crops. Now greylags, which graze in huge numbers on crofts in the islands, can be shot throughout the year and their meat sold. Instead of the birds stealing food which should be eaten by crofters' stock, they themselves can be eaten.

The pilot scheme permits shooting and sale locally under licence. This is the first time SNH has licensed the sale of goose meat in Scotland under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. The scheme is also being trialled in Orkney. SNH says the long-term goal is to minimise agricultural damage while maintaining a

viable goose population.

Selling geese shot as part of this management should go a small way to offsetting crofters' losses due to goose predation over the years – and will help pay for some of the work. Licences will initially be provided to enable the sale for a trial period to March 2015.

SCF director Roddy MacDonald, who took the Federation's well-supported goose petition to the Scottish Parliament last year, commented: "At last SNH and government have taken heed of what we have been saying to them for years on the very serious problem cause by escalating goose numbers on the islands.

"We watched these birds eat their way across fields of grass and grain intended to feed our stock, ruining any remaining crops with their droppings as well. This announcement at least shows acceptance by SNH and government of the rightness of what we have been saying. It gives us some hope that their numbers might reduce to a more acceptable level – which would let us grow our crops and not lose half of them to these voracious birds. But it will only work when linked to other schemes such as crop protection and further reduction of numbers."



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## John Farquhar Munro 26th August 1934 – 26th January 2014

*An appreciation from Patrick Krause*

**T**HERE HAS, understandably, been a great deal of tribute to the legendary John Farquhar Munro but I would like to add a small personal note of my own.

John Farquhar was a very strong ally to the SCF and to crofting in the protracted negotiations during the course of two crofting reform bills through the Scottish parliament. SCF colleagues and I also had the great pleasure of working with him on the cross-party group on crofting which he chaired until 2011, when he retired after serving three consecutive terms from the forming of a Scottish parliament in 1999. He was an exceptional politician who had the mastery of calm assurance and the gift of eloquence as only a native Gael has. After the cross-party group he would come outside and smoke a pipe of black twist as we bleathered. The smell was delicious and, being an ex-smoker, I was sorely tempted to join him.

He told me that he was known as John until he needed to use one of his middle names, as there was another John Munro candidate in the Ross and Cromarty county council elections in which he stood, and won, in 1966. And so it stuck and we all know him as John Farquhar.

John Farquhar was brought up in Cluanie, which now lies below the water of Loch Cluanie, the hydro project at the top of Glen Shiel. A strange thought and eerie; you can sometimes see the tops of chimneys when the water level is low.

When he left school John went to sea in the merchant navy. He was a great story-teller and one of his favourite tales was of his adventure as a stowaway on board the Queen Mary, making his way home from New York. He said he arrived in Liverpool with just the clothes he stood up in and then blagged his way by train back to Kyle.

His navy days over, he settled back home and had a multitude of different jobs and enterprises including having a quarry and a haulage firm. These two verses of The Munro Song by Tommy Mackenzie paint a great picture:

*"The boss himself's a fly one, he's as gallant as can be  
Driving up to council meetings with no tax or MOT  
When crossing Cal Mac's ferry he never pays the fee  
It's no wonder he's the boss man at Munro's."*

*From Dornie to Kilillan*

*From Lochcarron to Achmore;*

*At six o' clock each morning*

*It's to the yard we go*

*Digging drains, or driving artics*

*Or fitting a new door;*

*We're the boys that's working for Munro."*

He was late once for a meeting and his aide told me that he had been driving his beloved blue Mercedes down through Glen Garry when on that tight right-hander a wheel came off! It could only happen to JF. The registration of that car is JF DID, a well-known sight in Skye and Lochalsh.

I asked him once how he managed to stick so long at the politics and he said "Well, if you can, you've got to try to do something about it". J F did.



Gamekeepers from Shiel, Cluanie and Tomdoun estates carry the coffin

John Farquhar's good friend Hugh Dan MacLennan gave one of the tributes at the funeral and we are grateful to him for his permission to use his remarks and the song Crò Chinn-t-Saile, which John Farquhar believed referred to the graveyard at Clachan Duich.

"Written by a MacRae who wanted to get home to where his people were gathered together," he said, "its words sum up better than I could ever do the reason we are here. It is time for John Farquhar to go home."

JF's own translation was:

*Théid mi dhachaidh ho ro dhachaidh  
Théid mi dhachaidh Chrò Chinn t-Saile  
Théid mi dhachaidh ho ro dhachaidh  
Théid mi dhachaidh Chrò Chinn t-Saile*

I will go home  
I will go home to the fold of Kintail  
I will go home  
I will go home to the fold of Kintail.

© Willie Urquhart, West Highland Free Press



## A commissioner's view

*Crofting Commission vice-convenor Colin Kennedy looks ahead.*

**A**S DAYS GET LONGER and spring is awaited, I wonder quite where all the rain has come from.

The animals are looking miserable, fields are awash, drains unable to cope... I'm thinking comcrakes will soon require webbed feet!

Last week the sheep were scanned and treated for fluke. This was the first serious task of the season. The number of twins scanned is normal, while more triplets were recorded. With the export demand for lamb increasing, sheep are looking a reasonable bet for the coming season so I'm feeding the sheep already in an effort to try to increase the number of lambs reared.

Looking ahead, the next important date is the LFASS payment. With the new single farm payment out to consultation, clearly there'll be winners and losers. The second stage Scotland Rural Development Programme 2014–2020 Stage 2 was open for consultation until 28th February 2014. I hope crofters everywhere made representation in an effort to obtain the maximum support possible.

I am privileged to be a crofter awaiting the green shoots of spring. Lambs will be in the fields, birds in the bushes and quality Highland and Islands produce will be abundant for all to enjoy. The rain and the gales are soon forgotten and I am again glad to be a crofter.

Now putting on my other hat as a commissioner, let me give you a quick update on the duty to report by grazings committees and the draft common grazing

regulations consultations.

Approximately 300 consultation packs were sent out and it was heartening to see crofters, and organisations which work on their behalf, making sure their views were put forward to us. Around half asked to comment on the forms to be used for the duty to report, the others on the proposed new grazing regulations.

The duty to report consultation asked for comments on the content and format of the form grazing committees will be asked to complete every five years, to provide details on the condition of their common grazing and the condition of the crofts sharing in the common. The consultation on grazing regulations was to get feedback from committees and shareholders about the content and format of the revised grazing regulations template.

As of 24th January 2014, 102 responses were received on the duty to report consultation. Feedback on the form has been mainly positive, but a significant number of responses have highlighted an issue with Part 4 – which asks if tenant or owner occupier crofters are in breach of their duties. The Commission is legislatively required to ask this under Section 49A of the Crofters (Scotland) Act 1993. However, if the committee doesn't consider there to be a breach, then there is nothing to report. It's down to the committee to decide.

We were also pleased to see that of the draft forms that were sent out on the duty to report consultation, 30 of them came back completed – which suggests that those grazing committees didn't consider it a threatening exercise.



For the grazing regulation consultation, 120 responses have been received. With that, there's been a mix of comments. Some are in favour of the regulation framework, some aren't. There's no single clear feeling, which tells us we'll have to work hard to find a middle ground for all committees to agree upon. We will be displaying the statistics from the consultation and a summary report on our website shortly.

Together we will strive to maintain a crofting system that works better for individuals, communities and the land in the crofting counties.

## SCF welcomes community mapping support post

**S**CF WELCOMED the news at the end of January that Scottish Government and Registers of Scotland (RoS) are co-funding a post to facilitate and encourage group registrations of crofts to the Crofting Register.

"The Federation initiated the idea of crofting community mapping in the run-up to the launching of the Crofting Register," said Patrick Krause, SCF chief executive "and we have been working with Registers of Scotland in getting information on the register, and assistance in registering, out to crofters and their communities. So it is heartening that the money that is left from the group registration discount scheme will be matched by RoS to facilitate the further development of crofting community mapping".

Russell Smith, SCF's mapping project officer, added "The SCF firmly believes that a community mapping approach to populating the Crofting Register will be far more effective and acceptable than the trigger point concept introduced by Scottish Government. Individuals forced to map their crofts can come across many problems such as having to locate information, agree boundaries with neighbours, resolve disputes and so on, let alone the actual mapping itself. Crofting community mapping may not be the panacea, but it will go a long way to making the process much easier, faster and has added benefits

such as strengthening a township that works together to map its assets."

Patrick concluded: "Mapping the crofting counties is a vast undertaking and we look

forward to continuing to work with Registers of Scotland to roll out this effective methodology. It could mean we get the job done in years rather than decades."



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## HAVE YOUR SAY

### Dear editor

I was born in Skigersta, north east Lewis in 1942.

The small lots, or crofts under three acres, were only viable with fishing for ling and cod. The remains of curing houses still exist. Steam trawlers from mainland ports stopped great-line fishing to offshore marks. After the war part-time small-line fishing continued for haddock and smaller fish in the shallower, clean, sandy grounds from Butt of Lewis to Tiumpán. Then the government abolished the three-mile trawling ban, allowing large trawlers to fish for sand eels for fishmeal from 1980, cleaning out any remaining fish.

The small crofts here were converted by our predecessors from rough ground or moorland into arable or grazing with hard work, manure and seaweed over many generations, not by landowners or any government agency – no grants at that time. We thought of the land as ours and still do. We were left to run our own affairs with minimum interference from sensible landowners.

Life in these small villages after the war is well documented. We had no electricity until 1952; mains water and sewer came later. Working the croft was only possible in many cases by the strength and fortitude of women – with fathers away for weeks or months at a time in construction, merchant service or other occupations. Mothers had to bring up the family and work the croft, milk the cow, cut peats

and so on. Children worked very young to help out.

That was the reality of croft life then, not the romantic myth that is put about nowadays. We did have security and optimism and always the respected Crofters Commission to back the crofters if need be.

Now numerous government bodies meddle in our affairs. We have major problems with geese, making it impossible to grow grain, caused by a public-funded conservation body. The Crofting Commission, a significant name change with the emphasis not on crofters but on crofting, has increased unnecessary powers – and regulations with no purpose other than pointless information-gathering.

We hear rumours of crofters to be forced to work the land like serfs with the threat of dispossession. What does working an uneconomic croft mean?

The pressure on grazings committees to inform on neighbours is quite repugnant.



This insidious and divisive duty to report is alien to the egalitarian way of life in our villages. Recent press reports threaten us with the law on non-compliance.

The next step could be appointed commissars paid by the public purse to oversee all the crofters. In postwar years we were well aware of the dangers of facism and communism and the price paid by some for our democratic freedom. Younger crofters should be aware of this danger and encroachment of insidious and gradual totalitarian control.

The more power unaccountable agencies get, the more power and control they will seek and will justify their position by so-called initiatives and spurious consultation to achieve a predetermined result with massaged statistics.

What is the purpose of this bureaucratic avalanche? There is no advantage to crofters. All this regulation will make younger

crofters drift to the towns and cities. Many travel long journeys to towns to earn a living offshore or on-shore. They are the life-blood of those remote villages. The main reason is emotional attachment to the land, in some cases going back generations. More regulation and threat of dispossession will not help.

Many feel threatened and think they should have the automatic right to pass on those small pieces of land to their family and more time given them to return home. The crofts were not created and are not owned by any government agency. Why should faceless bureaucrats have power and control over this land?

This government must be accountable. They are alienating their supporters and may pay a political price unless they regulate the regulators. Some fear that on independence more regulation would come.

The only ones making a living from crofting are the agencies that surround it, treating crofting as their private fiefdom.

The old threat of dispossession "*cuiridh mi as an fhearán thu*" is once again coming to the fore but from a different direction.

Meanwhile the pier and slip in our village are falling into disrepair and becoming dangerous. Our roads would be shameful in a less-developed country. It appears that there is plenty of money to fund useless social engineering schemes but no money for proper infrastructure.

*John MacRitchie, 9 Skigersta, Ness, Isle of Lewis*

### Dear editor

This letter follows up a suggestion in December 2012 that local hostility towards particular applicants for a grazings share can frustrate the Commission's mission to restore traditional levels of participation in grazings work.

Low membership linked to high average age can result in disciplined committees capable of perpetuating that status quo, provided the reasons given for blocking a new application have a ring of political correctness for assessors. A warning light doesn't even seem to flash at the Commission in face of blunt admissions that the real fear is new participation at meetings.

Inherent difficulties are compounded for owner-occupiers by the Commission's way of implementing, with additional conditions, SLC121/11, which ruled that shares do not transfer automatically between croft owner-occupiers. New grazings committee rules seem set to strengthen the chosen practice of exclusion. Looking back at the 1998 grazings clerk guidance pack, we see a vanished

era where the Commission simply looked to the clerk to "provide a rounded picture of the community's views" on matters such as applications for non-family assignments and, strikingly, allowed non-shareholders to be elected to the grazings committee.

Today, according to reiterated recent clarification, non-shareholder crofters cannot become committee members; nor can they attend an AGM (where previously any member of the public could attend though not speak), except by invitation or as a shareholder's proxy. To actually speak an individual may still, but must be, mandated in relation to a specific topic, it appears. Although all changes to a township's regulations are said to require to be inscribed therein and formally issued in order to have authority, is this a universal norm? The new restrictions seem to enjoy Commission backing in practice when acted upon locally.

A new dimension of possible difficulty arises from Crofting Reform Act 2010 (Section 23A) which extends the role of grazings committees from managing common grazings to reporting on the

condition of every croft, whether tenanted or owned. Non-shareholders are exempt from this scrutiny, yet this is not necessarily good news for them if it means that legislators and commissioners assume that all crofters have shares – any exceptions to that traditional norm being too rare to merit consideration or intervention in order to restore access to common grazings and committees.

Assuming that recruitment to grazings committees is inhibited by the prospect of having to report croft neglect (see *Crofter* 98), this would not be generally deplored if it proved possible to manipulate the new powers to discredit unwelcome applicants. Even a control-exempt non-shareholder could be maligned under 49a(3)(a) "any other matter affecting the common grazing", for instance over an ambiguous croft/grazings boundary.

Already the Commission's grazings boundary mapping exercise has created an opportunity for aggressive boundary adjustment against non-shareholding crofters who are excluded from consultation.

*Roger Kershaw*



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## SCOTTISH CROFTING ENTERPRISE

### Showcase your croft produce on our new website

*Russell Smith explains how SCF members can maximise the opportunities for selling croft produce and holiday accommodation on the fresh, new Scottish Crofting Enterprise website.*

THE NEW website showcasing the Scottish Crofting Produce Mark has now gone live on [www.scottishcroftingenterprise.co.uk](http://www.scottishcroftingenterprise.co.uk). Go and check it out.

This new site gives members who sell direct to the public an opportunity to get their wares out on display. The cost has been kept low, as a service to members, and is held at £20 to join and £10 to renew regardless of how many categories you sell under. At the moment we have categories for lamb and mutton, beef, pork, vegetables, eggs, knitwear and holiday accommodation. For that you get a photograph, a brief description and your contact details. All orders are handled by yourself so you get to talk directly to your potential customers.

We plan to add a section for livestock, which would cover breeding stock and poultry.

We believe that not only is croft produce high quality, but consumers are willing to buy into the ethos and authenticity of crofting – as market research carried for SCF has shown. This

means that the scheme has to work to high welfare and environmental standards and that the produce has to be from a genuinely working croft, using as much local input as possible. And, of course, selling the final product direct to the consumer gives you a bigger margin than selling your animals store.

For accommodation providers, there has to be someone there who can talk to the visitors and explain the background to crofting and what is going on. This is how we differentiate ourselves. We have visitors come down to bottle feed lambs and see the newly hatched chickens – you don't need to go that far but, if you do, people will come back the next year. "Authenticity" is a buzzword in tourism marketing and if you can sell the crofting lifestyle, then tourists are more likely to stay with you than with someone in the town.

We can also include adverts for activities as well as accommodation provided they are based on, or run from, the croft.

Later on, we want to see what else we can do to help members develop their businesses, through joint marketing or whatever – more on this to follow.

If you want to be part of the Crofting Produce Mark, visit the SCF website or contact Sarah at HQ.





## ON THE CROFT

## A new adventure

SCF members Ian MacLean and Robbie Pançic are bringing a croft on Skye back to life. Here they describe their progress so far.

**I**N 2012 we took responsibility for a 15-acre bare-land croft in Galtrigill beside Loch Dunvegan in north west Skye.

This was the opportunity we had been dreaming of for several years, in an area we had fallen in love with from regular visits to the island. We had reached a stage where we wanted a better work-life balance and to be living in a rural environment.

A good local solicitor helped us overcome our initial anxiety about crofting legislation, whose complexity can be a barrier to entry. Our neighbours and the local community have been welcoming and share invaluable experience, encouragement and local history.

We enrolled on a full-time course at the local college which gave us a good grounding in rural skills and helped our transition to working outdoors.

We recommend the SCF induction course for both new and experienced crofters. Also, the training days provided by SCF and SAC are very informative and are great for sharing local experience. The SAC (Portree) team have been vital to us – from soil testing, CCAGS applications and livestock advice to



longer-term croft planning.

Our first two years have been about getting the croft infrastructure in place. The bracken was over waist high, but two summers of regular cutting has controlled it. With our trusty spades we opened up a kilometre of drainage ditches and restored a small lochan.

Our main interest is horticulture and we are lucky to have a ¼ acre field on the croft which has good soil depth and some natural protection. The field was limed, deer fenced and planted with mixed soft fruit bushes and some fruit trees. We

use seaweed on the veg beds and grow root crops, potatoes and kale which, together with fish caught by the shore, are a winter staple.

The Keder greenhouses were a big investment and have so far survived the winter storms. They should extend the growing season and enable us to grow a variety of produce for local market and gate sales. The beds are prepared, seeds delivered and we are eager for the start of the planting season.

It's great to see the croft coming to life. We are surprised at the distance our free-range hens and ducks cover every day and how unfazed they are by the weather. The stock fencing is complete so we can now bring in some sheep. Practical courses from our local vet have helped our confidence; we just can't decide on the breed – Hebridean or Cheviot?

To help make the croft sustainable we built holiday accommodation on the croft, An Airigh ([www.anairigh.co.uk](http://www.anairigh.co.uk)). It also gives us an opportunity to actively promote crofting as well as local produce, businesses and artists.

We have had no regrets about choosing crofting and feel healthier and happier for it. Crofting is a challenge and hard work, but is so rewarding and full of enterprising and inspiring people.

We are at the beginning of a new adventure and looking forward.

## Skye welcomes new farm shop

*I took the brave step of leaving my salaried employment to go self-employed and open a new business, Skye Farm Shop, in December 2013, reports SCF member Martin MacLure, and so far I've not looked back.*

**I** WAS BROUGHT UP on the family crofts in Aird and Calligarry, Sleat and I have been helping out for as long as I can remember – and still do when I am not too busy running the business.

I have always had a keen interest in cows and sheep; not only rearing them but also eating them. I often thought how good the meat from the animals we had slaughtered tasted compared to meat purchased in a supermarket. This was probably what made me start thinking of setting up a farm shop and letting other people taste the difference for themselves.

The idea came to me a number of years back but didn't progress due to work

commitments. In May 2013 these changed and the more I looked into options and opportunities, the more the idea grew. After several months of planning, with a few sleepless nights, the shop has now come to fruition.

The shop is based in the space adjoined to Sleat Community Trading Ltd, in Armadale, south Skye. I have been able to stay and work in the area I grew up in, as well as helping out on the family croft when possible. Although I don't have my own croft at present, I hope this will change in the years to come. Ideally I'd like to rear my own beasts to sell in the shop.

The shop stocks a variety of Skye and Highland-based produce: chocolates, home-

made jams and chutneys, sea salts, meats and cheeses and locally-grown fruit and vegetables when in season – the more local, the better.

There are hot drinks, home-baking and hot filled rolls to take away, which is handy as it's minutes away from the ferry terminal or if you have the car in at MacGillivray Motors.

I was surprised by how busy the first couple of weeks of the year were and I am so thankful for great support shown by the community – even more so since I recently found out the business has been nominated for an award in the category of Best New Scottish Business through the Scottish Variety Awards 2014. I am really looking forward to seeing what the rest of the year has in store.

To keep up to date on what's new in the shop, follow via Facebook and Twitter. More information via the website: [www.skyefarmshop.co.uk](http://www.skyefarmshop.co.uk).



  
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## ON THE CROFT

## The importance of scanning

*As we head into the final weeks of winter, my thoughts are starting to turn towards lambing, writes Donald MacSween.*

**S**PRING IS BY FAR and away my favourite time of year; the days are getting longer, the world is starting to wake up and the local football season starts again.

By the time you read this, though, an important event will have taken place: the scanning of pregnant ewes. I write this four days before the scanner is due and I'm thinking back to last year.

I remember likening the feeling on the eve of the scanner to a combination of the night before a big exam and Christmas Eve. Yes, you are counting your chickens before they hatch but you always have a number in your mind that you hope you will achieve. I have that for this year, but last year is still fresh in my mind; it felt like I failed the exam, and Santa never came.

2013 was a total disaster – I ended up with a third of the lambs I was hoping for. A big financial hit and, more importantly a depressing hit, mainly due to a horrible eye



© Donald MacSween

infection that swept through the flock while the rams were out.

To date, this year has been much better. I haven't had any of the issues which affected me last winter and the mild winter has meant that things have been relatively straightforward.

Like many others, I'll be hoping for at least 150% at scanning. That would mean 15 lambs from every 10 sheep.

Sheep scanning is a relatively new thing here in Lewis. It only became commonplace in the last 10 years or so. I suppose there is a danger that the old tricks

of spotting an empty ewe may disappear, or the mystery gone of trying to work out just how many lambs are in that big, waddling ewe, but it does help a lot. Empties can be moved on and appropriate feed given to those with multiple lambs – also no more standing in the freezing cold/pouring rain, waiting to find out if another lamb is going to appear!

Lots to consider, but I'm trying not to think about it too much. There's nothing I can do to increase the number of lambs now, so I just have to cross everything and hope for 150%.



© Donald MacSween

## Preventing joint ill in lambs

**J**OINT ILL is caused by bacteria and leads to swollen painful joints in young lambs.

Affected lambs have difficulty standing or walking and will be reluctant to feed. The damage to joints can be permanent if not treated promptly. Joint ill is usually seen in lambs less than three weeks of age and the bacteria that cause joint ill survive in the environment.

Tail docking or castration wounds have been suggested as a route of entry for the bacteria into the lamb, as has the navel. Lambs suckling ewes' teats that may be dirty are also at risk. The bacteria then travel to the lamb's legs, resulting in hot, swollen and very painful joints. More than one leg can be infected. Lambs with joint ill will show significant discomfort and will spend a lot of time lying, unable to feed and will be weak and ill thrifty as a result.

The disease is often associated with poor hygiene at lambing time. Large numbers of lambs can be affected at any one time, despite good hygiene and colostrum management and it is not uncommon for joint ill to recur on the same farm year after year. It is vital that lambs receive good levels of quality colostrum, particularly in the first twelve hours of life, in order to protect themselves from the bacteria that cause joint ill.

## Treatment and prevention

It is important to treat affected lambs as quickly as possible to reduce the risk of permanent damage to the joints. Treatment

with antibiotics and anti-inflammatory drugs can have some success; however joint ill is best prevented through good hygiene and colostrum management. Therefore:

- Try to lamb in a clean environment with plenty of fresh bedding and clean dry pens.
- Thoroughly clean and disinfect lambing pens or lambing areas between lambings.
- Disinfect navels to prevent environmental bacteria infecting the lamb. Strong iodine should be applied to the whole of the navel cord immediately after birth to dry it up.

- Make sure lambs receive sufficient colostrum as soon as they are born. Ideally lambs should receive 250ml/kg bodyweight of good quality ewe colostrum in the first 24 hours of life.

*Moredun runs a membership scheme to help farmers and crofters keep up to date with the latest advances in livestock health research. If you are interested in becoming a member of Moredun, please contact the Moredun communications team on 0131 445 5111 or visit their website at [www.moredun.org.uk](http://www.moredun.org.uk).*



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## ON THE CROFT

## Muirburn

AS WE APPROACH the spring, it is a good moment to consider your plans for muirburn in 2014.

Making a plan and assembling equipment in advance will mean that when dry weather comes and conditions are right there will be no mad scramble to get organised. Putting some thought into which areas require burning most urgently will also allow you to think about fire breaks and prepare for variations in wind direction and weather conditions.

It is often the areas which require burning most urgently that are also the most dangerous and risky to burn. Long, rank heather is of little value to livestock, but the extreme heat generated by a fire burning through this kind of vegetation can make control and management difficult under some circumstances. Burn a few easily-controllable test patches of grass and heather before lighting the main fires, since different kinds of undergrowth burn differently depending on the day.

Wildfires have become an annual issue during late March and early April, particularly in Scotland. There are grave environmental, economic and safety issues for wildfire, making it a pressing concern for communities and governments. At a political level, the drive to find solutions to the problem of large and uncontrolled fires is gathering momentum.

The Scottish wildfire forum has been re-launched under the leadership of the new single

Scottish fire and rescue service. This forum is developing good links to the England and Wales wildfire forum. A fire danger rating system is being developed from a Canadian model, aiming to provide some early warning of high fire risk periods. It is hoped that this system will be able to provide advance notice of periods when it may be safe to carry out muirburn. Within this drive to educate and inform, wildfire forums play an important part.

A wildfire operations guidance manual was recently published in Scotland which has since been adopted in England and Wales. This provides guidance for fire and rescue services on fighting wildfire. The process of continuous education is vital. At the same time, a proposed review of the muirburn code is in its early stages. There will inevitably be some high-profile fires during March and early April this year, but the key to measuring our progress will be in how we deal with them. The wildfire operational guidance manual can be found at: [www.scotland.gov.uk/resource/0043/00436138.pdf](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/resource/0043/00436138.pdf)

The Heather Trust works at all levels to protect and promote muirburn in Scotland as part of sustainable moorland management. For more information or advice, visit [www.HeatherTrust.co.uk](http://www.HeatherTrust.co.uk), or call 01387 723 201.

Patrick Laurie  
The Heather Trust



## Avoid prolonged calvings and risk of losses



© Martin Benson

EXPERTS from Scotland's Rural College are encouraging suckled-calf producers to enhance the rations fed to their pregnant beef cows in the two to three weeks before they are due to calve.

SAC Consulting's beef specialist Gavin Hill says he has increasingly been asked about cows taking too long to calve and not getting on with the job of pushing the calf out. "In some cases prolonged calvings can result in more calf deaths. The simple change to feeding we are recommending should help to overcome the problem at very little cost. The goal is to ensure that cows can effectively mobilise calcium from their body to allow the birth process to proceed as naturally as possible."

SAC now recommends that higher levels of magnesium are fed to cows two to three weeks pre-calving – for example by supplementing with an extra 30g per day of a high-magnesium mineral (15% magnesium) along with the normal mineral used. This extra magnesium will help mobilise the cows' own body reserves of calcium, improving

muscle tone in the womb and preventing prolonged calvings and the detrimental impact that has on the calf.

To implement the advice from consultants at Scotland's Rural College, producers need to know the expected calving date of their cows and group them accordingly. This will allow the additional magnesium to be targeted more accurately to only those animals in late pregnancy (for example by introducing them at a later date for groups of later-calving cows).

Predicted calving dates can only be determined by pregnancy diagnosis (unless AI has been used) and SAC Consulting strongly urges producers who have not already had their herd pregnancy diagnosed to do so as quickly as possible. Pregnancy results so far suggest that the very cold late spring of 2013 has resulted in similar high numbers of barren cows, as in the previous year. Identifying such animals early, to fatten them where necessary and cull them, will help save tight supplies of winter feed and minimise the loss to the business.

## ON THE CROFT

## Quality beef from the crofting counties

With LFASS continuing as it was and no firm promise of enhanced area of natural constraint money for the hills, plus the likelihood of very low RG rates, crofters may have to do the sums and decide if changes have to be made in order to stay in crofting and not breach their duties, writes Joyce Wilkinson, chair of SCF's agriculture working group.

WITH CRISIS of over-production of beef in Ireland, and Poland no longer being able to export to many countries since the banning of religious slaughter in their country, we are likely to have a lot of competition. It is already happening. The Irish Farmers Association is to announce a new ferry route for live trade to the UK very soon. Their deadweight price is 316p/kg at time of writing and Poland's is 255p/kg.

We are sitting at the top of the tree for deadweight prices in the EU, quite rightly with a superior product, but we can't afford to be complacent. Ireland and Poland are desperate to get into our markets. In January 2014 alone, imports of live cattle to the UK were up 50% on last January.

What can we do as crofters and store producers if we don't want to give up and start growing raspberries, in order that we don't breach our duties?



A tourist's dream but this type must have indirect subsidy to stay on the hills



This type of in-wintered crofter's cow will make the auctioneer's job easy when it comes time to sell the calves. She may not be so effective at looking after the hill, but she will make you more money.

Study conformation and carcass shape, use a bull with good muscling and length, plus as much width as you can get away with, to give the finishers the shape butchers and supermarkets want in order to make a profit. That way they won't be tempted to use cheaper imports.

Find out the deadweight and kill-out weight percentage from finishers, if you can, and adjust your breeding programme accordingly.

Keep the health status of cattle as high as you can so that Scotland has a reputation for healthy cattle. Then it is harder for live cattle to come in.

Think about changing your system if it doesn't add up. Keeping two very good cows indoors for six months and feeding 2kg of cake each a day plus ad lib hay/silage can yield the same as keeping four on the hill on ad lib and 1kg cake. The cull price of the good cow will be higher and the conversion ratio of feed to weight and growth in her calf and herself is often higher. It is a fallacy that good cattle need more put into them. For every 1kg you put in you get more back than you would from a poor specimen.

Take steps now to safeguard the future of profitability in beef in Scotland. Ensure that only quality comes from the crofting counties so that finishers, butchers and supermarkets get what they want and other EU countries can't compete.

## Scottish kye – collaboration and inclusion are key

THE HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS have many raw ingredients that are admired and sometimes shared, or passed on like a fleeting glance to someone somewhere else.

And so it has been with our cattle, the cows nurtured through the winter so that their calves may head south and east at the end of the summer. That trade has shrunk and the livelihood provided has diminished. What do we care and why should it change for the better?

For all the interest in the technical or historical influences that can be brought to the cattle sector of crofting, none of it will survive without the continuing presence of willing people to manage the cattle and to bind production to the area.

There is a continued need for the creation of business in the Highlands and Islands that is attractive to the younger generation, one that provides an outlet for creativity, for satisfaction and for a reasonable financial income in return for some of the darker aspects of food production in a difficult climate.

An overarching aspect of increased globalisation is ease of communication. Remote areas should embrace this so that the widespread production of small numbers of cattle can be assessed in a more structured manner than the piecemeal arrival of cattle at the markets. Collaboration has moved in to the digital age, if wanted.

Thereafter producers can choose to support and utilise the local infrastructure, so that local production is handled and processed at a local level, bringing benefits in shorter food chains and tighter provenance. All aspects of a shorter food chain will require people in a variety of tasks, not just in raising cattle but in adding value through butchery skills, packaging, marketing, design and logistics. Every animal sent south in live transport is reducing support to local employment and reducing the potential for selling a quality, branded product.

Scottish kye and the resultant food product have a history that would leave most modern product marketing agencies breathless. The

whisky trade has long embraced its history as a marketing tool, and Scottish beef from the crofting community could do the same. The continued survival of the crofting community may look to Edinburgh, London and Brussels for support; but a principal ingredient, the lasting presence of people on the ground, lies in our own hands.

Take a traditional product, apply the knowledge of animal husbandry to improve efficiency of production, and add value within community boundaries to create an industry that will attract younger people and propel traditional highland cattle into the 21st century.

Collaboration and the inclusion of young people are keys to the future.

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## ON THE CROFT

## A WWOOFing weekend – returning to roots



WWOOF started as a working weekend on an organic farm – and 42 years on, it is returning to its roots with a working weekend, writes Iris Coates.

IN OCTOBER 1971 Sue Coppard and three others decided to arrange a trial weekend at a local organic farm, helping out with any work that needed doing in exchange for food and accommodation, and Working Weekends on Organic Farms (WWOOF) was born.

The weekend was so successful that it became a regular trip and news gradually spread of Sue Coppard's "land army". Other organic farms got in touch, all keen to offer their hospitality in exchange for help from willing volunteers.

Today, WWOOF stands for World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms: a global phenomenon with over 12,000 hosts in more than

100 countries and in excess of 560 hosts in the UK.

Most of the WWOOFing work undertaken nowadays is through longer-term arrangements. However, last November it went back to its origins of being a working weekend, giving eight participants a chance to have a taster of what life is like on an organic farm local to them.

Kate Berry, one of the people volunteering at the weekend, explained how the gathering proved to be a good opportunity for WWOOF hosts and volunteers. "We were able to share knowledge, experiences and techniques for sustainable living and organic farming with like-minded people. Topics included water preservation, wildlife conservation and eco-friendly organic farming techniques."

Amanda Pearson, volunteer liaison for WWOOF, explained

why they re-initiated the local working weekend: "From a sustainable and economic perspective it seems appropriate to be encouraging more local WWOOFing, connecting hosts and WWOOFers who are within a 50-100 mile radius of one another."

She added: "This was a pilot project. Given the response, we are keen to support the creation of more local WWOOFing opportunities, perhaps with an educational theme such as bee or chicken keeping, or organic principles, so that we can skill up as many of our WWOOFers as possible to grow their own food and help others to do so."

The rewards of WWOOFing seem endless. It gives volunteers new skills, new knowledge, new friendships, fresh air, exercise and free meals, while the farmer or crofter benefits from free labour.

The success of this working weekend will hopefully set the stage for many more, so that people around the UK can have an opportunity.

To find out more about any local WWOOF farms and crofts near you where you could help out and become part of a growing revolution, visit [www.woof.org.uk](http://www.woof.org.uk).

WWOOF UK and SCF are forging closer ties and we are delighted to announce a new, innovative partnership deal: SCF members will be given FREE membership as a host, worth £30, for one year. The WWOOF exchange will provide them with willing hands to help around the croft and offer our WWOOFers more opportunities to gain meaningful experience of what living as a crofter is all about. Crofts do not have to be organic to participate.



Ben Campbell introducing Back Rough farm



Woodland, Back Rough farm



Making a dry leaf box



WWOOF volunteers

All © Kate Berry

## ON THE CROFT

## Na bi coimhead air cùl an t-sabhail!

SEOANT-ÀM den bhliadhna nuair nach urrainn dhut mòran a dhèanamh a-muigh, agus mar sin tha sinn buailteach a bhith a' cur ar n-aire air sgioblachadh, no càradh, no planadh airson obair na bliadhna.

Thug mi fhìn sùil mun cuairt cùl an t-sabhail aig deireadh na seachdain agus bhuail e orm nach eil eadhon aon bhara-roth againn a tha ag obair mar bu chòir. 'S e am prìomh dhuilgheadas gu bheil callaid againn de sgitheach mar bhriseadh-gaoithe mun cuairt air a' ghàradh agus nuair a thèid a gheàrradh, mar a dh'fheumas sinn gu tric san t-samhradh, gu bheil sin a' fàgail geugan le stoban biorach air feadh an àite.

An uair sin ma thèid thu faisg orra le bara-roth bidh puncture agad le cinnt. Tha mi cho searbh de càradh nam punctures, gu bheil mi a' feuchainn ri taidhr niumataig a sheachnadh uile gu lèir. Bliadhna no dhà air ais bith mhòr sa phrìomh bhaile a' cur bhileagan tro na dorsan a' sanasachd bargain air a h-uile seòrsa inneal agus pàirt airson obair sa ghàradh. Chunnaic mi roth cruaidh airson bara sa bhileag agus dh'fhalbh mi don bhùth sa bhad. Uill nach mi fhuair am briseadh dùil. Cha robh an roth sin aca, cha robh

am meur eileanach den t-sein bhùthan a' faighinn a h-uile rud sa bhileag! Thàinig mi dhachaidh le roth na bu lugha na am fear a bha mi ag iarraidh. Tha sin ag obair ach tha am bara car crùbach a-nis. Chan urrainn dha faighinn thairis air clach nas motha na ball-goilf no pios maide sa rathad air!

Bha bara eile againn air an do chuir mi roth iarainn far inneal-cuir a bha uair sa

ghàradh. Tha am fear seo mòr gu leòr airson siubhal nan garbhach ach tha tulg ann 's mar sin nuair a thèid thu air an rathad, bidh e dèanamh seòrsa de leum agus glang gach car a tha e cur. Bha bara eile againn airson mòine, is bocsa leathann air, agus taidhr rubair fhathast a' dol. 'S ann a thuit am bara seo as a chèile le meirg, lùb na h-iarainnean a bha cumail suas an eallaich. Dh'fhaoidte

gun gabhadh aon bhara-roth slàn a dhèanamh as na pàirtan math den trì dhiubh!

Cha tòisich mi air an t-sreath de chòtaichean oilsgin aodionach crochte air stoban sa bhalla, no air a' chàrn de bhòtannan, a' mhòr chuid dhiubh don chas chli, bu chòir dhomh dìreach an tilgeil ann am bara roth agus an toirt don òtrach!

Gabhan Mac a'Phearsain



© Claire Nicolson

## Best use of muck on the croft

Livestock manures are a valuable resource and can bring significant benefits to your soil when used appropriately, writes SAC's Ricky Marwick.

THEY CAN PROVIDE organic matter, major and secondary nutrients as well as some trace elements. Soil analysis can be used to determine the areas of your croft which have the greatest need for these nutrients. The analysis report will either show a very low, low, moderate (+/-), high or very high phosphate (P) and potash (K) status. For grass you should aim to maintain a moderate (-) status by applying additional P and K to low areas and less to high areas. For specific application rates speak to a FACTS-qualified advisor or read SRUC's technical notes on *Fertiliser recommendations for grassland and Optimising the application of bulky organic fertilisers*.

A typical 10t/acre (25t/ha) application of old cattle dung will supply around 15 kg/ha of readily-available N, 80 kg/ha of total phosphate and 200 kg/ha of total potash. The high proportions of P and K in cattle dung make it ideal for raising the fertility of a soil with low reserves. Care should be

taken not to over-apply dung to soil which has been analysed as having a high status of P or K, as this increases the likelihood of nutrients being leached into a watercourse and is also a poor use of a valuable fertiliser. Around 60% of the phosphate and 90% of the potash will be available to the growing grass in the year of application, while the remainder will build soil reserves becoming available to future crops.

While dung is a valuable resource in the crofting counties it also carries pollution risks to the environment. Guidance on the storage, handling and application of dung is provided in the PEPFAA code (Prevention of Environmental Pollution From Agricultural Activity.) A set of general binding rules also places legal restrictions on how and when dung can be spread. Keeping your croft in good agricultural and environmental condition is also one of the conditions for receipt of the single farm payment and penalties can apply where poor management of livestock manure has been found.

With so many codes, rules and regulations it can be difficult to determine which apply to your croft. However, in general it is best to adhere to all good practice as this reduces the

risk to the environment and makes best use of your on-farm nutrients, reducing the need for bagged fertiliser. A comprehensive summary of the rules and good practice can be found at [www.farmingandwaterscotland.org](http://www.farmingandwaterscotland.org). Some of the main rules and good practice relating to dung applications follow.

- Don't spread or store dung or slurry within 10m of any surface water or within 50m of a spring or borehole.
- Don't spread dung or slurry on waterlogged or snow covered ground.
- Don't spread dung or slurry on shallow soils with an average depth less than 40cm over gravel or fissured rock.
- Do adjust your bagged fertiliser applications to take livestock manure into account.
- Do apply livestock manures at a time when the grass or crop is going to grow, to make maximum use of the nutrients.

This article is funded by the Scottish Government as part of its pollution prevention advisory activity. For more information contact your local SAC office.



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**CROFTING CONNECTIONS****Lots to learn about crofting***Primary 6/7 at Abernethy Primary School, Nethybridge describe their crofting experiences.***HISTORY CAME ALIVE** for our class when we visited Mrs Marina Dennis at Inchdryne croft, near Tulloch.

This was a great start to our crofting topic, where we were comparing life in the past to our own lives nowadays. We learned a lot from Mrs Dennis including how we can still live in a more environmentally-responsible way.

Mrs Dennis was a great guide and inspired us with an assortment of props, including Pip the collie dog and some examples of farming tools to help her with her work. These included old tractors and animals, but also older tools like paddles, churns, a cheese press and a tusk that have been used for centuries. Mrs Dennis explained in great detail how the tools were used and let us hold them, which was great fun.

We were shown examples of wheat and barley from a harvest two years ago and were even given oatcakes to taste. As we walked across stubble fields, Mrs Dennis described her family's history living on the croft and her hopes for future generations. Before leaving we had time to look at an old tree that has been around since wolves roamed Scotland!

Mrs Dennis was very welcoming. She made our visit great fun, which encouraged us to learn more about crofting history and traditions when we went back to school. We were also motivated to write descriptions of croft settings and poetry using a range of senses, similes and metaphors. We painted pictures of old crofts and made models to display with our writing.

Our next trip was to the Highland Folk Museum in Newtonmore where we compared some older croft houses to the one we visited at Tulloch. We looked at a dry-stone blackhouse and discovered its walls were a metre and a half thick! We split into groups to explore the park, beginning with the steading and the stables. Next, we looked at old machinery before moving on to the dairy and the workers' house. We were learning how hard life must have been without computers, cookers and washing machines. All the work was done by hand and the machines were really heavy.

We helped to dig up potatoes at the park and were rewarded with two huge bags for all our hard work. We learned that children in the past were given tattie holidays to help with the potato harvest and that's why we still have two weeks holiday in October today.

Back at school we enjoyed trying out different recipes with our potatoes but as we still had lots left, we decided to hold a fund raising lunch in aid of Mary's Meals. We made different soups with the potatoes and sold off the remaining bags. Our fund raiser was a big success and raised £237 for a great cause. We also discovered why it is better to buy food grown locally. Buying food at local farmers markets saves food miles, reduces packaging and supports local businesses.



P6 pupils with Marina Dennis at Inchdryne Croft



Marina Dennis with her oats and barley



P5 pupils peeling tatties for their soup



Harvesting tatties at Newtonmore Folk Park

**We have really enjoyed our crofting topic and have learned so much. We will continue to grow vegetables and potatoes in our school garden and look forward to trying out new recipes in our lunchtime cookery club.**



## TRAINING

### Something for everyone

**SCF OFFERS** a number of training opportunities, supported with funding from the Scottish Government's skills development scheme and Highlands and Islands Enterprise.

Training is available for existing crofters and those who are keen to get a croft – in fact anyone with an interest in learning more about rural skills and crofting is very welcome. Courses are aimed at people interested in developing hands-on knowledge and skills, both for new entrants and to support existing crofters in best practice and improving performance.

Our crofting skills training programme will run until 2015, throughout the crofting counties, offering our popular introductory crofting courses as well as a wide range of practical skills courses.

The entry level course is designed for new entrants, recent assignees, aspirant crofters and anyone wishing to know more about modern crofting. It has been very popular over the past 15 years and appreciated by past students and tutors alike. It is delivered by SCF, a founder member of the Highlands and Islands crofter and small landholders training panel. The panel is a partnership between SCF, Forestry Commission Scotland, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Lantra (Sector Skills Council for Land-Based Industries), Scottish Agricultural College and Scottish Natural Heritage.

Course tutors are drawn from organisations having statutory and advisory responsibilities in crofting, environment or small business. There is no assumption of prior knowledge and participants will be led from the most basic level to a point that gives a broad, informed and up-to-date view of present-day crofting. Each student will be provided with supporting handouts, brochures/leaflets and recommendations for further reading, help and advice.

The introductory courses are classroom-based and available in two formats – either one-day or intensive two-day sessions. They take place at various locations throughout the Highlands and Islands during the autumn and winter months.

Get in touch with SCF HQ for more information or visit the training page on [www.crofting.org](http://www.crofting.org).

#### Forthcoming crofting training courses

##### Wednesday 5th March

**Strained wire fencing**, Lochinver, Assynt.  
Price: £40 or £36 for SCF members/concessions  
Contact: Romany Garnett on 01571 844 172 or email: [rgarnett@coigach-assynt.org](mailto:rgarnett@coigach-assynt.org)

##### Saturday 8th March

**Polytunnel management** with tutors Maria Scholten and Anneke Kraakman in the greenhouse in Lionacleit, Benbecula

##### Saturday 22th March

**Croft land management** – fencing, ditching and drainage with tutor John Allan MacLellan in Cnoc An Torrain, North Uist.  
Price per course: £40 or £36 for SCF members/concessions  
Contact: Susy Macaulay on 01870 602151 /510758 or email [susymacaulay@gmail.com](mailto:susymacaulay@gmail.com)

##### 29th-30th March

**Entry-level induction to crofting**, Kilmartin, Lochgilphead.  
Price: £60 or £50 for SCF members/concessions  
Contact: Julia or Sally on [education@kilmartin.org](mailto:education@kilmartin.org) or 01546 510278.

##### Saturday 12th April

**Build your own hen house in a day**, Elphin, Assynt.  
Price: £40 or £36 for SCF members/concessions + £75 pp for materials  
Contact: Christine Crook on 01854 613 099 or email [Christine.Crook.whc@uhi.ac.uk](mailto:Christine.Crook.whc@uhi.ac.uk)

##### Saturday 7th June

**Animal health and welfare**, Quendale Farm, Shetland.  
Price: £40 or £36 for SCF members/concessions  
Contact: David Smith on [david@crofting.org](mailto:david@crofting.org)

##### 13th-14th June

**Croft diversification** – added-value products and best practice. Weekend seminar for those already involved in crofting, to be held at the New Highland Folk Museum, Newtonmore.  
Price: £60 or £50 SCF members.  
Contact: [tina@crofting.org](mailto:tina@crofting.org)



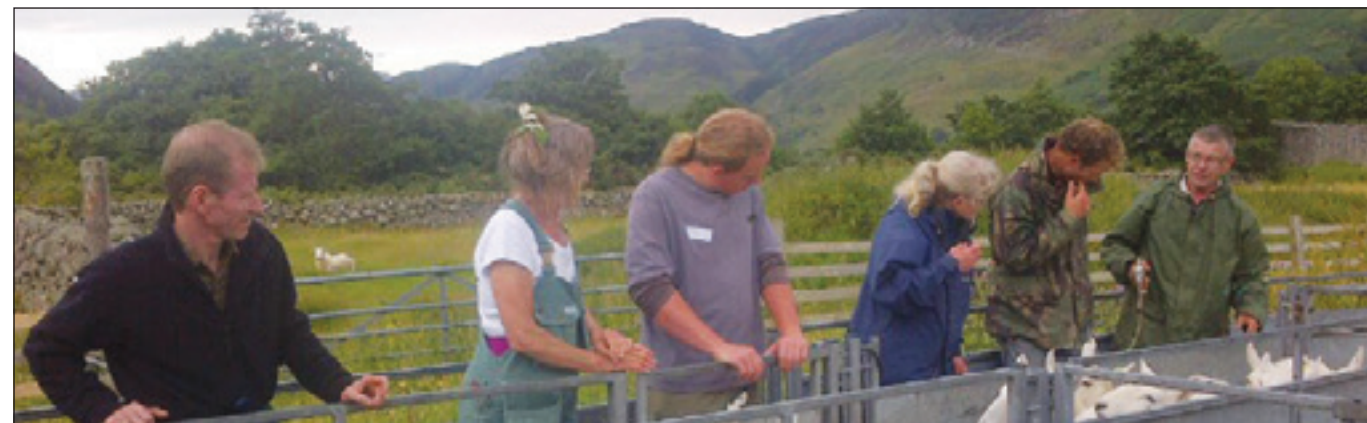
Gently does it



Taking a welcome break



Fencing



Sheep husbandry

## TRAINING

### Wool processing course

*Bridie and Russell Pursey are active members of the SCF and have a croft at Elphin. In January Bridie ran a hugely successful wool processing course in Ullapool village hall. Here she talks about her experience of crofting, spinning and teaching others valuable skills.*

**FIRST WORKED** on the land in Assynt in 1978, having studied zoology at Cardiff University and spent holidays camping in the Hebrides. We got an assignation of a bare-land croft in Knockan after seven years in a tied cottage at Ledmore, where we had built a flock of Cheviots, starting with four pet lambs, hens, ducks and milking goats... and took advice from a retired shepherd next door. Rogart vets ran some courses, too.

I believe I got my first spinning wheel before 1980. I was weaving by then and selling a few bits of work to passing visitors and B&B guests. We also shared a little outlet in Lochinver bakery, with four or five other craftsfolk, rent-free, shop-sitting for a day each, every week. I persevered with spinning

on my own, always knitting sweaters, selling from the house.

Once we built a croft house we wanted a reliable-ish income to pay back the loan and diversified, incorporating our keen interest in livestock and numbers of rare breeds, both of which were increasing. The rare breeds farm was an educational farm for 15 summers, selling offspring to other crofts and hopefully making them less rare.

WVWOOFers, organic farming volunteers worldwide (with us since 1981), really helped us get organised and move ahead. Teaching them seasonal skills – husbandry, vegetable growing, milking, bread-making, lambing, wool work and even shed-building – was the start of me later taking to teaching seriously and going for a post-graduate teaching certificate.

Crofting is labour-intensive; you need more hands and able-bodies. In the evenings, discussing methods on different holdings is part of the pleasant exchange with itinerant workers, who bring news of the world beyond your doorstep.

We also met up with other WVWOOF hosts through them.

Our present flock consists of 40-50 Shetlands, giving me fine fleeces and many shades to spin. We feed them well and cross the best-fleeced ones. We keep the whethers till they are 18 months old.

I've had a lot of practice teaching hands-on in classes or fieldwork. I am sure it is the best way to learn our traditional methods. We need to make sure the next generation can look after themselves, not be dependent on others for growing their food, for the land is waiting for them!

*Twelve folk attended an introductory wool processing day, many from Assynt, Lochbroom and even Lochalsh. Here, Jeannie Matheson describes the day.*

We learned about all aspects of wool: how versatile it is, being used for clothing, home furnishings and insulation to name just a few. There were several fleeces on display and it was useful to compare them for quality. Some were coarse like

the Cheviot and some were soft like the Shetland fleece and it was good to learn that different parts of a fleece also have differing qualities. Diet and how the sheep has been reared also affect the quality of the fleece. We were shown the process of preparing the raw wool before spinning, which included teasing, carding and washing. We learned how to use a spinning wheel and also a drop spindle and that was a lot of fun – and tricky.

Bridie is a very knowledgeable tutor and she was able to answer all our questions and gave us lots of inspiring ideas to take home with us. A really tasty and filling lunch was provided, of homemade soup, bread, oatcakes, tea and biscuits and we all heartily tucked into that with relish.

*Bridie will be running more beginner and intermediate spinning and weaving classes. Get in touch with [training@crofting.org](mailto:training@crofting.org) to register your interest.*

*Lucy Beattie, training manager*

### Don't get caught by your own snare

*A reminder from Ian Clark, director of the Scottish Association for Country Sports.*

**AS CROFTERS** you will all work on your land in some way.

Your profits will be marginal – if you actually make any – and you are right on the edge of mainstream agriculture. You might not always be up to date with countryside legislation. That is the purpose of this short article.

Most of you will have either sheep or poultry on the croft and you have to protect them from predators such as foxes. Unless you are lucky enough to have your foxes efficiently controlled by a local gamekeeper, your first line of defence is likely to be snares. In some areas, rabbits will be eating your profits as well and again snaring can be essential in keeping them down.

The law on snaring has been changed since 1 April 2013 and it is now absolutely illegal to set a snare of any kind unless you have completed a training course, gained the competence certificate and registered with the police as a

snare operator.

There are no exceptions to this and using even a single snare if you have not completed the above course could land you with a heavy fine or even a jail sentence.

The Scottish Association for Country Sports is one of only four approved snaring course providers and we know that only a tiny number of crofters have been on these courses – probably because the news of the change in law hasn't reached you.

We have already run courses for groups of crofters at Ardnamurchan, Skye and at Dingwall, but we are happy to run them for you anywhere you need them to help you stay legal.

If you do use snares, you can contact us directly, or via the SCF, and we will arrange to run a course for you in your area as quickly as possible. In many cases you can even get the one-day course, which normally costs £40, paid for by an Individual Learning Account.

*Scottish Association for Country Sports*  
01698 885206 [info@sacs.org.uk](mailto:info@sacs.org.uk)



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SAC Agricultural & Conservation Consultants combine local knowledge with extensive experience and are supported by our team of renowned specialists. We can assist crofters with business advice on a range of topics to improve profitability including:

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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 reseeds
- 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

**Contact your local SAC office:**

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## MEMBERSHIP MATTERS

# Make the most of your membership

**WE HAVE BEEN** working hard at HQ to make sure that you are getting value for money on your subscription.

More supplier discounts are now available. We are pleased to welcome our latest supporter of this scheme – Animal Health Highland. You get a 5% discount on all stock when you show your up-to-date SCF membership card.

If you know of any suppliers who may be willing to participate in this scheme then please let Karen at HQ know and she will make contact with the supplier.

As we go to press there are a number of local meetings being planned, with the main topic for discussion being the current CAP reform. We are encouraging members to respond to these consultations as well as contributing to the SCF's response.

We have also launched a membership recruitment incentive.

**Get paid for every member you recruit!**

Word of mouth is the best way to spread the knowledge of the work that SCF does on crofters' behalf. Now you can be rewarded for encouraging folk to join and give us their support. For every member you recruit we will give you £7.65 (15% of your annual subscription). The more members you recruit the more you will get paid.

**How it works**

With this edition of *The Crofter* members have received a special application form. You need to add your own membership number to the form and then encourage a neighbour, friend or colleague to join the SCF. If they return the form we will send out a cheque or make a bank transfer for £7.65 depending on how you currently pay your own subscription.

You can request more copies of this special application form from HQ as there is no limit on

the number of members you can recruit.

There are a number of other ways that a new member can join, such as signing up online or downloading an application form from our website. It is important for you to ask the new member you recruit to mention your membership reference on application to ensure that you will receive your reward.

**Terms and Conditions**

When a current paid-up member recruits a new member they can receive a reward. The reward is 15% of an individual membership subscription, currently £51, giving a reward of £7.65.

Recruitment of joint members will be counted as one application.

Recruiting associate members is excluded from this scheme.

This membership offer is subject to changes in terms or to cancellation at any time without notice.



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## Discount scheme for SCF members

The following firms have agreed to offer discounts to paid-up members of SCF – another worthwhile benefit of your membership.

	Offer	Details	Contact
Animal Health (Highland) Ltd	5% off all stock, excluding bagged feed	Animal nutrition, health care and pet food, livestock equipment.	Animal Health (Highland) Ltd, Strathpeffer Road, Dingwall Tel: 01349 865425 E: animalhealthhighland@gmail.com
WWOOF UK (World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms UK)	Free year's subscription as a crofting host	A WWOOF exchange will provide willing hands to help around the croft. More details on page 16.	www.woof.org.uk/content/crofting Tel: 01599 530 005 (SCF HQ)
Inksters Solicitors	Free initial advice through the SCF Legal Helpline and a 10% discount on legal work	Providers of the SCF Legal Helpline, all aspects of crofting law throughout the crofting counties.	Inksters Solicitors, Inverness, Portree, Wick, Glasgow Tel: 01599 230 300 E: brian@inksters.com Web: http://www.inksters.com/croftinglaw.aspx
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Alba Air Energy is pleased to announce its association with Panasonic on the AQUAREA range of Air Source Heat Pumps: Renewable Heat Incentive for domestic properties will be introduced in 2014. Air to Water systems installed by an MCS accredited installer will be eligible retrospectively from July 2009 for incentive payments. The incentive will be paid for a period of seven years and could return as much as £1900 per annum approx. In addition homeowners will be eligible to Renewable Heat Premium of £1,300 as a one off payment.

**BENEFITS**

- Eligible for £1,300 Renewable Heat Premium Payment Grant
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- User friendly - advanced controls
- 7 Year Product Warranty

Renewable Heat Incentive for commercial properties is available now and applies to a wide range of property types, paid for a period of 20 years at the rate of 10 per Kilowatt Hour Produced. A heat meter requires to be fitted to measure production.

**Example:** A current church installation will attract in excess of 4,500 per annum! Alba continue to offer the successful range of Air to Air systems. Using air source heat pump technology eliminates the need for expensive ground works as the units are self-contained. Installation typically takes less than a day to complete, with minimal disruption to the property. All at an affordable cost of around £3,300 including installation (+VAT rated at 5%).

We are delivering energy efficient heating solutions at an affordable rate across the Highlands and Islands, from Islay to South Uist, Tarbert to Aberdeen, the borders to Caithness and all points in between. Eliminating the need for expensive ground work, reference projects in all areas of Scotland. Installation usually takes less than a day with running costs as low as £300 per annum approx. enjoy the benefits of warm homes and reduced energy bills. References are available on request. A home visit survey is free and without obligation - for Air to Air or Air to Water Heat Pumps. All installations are backed up with a seven year parts and labour warranty.

For further information, contact Bill Hall on 01320 366 808 or email bill@albaairenergy.co.uk web: www.albaairenergy.co.uk

# inksters

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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## Oxford real farming conference 2014

**T**HE ANNUAL Oxford real farming conference is founded on the need for farming designed expressly to provide good food for everyone without wrecking the rest of the world – not the hyper-industrial kind designed to maximise short-term wealth. We need more small farms, with far shorter food chains.

Less big-scale engineering and much less agrochemistry means less capital investment and less debt. This would bring down the price of good food because most of what we spend on food nowadays goes to bankers and middle men.

At the conference, panelists were asked to address some questions that go to the heart of the tension between different uses in the uplands. The first was: **Why have upland farming at all?** This question is equally pertinent to crofting, and the word “crofting” could be substituted throughout this article with equal relevance.

Julia Aglionby, chair of the Foundation for Common Land, of which SCF is a member, responded as follows.

Upland farming has created a distinctive cultural asset. Would you destroy Stonehenge? Or Westminster Abbey? Of course the answer is no and therefore the same applies to our designated upland landscapes. The biodiversity that is designated in the uplands is, more often than not, a product of complex management – for example hay meadows, calcareous landscape and coppiced woodland. If we dig beneath the broad landscape so beloved by walkers and visitors, we quickly find the cultural heritage that has developed in

these areas and is epitomised by commons where farming families work together to maintain the juxtaposition of rough fell and highly-managed fields, where complex sheep systems of hefted flocks have evolved in synergy with the biophysical conditions.

In terms of community, farmers are the social glue of these areas and maintain an environment that provides our nation's sense of place and a thread to our rural roots, a natural health service through outdoor activities and through local food, connecting people with place and what they eat. Without this active management, we would shatter the bedrock of our tourism industry and create an ecological mess – as land is abandoned and the rewilding process wends its slow path over a century or two to climax succession.

A second question was: **What are we trying to achieve in terms of upland farming?**

An appropriate range of

ecosystem services – food, water, carbon storage, access – is the holy grail we are trying to achieve through upland farming, but the holy grail varies from place to place, as in each valley the underlying bio-physical and cultural history varies. So the answer is, it depends.

The common thread across these diverse places is the need for viable farming businesses and preferably lots of them, even if this means part-time businesses. The more businesses, the more committed people there are working the land, enhancing the cultural landscape.

**Is what we are doing the right path and if not how do we get there?**

Julia's view is that we are not on the right path, as we need to motivate private businesses to deliver public goods, integrate delivery of biological, cultural and social public goods, pay a fair price for public goods, develop supportive government agencies

and use CAP direct payments to deliver public goods. She disagrees with the drive for financial growth which leads to larger holdings. Much better to have more part-time farms. In terms of food production, the volume of finished meat is not enormous. Therefore we need to seek niche markets – quality not quantity. Returns from this and the quality of breeding stock is at the heart of what drives farmers to farm.

We all need to value farmers (and crofters) and motivate them and their active management of their land and governance of common land. Tied in with this is the nature of support for younger and small farmers to encourage the next generation. To enable this we need to develop exit strategies for older farmers.

All citizens should pay for the public goods or ecosystem services they benefit from. This can be via state schemes, commercial contracts and visitor payments, rather like London's congestion charging.



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## The crofting case

*Patrick Krause, also on the panel, answered the same questions from the crofting perspective.*

**Why have upland farming at all?**

The uplands, which have most of the UK's mountain, moorland, heath (MMH) are very significant in the national ecosystem. About 43% of Scotland is MMH. Most croft land is found in the uplands and contributes to the survival of around 33,000 family members, around 30% of Highland households and up to 60% of island households.

MMH areas have around 40% of the UK's soil carbon, provide 70% of our drinking water and are essential for biodiversity and conservation, providing a refuge for many species that used to

occur throughout the UK. Such a valuable high-nature-value resource is kept in good condition by careful land management including grazing.

**What are we trying to achieve?**

**Survival.** Crofting has sustained vibrant communities in some of the remotest areas on the edge of Europe for generations. Survival is a great driver for care of the land, for example setting soumings in order to not over-graze. The UK National Ecosystem Assessment (UKNEA) said “Blanket bogs and oceanic mountain habitats (croft land) provide a home to some of the UK's rarest species, a unique mixture of temperate alpine and arctic species.” Maintenance of this requires low-intensity

management related to traditional farming.

**Is what we are doing on the right path? If not, what is stopping us?**

**Money, money and money.**

1. Government policy: driven by economic growth so land is seen as a resource to be exploited, for example by mega-scale wind-farm projects, commercial monocrop forestry or mechanised peat extraction.

2. Common Agriculture Policy (CAP): Manipulation by subsidy, for example headage payments leading to over-grazing. Conversely the single farm payment then led to under-grazing, land abandonment and inertia. The UKNEA says “Agri-environment schemes (P2 in the

CAP) are critical to maintain and enhance biodiversity and the ecosystem”. P2 in Scotland has the lowest budget in Europe.

3. NFUS: manipulation of subsidy under the NFUS lobby, for example perverse use of the Less Favoured Area Support Scheme.

**How do we get there?**

We need a shift in mind-set. The next generation needs access to land, to homes, to jobs. And they need support in appropriate, place-based education and training. SCF provides crofting skills training and mentoring, but mainstream agricultural education needs to move away from the industrial model; we need the College of Enlightened Agriculture, where agroecology is practiced.

## Scottish Smallholder and Grower spring gathering at Thainstone

**F**OLLOWING the success of the Scottish Smallholder and Grower festival, the organisers have launched a new event for 2014, based in the north east of Scotland, which will be of considerable interest to the crofting community.

The Scottish Smallholder and Grower spring gathering will take place on Saturday 31st May at Thainstone agricultural centre, a popular venue well known to smallholders, crofters and growers. Situated on the A96 Aberdeen-Inverness road, the venue has excellent facilities and is easily accessible.

Following the successful format of the festival, the spring gathering has a full livestock show (pigs, sheep, goats and cattle classes); poultry and waterfowl show; garden, craft and food fair; trade stands; breed societies and a full programme of demonstrations and seminars to inform and inspire. Visitors to the spring gathering will be able to pick up new business ideas, find out how to get the most out of their land, see a range of traditional breeds and learn how to develop niche markets.

Mainly under cover, the spring gathering will have trade-stand opportunities to suit all businesses, including crofters.

Opportunities for sponsorship and advertising are also available.

Unique in Scotland are the sheep, cattle, pig and goat shows, focusing on breeds popular with smallholders, crofters and small-scale keepers. The poultry and waterfowl show includes classes for geese, turkeys and ducks, as well as large fowl and bantams, plus junior and novice classes.

The garden, craft and food fair includes classes for eggs, wool crafts, baking, preserves and much more. Following their popularity at our festival events, the gathering features a full programme of seminars and demonstrations related to smallholding and smaller-scale production, all included in the ticket price.

Topics already confirmed for the gathering include subjects as diverse as production of rabbits and goats for meat, preparing fleece and skins, beekeeping, growing productive apple trees and a growers' question time. There will be at least 18 seminars over the course of the day, as well as working pony and Clydesdale horse demonstrations.

Class schedules, entry forms and further information are available on the website [www.scottishsmallholdershow.co.uk](http://www.scottishsmallholdershow.co.uk).



### Magazine offer

*Country Smallholding* magazine is offering a special subscription deal for *Crofter* readers. Try five issues for just £5 by either visiting [www.subscriptionsave.co.uk/cro2](http://www.subscriptionsave.co.uk/cro2) or calling 0844 848 8041 quoting NSMCRO14.

*Country Smallholding* is the UK's biggest-selling smallholding magazine.



May 31st 2014 at Thainstone, Inverurie

- Classes for Cattle, Sheep, Goats, Pigs, Poultry, Craft & Produce
- Seminars and workshops, Trade Exhibition & Breed Societies
- Working Pony demonstration

**Schedules and further information at:**

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

or call: 01241 859108/ 07986 451129

enquiries@scottishsmallholdershow.co.uk





## Investing in agriculture

SCF's project officer Maria Scholten reports on a recent conference.

THE International Year of Family Farming started with a conference organised by the UK Food Group on investing in agriculture for food sovereignty. UN special rapporteur on food and security, Olivier de Schutter, gave a very concise plea for a redirection of agricultural investing. Below is a summary. Although the focus is on global issues, there are lessons for Scotland. The speeches can be seen at [www.ukfg.org.uk/2013investinginag](http://www.ukfg.org.uk/2013investinginag).

The origin of our current food system in the 1950s and 1960s, the post-war years, was based on boosting food production – rewarding scale and production efficiency. This was a success story. Very soon more food was produced than was required by population growth, which peaked in 1965. This type of food production has increasingly become inadequate, with five key failures.

- Worldwide hunger has not been reduced significantly. 1.3 billion people are underfed.
- Food has been produced as a commodity, is often poor in

quality and leads to micronutrient deficiencies. Highly-processed food has created waves of obesity.

- Environmentally, scale-oriented food production is detrimental.
- Use of resources is not efficient; one example is overfishing and acidification of oceans.
- The system is not equitable and has led to the disappearance of small farms and lack of support for family farms.

This productionist policy has led to vicious circles of migration of poor farmers to cities, leading to higher dependencies on subsidised food imports, creating dependence on imports, making developing countries vulnerable to volatile markets.

### Today's demands for a food system

Resource efficiency is key because environmental sustainability has become more important. Low-input agricultural systems are more relevant.

Sustainability of consumption has been taboo. For example – overconsumption of industrial meat; liquid biofuels; food wastes. All of these forms of consumption need to become more sustainable.

Reduction of poverty has to be addressed. Small farmers need to be better supported and

offered choices. Small farmers' autonomy must be guaranteed, such as seed saving, access to land and use of traditional knowledge.

Key leverage points emerge: reinvest in small farmers by supporting technically and economically; but also socio-culturally, for example by (re) developing cooking skills; and allowing more small farmers in key political positions.

The relevance of this last point

of De Schutter's can be seen within the EU, within DG AGRI, where key decisions are made on agriculture. Less than 20% of the representatives are small-farmer and civil-society organisations.

The importance of these voices was shown recently. Lobbying by the World Development Movement and others forced the EU to begin stopping banks' speculation on food – a historic step on 15 January 2014. See [www.wdm.org](http://www.wdm.org).



## CAP reform and new entrants

THE NEW entrants advisory panel, set up by the Scottish Government, has been tasked with looking at the impact the current CAP reform will have on new entrants, both good and bad.

Starting with pillar one direct payments, the majority of new entrants, those who have been crofting since the 2004, will not have any entitlements, or may have purchased a small amount of entitlements. In the current proposals, if you are in this group it is most likely that you will have

to apply to the National Reserve to receive any entitlements.

The value of these will be based on a proportion of this current year's SFP using the historic payments system, so will be likely to be of low value. There may be an opportunity to top-up these payments to the regional average using the new area-based payment system.

Also in the proposals, crofters who have commenced activity in 2013 or 2014 will be able to apply to the national reserve and

receive payments at the regional average using the new area-based payments system.

The new entrants panel is also looking at an anomaly in the system: crofters and farmers who had commenced activity during the reference period of the last CAP reform but have since increased the area worked. At the moment this group could be excluded from receiving any top-up payments until 2019, when the whole system is proposed to change over to area-based payments.

Karen at SCF HQ would like to hear from members who fall into any of these categories to help her contribute crofters' views. This pillar one consultation closes on 17th March, so get in touch while there is still an opportunity for you to have your say.

There are a number of measures which will help new entrants under pillar two. At the time of going to print the consultation had just closed, so the next edition of *The Crofter* will cover the outcomes of this consultation.

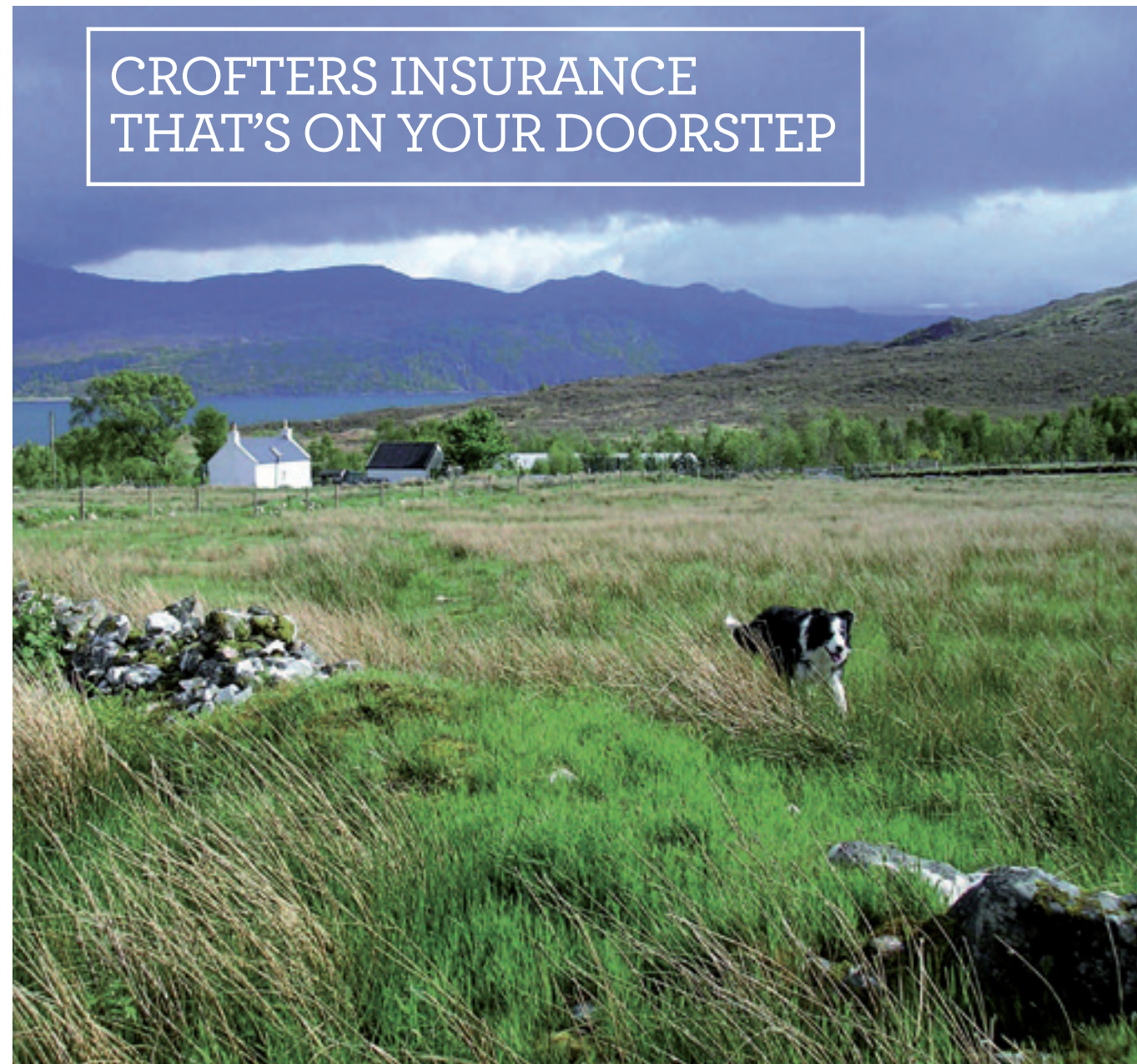


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## Call for young folk

**T**HIS YEAR'S annual gathering is on the theme of Young Folk: The Future of Crofting.

Subthemes are likely to include access to land, affordable homes and creation of employment. The event will be held in Glencanisp Lodge on the community-owned Glencanisp Estate in Assynt, from lunchtime Thursday 2nd October to lunchtime Saturday 4th October.

Priority is given to young crofters and aspiring crofters and places will be subsidised as

much as possible, depending on how successful fund-raising is.

It will also be open to older crofters and civil servants who will be invited to participate. This is an opportunity for young crofters, and those wanting to croft, to be able to have a meaningful conversation with those who have the land and those who make crofting policy.

It will not just be a talking-shop however. It is expected that all will participate in forming ACTIONS to be taken forward

from the gathering.

If you are interested in participating in this unique event please let Karen at SCF HQ know, as it is very helpful to gauge interest. Also we need you young crofters and aspiring crofters to let us know if you have ideas for what should be in the event.

Again, please tell Karen.

This is the first time that young folk who are, or want to be, crofting will gather – to form your vision of the future of crofting and plan out the steps you need to take to make that vision reality.

Come to Assynt and be the future you want to see.

## Speaking out for crofters' interests

**T**HE IMPORTANCE of having a strong organisation fighting for crofters – and run by crofters – has been clearly demonstrated in other articles in this issue.

If the Scottish Crofting Federation doesn't speak out to look after crofters' interests, you can be sure no-one else will either. If SCF wasn't pointing out the injustices of the proposal to get rid of CCAGS, for example, or the continuing absurdity of paying ten times as much support per hectare to large farmers on the best quality land, then crofting's future would be bleak indeed.

Only the SCF speaks with authority and truth about these issues. The Federation is the only membership body committed to the crofting cause. We work extremely hard on your behalf.

As an SCF member, you benefit from our lobbying and development work in many ways. And if you make use of our legal advisory scheme, or our members-only discount scheme, you can easily save more than the cost of your subscription.

You benefit in all the ways mentioned below. But we need you to help your organisation too. Please do all you can to persuade other crofters to support us by becoming SCF members. **We are stronger together.** The article on page 23 is all about making the most of your membership – and the recruitment incentives we now offer. We believe these are a worthwhile investment in the future of our organisation – and therefore in the future of crofting.



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### What do you get as a member of SCF?

As a member of the only organisation dedicated to promoting crofting you get:

- Strong political representation to help shape crofting policies for the benefit of future generations of crofters and our rural communities.
- Four issues a year of *The Crofter* – a 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. Just phone **01599 230 300** for direct access to legal assistance. Have your membership number ready.
- Discounted training opportunities.
- The opportunity to promote your croft tourism business on the SCE 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.



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