A hundred-plus years ago security of tenure, compensation for improvements and controlled rents were the rewards a balance of rewards and responsibility. 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 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. 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

Crofters warned to speak up or get shafted

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. The large-farm lobby 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

Continued on page 3
Message from the chair...

**Derek Flyn**

**Our man in Brussels**

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 crofting, our warning was about crofting cross-compliance rules and are subject to losing a substantial part, or even all, of their Single Farm Payment. To highlight this I recently joined a peaceful protest outside parliament position on the animal health issue of native seeds and animals.

**Our man in Brussels**

*Continued from page 1*

**Scottish Crofting Federation**

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

**Crofters warned to speak up or get shafted**

Individuals supported the suggestion of a crofting support scheme, but it appears that the large-farm lobby has turned the government against it. In what is probably the greatest perversion of public support to Scottish agriculture, the LFASS (Less Favoured Area Support Scheme) is to continue to be abused, paying the highest payments per hectare to the better land in the LFA – mostly 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 crofting should be a member. It is the only way we can stand up to the intimidation by the farming industry.

On Saturday, a crofter was attempting to stop someone in an expectation through trickery or deceit.

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**Our man in Brussels**

In 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 – “special friend” to myself.

At the animal health conference EID was the biggest, but not the only, major issue. Running in parallel was a seed directive on the sustainable breeding of native species.

**Norman Leask**

This is an extremely serious time for crofting. When crofters see no point in being regulated they will ask for deregulation and we really don’t know what the consequences would be. The end of a highly-regulated system is likely to 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 jobs 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.
INDEPENDENCE DEBATE

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

Dave Thompson, MSP (SNP) makes the case for a “Yes” vote.

The Crofters, March 2014

Crofting is a vital part of our culture and rural support system and is extremely important in my constituency of Skye, Lochalsh and Badenoch. Scottish exports almost £2bn (all products) for every man, woman and child per annum and crofters are crucial in this – eg hand-dived scallops, laing – £1bn grass-fed beef, quality knitwear and other crafts.

But Westminster ignores crofters and crofting. 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 £114/t, the EU average is £176. For Pillar 1 Scotland’s future (p 281) states it has 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 £169 per hectare. This would have brought Scotland an extra £1 billion (£330 million) between 2014 and 2020.

Adding insult to injury is the £600 million subsidy to energy uplift. This is a direct consequence of Scottish people’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 commitment of support for coupled payments rather than 8%. This will require Westminster’s approval, so far with a “No” vote.

“Vote ‘No’ and get either urban- focussed Labour or the Tories. Conservatism 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 1.5 million 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.

Policy areas affecting 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. The Scottish Future (p 281) states it will provide the opportunity of introducing the possibility of creating a separate crofting Act and leaving the Crofters Commission with inadequate budgets, but with development powers, and oversight of its own grant schemes.

The 2010 Scottish Rural Economy Act is massively prescriptive, woefully drafted (as evidenced by the sundry 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;
• specific area payments;
• greening and equivalence;

a border to our largest market and is a border to our position of agriculture in the EU – that is by the people who live here. They can only be good for crofters.

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

If we vote ‘Yes’ to independence, Westminster will have no control over land use and its 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 vines and bracken, really not as they are headed towards changes in this – eg hand-dived scallops, laing – £1bn grass-fed beef, quality knitwear and other crafts.

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. 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 vines and bracken, really not as they are.

rofting is extremely important in my constituency of Skye, Lochalsh and Badenoch. Scottish exports almost £2bn (all products) for every man, woman and child per annum and crofters are crucial in this – eg hand-dived scallops, laing – £1bn grass-fed beef, quality knitwear and other crafts.

THE CROFTER, MARCH 2014

The 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.

• 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 those questions they want to. When completing the electronic version, 2014, the map pays no heed to views or perceptions of the people who live and work in the areas covered. Sustras 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 let them that crofters think its definition of wildness is misguided, misrepresented, and offensive.

Designation, managed by SNH, would manage the landscape and all its components. SNH, on the other hand, can take a direct role in conserving crofting and 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, not designation as such.

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The major influences on CAP are, and will remain, France and Germany. Ireland has tended to be more lenient, but currently tends to 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.

No, what crofters like me want to see is our governments listening to and speaking to consumers about what 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 does not occupy 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. Crofting communities are to thrive.

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Geese on the menu

After 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 be shot throughout the year and demand ingly, been a great deal of tribute to the ||KederGreenhouse

A

geese on the menu

6 and Countryside Act 1981. The

country, can be effective control measures, damage while maintaining a

goal is to minimise agricultural

meat in Scotland under the Wildlife

scheme is also being trialled in Orkney. SNH says the long-term

problem of greylag geese in the

settlement over the years in North

Scottish Natural Heritage recently

THERE 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 crotting in the protracted negotiations during the course of two crotting 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 crotting 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 bethought. 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 a very strong ally to the SCF and to crofting in different jobs and enterprises including having a quarry and a haulage

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 greylag, which graze in huge numbers on crofts in the islands, can be shot, feeding 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 government have taken heed of what we have been saying. It gives government of the rightness of what we have been saying to what we have been saying to what we have been saying to what we have been saying to what we have been saying to what we have been saying to what we have been saying to what we have been saying.
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A commissioner’s view

Crofting Commission vice-chairman Colin Kennedy looks ahead.

As days get longer and spring is awaited, I wonder where all the time has gone. Although my hair is white.

The animals are looking miserable, fields are awash, drains unable to cope... I’m thinking crofters will soon require wellies and foot-warmer 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, but more triplets were recorded. With the escort demand for lambs increasing, sheep are looking a reasonable but for the coming season I’m feeding the sheep already in an effort to try to increase the number of numbers reared.

As of 28th January 2014, 120 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 determine what to do with the information.

We were also pleased to see that of the draft forms that were sent out on the duty to report consultation, 30 but from a completed – which suggests that those grassing 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.

For the ground

SCF welcomes community mapping support post

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 community mapping in the run-up to the launching of the Crofting Register,” said Patrick Krauss, 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 Ross to facilitate the further development of crofting community mapping”.

Russell Smith, SCF’s mapping project officer, added: “This 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, receive 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.”

SCF welcomes community mapping support post

THE CROFTER, MARCH 2014

Dear editor

This letter follows up a suggestion in December 2012 that local hostility towards proposed changes can frustrate the Commission’s mission to restore traditional levels of participation in grazings work. The resultant linkage to high average age can result in disciplined committees capable of perpetuating that status quo, preserving the status as is. Thinking that a new application has a ring of political correctness for political correctness’ sake doesn’t even seem to flash at the Commission in face of blunt admissions that the real fear is the new ‘parasite’ at meetings.

Inherent difficulties are compounded for crofters by the very same way of implementing, with additional conditions, SLC121/11, which ruled that shares do not transfer automatically between owner-occupiers. New grassing committees rules seem to be a positive step in this direction.

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 policies. The Commission’s approach to strikingly, allowed non-shareholders to be enshrined in the new committees norm being too rare to merit consideration or intervention in order to restore access to common grazings committees.

Assuming that recruitment to grassings committees is inhibited by the prospect of having to report croft neglect (see Crofter 91), this would not be generally defended if it proved to be accepted by non-shareholders. The LCS121/11 (a) rule is inegalitarian, with some groups having the automatic advantage of exclusion. Looking back at the 1998 grazing 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 policies. The Commission’s approach to strikingly, allowed non-shareholders to be enshrined in the new committees norm being too rare to merit consideration or intervention in order to restore access to common grazings committees.

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John Mackichan, John Mackichan, Isle of Lewis

Roger Kershaw

HAVE YOUR SAY

Roger Kershaw

THE CROFTER, MARCH 2014

The wearing of fishing creels under three acres, were only viable with fishing for ling and cod. Traditionally, this practice has not existed. Steam trawlers from Mediterranean, long line fishing to offshore marks. After the war part-time small-scale fishermen transferred to large scale and smaller fish in the shallower, clearer, sandy grounds from Bluff of Lewis to Trumpen. Then the government abolished the three- mile limit allowing large trawlers to fish for sand eels for example, or to clear out any remaining fish.

The small crofts here were conveyed 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 the government.

Life in these small villages also revolved around the sea. We had no electricity until 1952, mains water and sewer came later. Working the croft was only possible in many cases if there was strong family cohesion – with fathers away for work or more traditional jobs in construction, merchant service or other occupations. Mothers had to raise the families and do a range of jobs from 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, before the traumatic myth of the law on non-compliance.

The next step could be appointed commissioners paid by the public purse to oversee all decisions and people who were well aware of the dangers of fascism and communism (as we argue) and the price paid by some of our democratic freedom. Younger crofters should be aware of the family danger and enroachment of the bureaucratic, faceless, and gradual totalitarian government.

The more powerful unaccountable agencies get, the more of their powers – and control they will seek and demand – and so the more pressure is put on to their supporters and they may pay a political price unless they regulate the supporters. 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 feudal.

The threat of dispossession “cùiridh mi as an t-earrainn thu” is once again coming to the fore but from a different direction.

Migration and pair and slip in our village are falling into disrepair and becoming dangerous. Our roads would be shamed 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.

Roger Kershaw
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. 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 it worth selling the crofting lifestyle, as we can sell the crofting lifestyle, that 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.

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A new adventure

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

In 2012 we took responsibility for a 15-acre bare-land croft in Gatelrig 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, which can be a barrier to entry for new crofters. Our neighbours and the local community have been welcoming and share invaluable experience, encouragement and local history.

The field was limed, deer fenced and planted with long-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 ¾ acre field on the croft which has good soil depth and some natural protection. Formal courses from our local vet have helped our confidence; we just can’t stop learning. So far I’ve not looked back.

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. The importance of scanning

As we head into the final weeks of winter, my thoughts are focused on scanning. The disease is often associated with poor hygiene and colostrum management. Therefore:

- Take a comprehensive history of the issues which affected me
- Check how much better I have been
- Consider the cost of the cost of treatment
- Use seaweed on the veg beds and grow root crops, potatoes and kale which, together with fish caught by the crofter, are a winter staple.

The Keider 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. Thoroughly clean and disinfect lambing pens and the more I looked into options and commitments. In May 2013 these changed. In September, 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 single use drinking, home-baking and hot filled rolls to take away, which is handy as it’s minutes away from the ferry terminal if you are counting your chickens.

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 to swill, I’m sure everyone has days before the scanner is due and I’m thinking back to last year. I remember likening the feeling to the edge of the sea when the tides are out. To keep up to date on what’s new

I was hoping for a big financial hit and, more importantly, a depressing hit, mainly due to a horrible eye infection that swept through the flock while the rains 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 hope 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. Emptiness can be move 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 my fingers and hope for 150%.

The importance of scanning

S PRING IS BY FAR and away my favourite time of year. There is an order to protect themselves from the bacteria infecting the lamb. Strong iodine should be applied to the whole of the navel of the lamb, as has the navel. Lambs sucking ewes’ teats that may be dirty are an additional risk to 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 thirsty 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.

Preventing joint ill in lambs

J OINT ILL IS caused by bacteria and leads to swollen painful joints in young lambs. Lambs have difficulty standing or walking and will be refused 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 for a very long time.

Tail docking or castration wounds have been suggested as a route of entry for the bacteria into the lamb, as has the navel. Lambs sucking 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 thirsty 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 navel to prevent the entry of the bacteria infecting the lamb. Strong iodine should be applied to the whole of the navel area immediately after birth to dry it up.

The Crofter, March 2014

© Donald MacSween

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.

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Muirburn

Avoid prolonged calvings and risk of losses

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.scottland.gov.uk/resource/00430436138.pdf

The Heath Trust works at all levels to help brokers and promote muirburn in Scotland as part of sustainable moorland management. For more information or advice, visit www.HealthTrust.co.uk, or call 0131873 2201

Patrick Laurie
The Heath Trust

Expert's view

From Scotland's Rural College, we are encouraging suckled-calf producers to enhance the rations fed to their pregnant beef cows for 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 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 labor- 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 diagnosis 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 culled them, this extra magnesium will help to reduce the risk of stillbirths and the need for artificial insemination. This will save time and money on feeding and medicines

Scottish kye – collaboration and inclusion are key

With ILASS continuing as it was and no firm promise of enhanced area of natural constraint money for the hills, 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 keep crofting viable and to tempt to use cheaper imports.

Farming, livestock 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. This is harder for live cattle to come in.

This type of in-wintered crofter's cow will make the auctioneer's job much easier when it comes time to sell the calves. She may not be as attractive as a heifer but she will make you more money. We are sitting at the top of the tree for dealing with those calves who have not already had their herd pregnancy diagnosed. 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.

The Highlands and Islands have many raw ingredients that are admired and sometimes shared, or passed on like many raw ingredients that are admired and sometimes shared, or passed on like raw ingredients that are admired and sometimes shared, or passed on like raw ingredients that are admired and sometimes shared, or passed on like raw ingredients that are admired and sometimes shared, or passed on like raw ingredients that are admired and sometimes shared, or passed on like raw ingredients that are admired and sometimes shared, or passed on like raw ingredients that are admired and sometimes shared, or passed on like raw ingredients that are admired and sometimes shared, or passed on like raw ingredients that are admired and sometimes shared, or passed on like raw ingredients that are admired and sometimes shared, or passed on like raw ingredients that are admired and sometimes shared, or passed on like raw ingredients that are admired and sometimes shared, or passed on like raw ingredients that are admired and sometimes shared, or passed on like raw ingredients that are admired and sometimes shared, or passed on like raw ingredients that are admired and sometimes shared, or passed on like raw ingredients that are admired and sometimes shared, or passed on like raw ingredients that are admired and sometimes shared, or passed on like raw ingredients that are admired and sometimes shared, or passed on like raw ingredients that are admired and sometimes shared, or passed on like raw ingredients that are admired and sometimes shared, or passed on like raw ingredients that are admired and sometimes shared, or passed on like raw ingredients that are admired and sometimes shared, or passed on like raw ingredients that are admired and sometimes shared, or passed on like raw ingredients that are admired and sometimes shared, or passed on like raw ingredients that are admired and sometimes shared, or passed on like raw ingredients that are admire...
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 written into 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 WWOOFers who are within a 50-100 mile radius of one another.

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 hostels 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 taste of what life is like on an organic farm local to them.

Kate Barry, 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 cooking 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 decided to arrange a trial 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.wwoof.org.uk."

WWOOF UK and SCF are forging closer ties and SCF 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.

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

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 Raven MacPhee.

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 grassland 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 100/acre (25.5ha) application of old cattle dung will supply around 15 kg/ha of readily-available P, 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 50% 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 any 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. Some of the main rules and good practice relating to dung applications follow.

• Don’t spread or store dung or slurry within 50m 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 soil.
• Do adjust your bagged fertiliser applications to take live 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.
Lots to learn about crofting

Primary 6/7 at Abernethy Primary School, Nethybridge describe their crofting experiences.

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 task that have been used for centuries. Mrs Dennis explained in great detail how the tools were used and let hand 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 with display to 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 Tulliboch. 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 £327 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.

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.
S
CF OFFERS a number of training opportunities, supported with funding from the Scottish Government’s skills enhancement 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, Inverness (Sactor 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.

**Forcoming crofting training courses**

**Wednesday 5th March**

Strained wire fencing. Lochinver, Assynt. Price: £40 or £36 for SCF members/concessions

Contact: Romyann Garnett on 01571 844 172 or email: rgarnett@cosgl-assynt.org

**Saturday 8th March**

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

**Saturday 22nd March**

Croft land management – fencing, ditching and drainage with tutor John Allan MacLellan in Cnoc an Tòrain, North Uist.

Price per course: £40 or £36 for SCF members/concessions

Contact: Suzy Macaulay on 01870 502151 /510758 or email aussyamacaulay@gmail.com

**29th-30th March**

Entry-level introduction to crofting, Kilmartin, Lochgilphead.

Price: £60 or £50 for SCF members/concessions

Contact: Julia or Sally on education@kilmartin.org or 01546 510758

**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 Crock on 01854 613 099 or email Christine.Crock@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

**13th-14th June**

Croft diversification – added-value products taking 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.

**Wool processing course**

**FIRST WORKED on the land in Assynt. In 1978, having studied at the Scarcroft scheme at Caithness University and spent holidays camping in the Highlands, Bridie was offered an apprenticeship as a bare-lane croft in Knockan after seven years in a tied cottage on the mainland. She had built a flock of Cheviots, starting with four pet lambs, hens, ducks and milking goats... and took advice from a vet.

**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 Ulvafoot village. Here she tells us about her experience of crofting, spinning and teaching others valuable skills.**

**A reminder from Ian Clark, Director Scottish Association for Country Sports.**

**S 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 pigs 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 training course providers and we know that only a tiny number of crofters have the best practices. We have these courses as a result of the news of the change in law hasn’t reached you.**

**We have already run courses for groups of crofters at Achintimchan, 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

**Train!**

**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, scones, 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 to register your interest.**

**LUCY BEATTIE, training manager.**
MEMBERSHIP MATTERS

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 that any suppliers who may be willing to participate in this scheme then please let Karen at HQ know and she will contact 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 they 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 the amount of 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. The membership offer is subject to change in terms or to cancellation at any time without notice.

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.

Animal Health (Highland) Ltd

5% off all stock excluding bagged feed

Animal nutrition, health care and post food, livestock eq- ment

Contact
Animal Health (Highland) Ltd, Strathpeffer Road, Dingwall
Tel: 01549 852412
E: aanimalhealthhighland@gmail.com

WWOOF UK (World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms) Ltd

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

Contact
Inksters Solicitors, Inverness, Portree, Wick, Glasgow
Tel: 01599 230 300
E: brian@inksters.com
Web: http://www.inksters.com/croftinglaw.aspx

Inksters

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

Glasgow
Brian Inkster
Solicitor + Notary Public
0141 229 0880
brian@inksters.com

Inverness
Evelin Ross
Solicitor + Notary Public
01463 210 333
evelin@inksters.com

croftinglaw.com
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-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 sownings in order to not over-graze. The UK National Ecosystem Assessment (UNKEA) said “Blanket bogs and oceanic mountain habitats (croft land) provide a home for 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, agriculture is seen as a resource to be exploited, for example by mega-scale windfarms, commercial mono-crop forestry or mechanised peat extraction.

2. Common Agriculture Policy (CAP). Manipulation by subsidy, for example heagead payments leading to over-grazing. Conversely the single farm payment then led to under-grazing, land abandonment and inertia. The UNKEA says “Agric-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 mindset. 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.
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/2013investing.

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, it 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 waste. 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.

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.
Call for young folk

This 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

The importance of having a strong organisation fighting for crofters – and run by crofters – has been clearly demonstrated in other articles in this issue. 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.

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.