

Call for early action on law of crofting

THE MANY DIFFICULTIES caused by existing legislation dealing with crofting have been revealed in a report published in December by the Crofting Law Group.

This was based on 126 issues submitted by lawyers, organisations and members of the public, who were encouraged to submit details of the problems and anomalies they had encountered. Once collected, they were examined by the group and interested parties were afforded the opportunity of commenting and debating them.

The final report of the Crofting Law Sump has now been made available to the Scottish Government.

The initiative came from the Crofting Law Group after practitioners gave evidence about the many obstacles and obstructions caused by the successive changes to the applicable law over several generations. Appointed by the group to administer the sump were Keith Graham, formerly principal clerk of the Scottish Land Court, and recent SCF chair Derek Flynn, a retired crofting lawyer.

Derek explains, "In 2013, it was necessary to force an amendment of recent legislation because it had been found to be unworkable. At that time, it was made clear that there were

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What will wake up the Scottish Government to the plight of common grazings?

YET AGAIN, IN the new CAP allocation, the highest support rates go to best quality land; and traditional livestock producers continue to be under threat.

Given that so much of Scotland is hill grazing, it is surprising that Scottish Government has never really got to grips with how to support it appropriately. Following the CAP reforms of 2004, vast numbers of livestock disappeared from grazings, leaving hills under-stocked and even abandoned completely in some areas.

Some environmental groups have welcomed this, saying that re-wilding is a good thing. RSPB has studied the issue in depth and concluded that appropriate grazing increases bio-diversity and brings the hill into better condition than if ungrazed. And it is mixed livestock, not deer, which produce the good results.

Scottish Government was willing to go along with this manipulation by subsidy that caused the "retreat from the hills", as SAC put it. This was despite the warnings of organisations such as SAC, RSPB and the SCF. It is probable that the cause was the industry lobby for single farm payments – to provide a retirement pay-out to farmers. Ironically, that same industry lobby is now claiming that their proposed regime of regionalisation is there to stop slipper-farming.

Regionalisation is highly unlikely to fix the grazing problem in the crofting areas. Common grazings still seem to be a complete mystery to Scottish Government and of no concern to the industry lobby. Under this regime extensive rough grazing, which will include most of crofters' common grazings, will get paid £8 per

hectare, less than one twentieth of what will go to permanent grassland; and a quarter of the rate for higher-quality rough grazing.

It was pointed out in a recent policy meeting that there would be no incentive to improve land, as once allocated a region, land cannot move to a better region even if improved. A senior Scottish Government official suggested that producers should need no incentive to improve land, that the increased productivity and therefore market returns should be incentive enough. So why, he was asked, do we in Scotland use the CAP public money to make higher payments to better quality land?

The official had no answer. Maybe it has something to do with the industry lobby?

Traditional livestock crofters are getting thin on the ground. The new CAP doesn't look any more likely to provide the appropriate incentive to continue keeping livestock on the very extensively grazed hills than the last. Some chose to graze in-bye only, or not graze at all, to avoid the complicated, punitive and downright unfair payment system.

Once herds and flocks are lost from the hill it is a long and difficult task to re-establish them. Skills are lost, flocks take a long time to heft and introduced animals potentially take years to thrive.

This sounds gloomy. But look at what the Welsh hill farmers Fairness for the Uplands have achieved. They took the Welsh Government to court over extensive grazings only getting £20 per hectare against the better quality grazings getting £160, and won.

Is it time to consider doing the same here?

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and much more...



Message from the chair...

Fiona Mandeville



LET ME BEGIN by wishing all our members a belated good new year. I hope this year will be a productive one for you.

Who would have thought, when Jim Hunter and I spent the last few days of January 1986 setting up the Scottish Crofters Union (SCU) HQ in Broadford, I would end up almost 30 years later as its chair. Becoming chair is an important responsibility that I do not take on lightly – and, indeed, had to be persuaded to accept.

I'll do my best to follow the good example of my predecessors, with the help of my very able colleagues on the SCF board. Regrettably we recently lost one of those, Paddy Zakaria, to pressures of work with her ground-breaking project of importing Shetland cattle embryos to Australia. You can read about her progress on page 18.

Yvonne White has agreed to be vice-chair, for which I thank her.

I must particularly thank Derek Flynn for his excellent work as the previous SCF chair. We were privileged to have his expertise and presence to lead our organisation at a time when crofting was hitting the headlines in a number of ways.

Derek guided us through the maze of croft registration and encouraged crofters to take advantage of the opportunities of community registration. He was invited to advise the Crofting Commission on the interpretation and implementation of crofting law as modified by the 2007 and 2010 Crofting Acts. And, along with Keith Graham, former clerk to the Scottish Land Court, compiled the Crofting Law Sump. This important report highlights problems and inconsistencies with these acts and offers proposals to remedy them.

Derek should now have more time to enjoy his retirement, although he has taken on the role of SCF parliamentary spokesman.

As a result of the sump, we hope to see significant improvements to crofting legislation before too long, not least the totally unacceptable imposition of compulsory advertising on crofters who register their crofts.

At a rough calculation, this takes £1.8 million out of crofters' pockets and into the tills of newspapers for no tangible benefit. We will be fighting this unnecessary burden.

We have a busy year ahead of us at SCF. Helping us with the workload are two new staff members. Katrine Fogt has taken over as administrator at SCF HQ in Kyle. Donna Williamson joins Lucy and Tina the in training team. Thanks are due to project manager Maria Scholten, who stepped in at SCF HQ to fill gaps while new staff came on stream. These three introduce themselves on page 26.

Leading our staff team, chief executive Patrick Krause does a huge job, travelling the length and breadth of the country to represent SCF members.

One of our key staff members is Barbara Thayer, who looks after SCF's finances. Her diligence with figures ensures that your membership subscriptions are put to best use and not a penny wasted.

In mentioning these people, it may seem that SCF has a large staff team. In fact most are part-time and our total staff (including project officers) amounts to only 4.5 full-time equivalent posts. Their hard work makes it seem that we have a host of folk available to meet all the expectations upon us.

SCF relies on the voluntary effort put in by board members and our other SCF representatives at area level. They are all active crofters who freely give up their own time on members' behalf. I urge members to appreciate how much is done on their part by SCF's volunteers.

You can participate in our work too by becoming a local contact yourself. It's rewarding and stimulating and gives you the opportunity to contribute to the future of crofting. Just get in touch if you're interested.

If you feel that this year's annual subscription, £59, is getting a bit much, consider what else that modest sum could purchase. Less than one tank of fuel for your pick-up. Less than the cost of a good pair of boots. Less than ten bags of cow

nuts. That £59 is an investment in crofting, a way of life that is very dear to all of us. **Without the SCF, there would be no-one fighting to preserve and develop crofting.** Patrick outlines in more detail on page 23 what you get for your sub.

One member who has been a devoted supporter for longer than most is Mrs Jean MacIver from Lewis. Now aged 102, Mrs MacIver has just been made an honorary life member of SCF in recognition of her commitment to our work for all those years. We are very appreciative of her support.

I am really pleased that the achievements of a previous SCU president/chair have been acknowledged at the highest level. Alistair Maciver from Rogart in Sutherland received a well-deserved MBE in the New Year's honours list.

Every year throws more challenges at crofters, and now we are facing a new phase of the Common Agriculture Policy. These support schemes have great impact for crofters and we must ensure that our members are treated fairly and that our government invests in crofting's vital contribution to the environment and rural communities. Hill farmers in Wales took on their government to legally challenge the unfairness of their allocations – and won the battle. We at SCF are considering how we can follow their example. There are winners and losers in the new schemes, but we continue to strive for an equitable solution for our members. By the time you receive this issue, details of the SRDP should be available. Rest assured, your SCF will not let up until the importance of crofting is fully recognised. To this end we will be meeting soon with crofting minister Dr Aileen McLeod.

Land Reform is a national priority and crofters have a significant stake in land management. Crofting demonstrates an appropriate system of land tenure that should be rolled out across Scotland.

Crofting generated an estimated revenue of almost £86 million last year, according to a recent Scottish Government economic report. However, the figures used give a false impression. Please see an article from the West Highland Free Press on page 4 which puts perspective on the report's findings.

Finally, the future of crofting lies with our young people. This is the subject of our next gathering in March (more information on page 28). When I was at school it was very uncool to be a Gaelic speaker and to live on a croft. Now

the opposite is the case. Young folk have pride in their heritage. They learn about crofting in school through the excellent Crofting Connections project and at college. Having a croft is the desire of many, as shown by the interest in SCF's crofting training courses and the enthusiasm of participants.

Young – and not quite so young – people are very keen to get crofts, to work them and become part of a crofting community. But few can afford the high prices being asked for croft tenancies these days. And they need a croft house grant which is considerably raised from its current, out-dated level. We will be responding to the consultation on these grants and invite members to do so too. Please see page 11 for more information.

We can also help by encouraging older crofters, who may struggle to find the energy to keep on working their holdings, to consider handing over their crofts to a younger generation who do have that energy. Our forefathers fought for security of tenure in order to work their land and live securely on it. They would surely wish to see that hard-won land, which they improved by hard work over many years, being kept in good heart and worked today by new blood, rather than be left to go back to bog and rushes. Retiring crofters can stay on in the old croft house, but gain the satisfaction of seeing new faces at the plough, at the fank and rebuilding the infrastructure.

We owe this to our elders and our youth.

Let's work together towards a more prosperous future for crofting. You can help by encouraging more people to join SCF and give their support. It's really important to build the strongest possible crofters' organisation – the only one run by crofters, for crofters.



Fiona presented Derek with the traditional cromag on his retirement as SCF chair

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a significant number of other outstanding issues relating to crofting requiring to be addressed by the Scottish Government. I doubt anyone expected that so many matters would be identified.

"Fortuitously, the minister with responsibility for crofting was listening and he undertook that his officials would investigate the best method for dealing with these outstanding issues, in consultation with stakeholders. The report is but the first step in that process."

Hopefully further steps will now be taken to deal with the significant frustration and concern felt by crofters and their advisers, caused by the increasing complexity and layers of crofting law. This was given recognition by the rural affairs committee at Holyrood, who oversaw the amendment in 2013.

SCF priorities from the crofting law sump

THIS MONUMENTAL PIECE of work by Derek Flynn and Keith Graham has been needed for decades and we applaud them in completing the task. It will enable crofting law to be made fit for the 21st century. We now call on the Scottish Government to action it.

SCF would like to see all 17 priority proposals taken up by Scottish Government immediately and new law made. The proposals support much of what SCF has been lobbying for and four have particular resonance:

Proposition 1 says work should commence on the preparation of a simplified crofting code. This has been called for since the beginning of the crofting law reforms in the late 1990s.

We are very glad to see that the sump echoes SCF concerns that crofters registering their crofts are required to place two newspaper adverts to complete the process. Taking an average for two adverts to be £100 and there being 18,000 crofts, the total sum lost to crofters will be at least £1.8 million. SCF is campaigning for the immediate abolition of this unnecessary

legislation and complete waste of money.

We no longer have a clear definition of who a crofter is. The intention of the 2010 Act was to end the distinction between those who tenant and those who own their crofts, to make them all crofters. It failed to do this. Proposition 2 says "To simplify crofting law, the term crofter should be re-defined to take account of everyone who is entitled to occupy a croft as a principal". The term crofter should be applied to all who reside on or beside their crofts and keep them in good order.

Proposition 5 states that it should be made possible for a person to apply to the Commission to be recognised as the rightful occupier of a croft (and as such the crofter) where, for instance, a person is a constituting landlord. In other words it should be possible for the owner of land to create a croft and to become the crofter of it, subject to the same duties and protection as other crofters. This corresponds with the SCF call to create 10,000 new crofts, a mission hampered by the difficulties in converting a holding to a croft.



The value of crofting

THE NEWS THAT crofting generates £86 million a year was misleading.

That £86 million was a net turnover figure, not profit. As later pages in the report on *The Economic Condition of Crofting 2011-2014* make clear, once running costs and investments are subtracted the average sum earned falls to around £18 million, or around £1,500 a year.

Almost three-quarters of crofters are tenants of just one croft, so it makes sense when the report indicates that almost three-quarters of all crofters make less than £5,000 a year from their crofts. At the other end of the scale, seven per cent of crofters make £20,000 or something approaching a living wage, almost always from the use of several crofts.

Crofting as a sustainable small-scale means of agricultural production must be encouraged. Even with all the odds stacked against crofters – remoteness, distance from markets, some of the poorest worked land and one of the worst climates in Europe – it is greatly to crofting's credit that the system still produces almost 11 per cent of Scotland's sheep and lambs and almost four per cent of the country's cattle.

But there is a danger in such calculations. Even in the late 19th century, when crofting

communities were properly established and secured, crofts were never intended to sustain even a subsistence lifestyle.

The value of crofting, like many other good things, is not quantifiable in monetary terms. The day that crofting is judged by an accountant's bottom line is the day that its true importance is forgotten. Nobody in the 21st century is going to settle for a Victorian subsistence lifestyle.

The report recognises that fact when it says that "Crofting, as a social system, is designed to keep people on the land and sustain rural communities, rather than provide a sole source of income for a family."

Taking all forms of economic activity into consideration, all forms of other paid employment or self-employment, our crofting households generate around £482 million a year, or an average of £40,000 annual income before tax.

That is a truer and vastly more important assessment of the value of crofting. Crofting continues to stabilise Highland communities by offering a home and a base from which crofting families can pursue their lives in a degree of comfort and security.

There are, of course, many flies in the ointment. "Population retention within rural communities is

an increasingly important issue," says the report. "If the population is an aging one, new entrants to crofting are needed to replace retiring crofters and ensure a positive future for crofting."

One-third of all adults in crofting households are now over the age of 65 years and only nine per cent are in the 16 to 24 age group. Everybody, crofters most of all, agrees that a regular influx of new and younger blood is vital for the future of crofting.

There are many causes of the shortage of crofting youth in the 21st century, and as many ways of addressing it. One certainty – and this has not changed over the decades – is that there are still plenty of young people who would happily take on a croft, if among other things it offered affordable housing.

It is therefore essential that the new crofting minister Aileen MacLeod takes note of her government's massive reduction in spending on the Croft House Grant Scheme, and listens to the voices which beg her to lift it back to earlier levels.

Crofting can and will continue to keep people in the Highlands and Islands. But only if they have somewhere to live.

A longer version of this article first appeared in the West Highland Free Press.

Contributing to the future of crofting – the Crofting Census

THE CROFTING COMMISSION is reminding crofters to complete and return their Crofting Census forms, if they have not already done so.

The completion deadline for the census was Friday 16 January 2015 and the Commission is currently sending out reminders to those still yet to return their census forms advising crofters of their legal obligations.

The Crofting Commission has undertaken an unprecedented data-gathering exercise across the crofting community with over 18,000 Crofting Census forms sent out to all crofts. Crofters are legally obliged to complete the census forms in full and return them to the Crofting Commission. The Crofting Reform (Scotland) Act 2010 requires crofters to complete the Crofting Census each year and if they fail to provide the information without reasonable cause, by the date shown, or knowingly provide false information, they will be guilty of an offence under this act.

The Crofting Census forms have been well received, with many crofters seeing the benefit to providing the information and helping to establish a clear picture of the current state of crofting.

The census has provided crofters with the opportunity to gain a better understanding of their responsibilities in fulfilling their duties, with some crofters being encouraged to look at their current situation and consider the options available to them to utilise their land more effectively. The census, and supporting guidance notes,

highlights various possibilities available to crofters in complying with their duties.

The Commission has set up a dedicated helpline, 01463 663404, and the census team is on hand to support crofters in completing their census forms and to answer any questions they may have.

The annual Crofting Census will allow the Commission to gather an evidence base which will grow year on year, helping to develop the case for crofting. The census allows crofters to contribute to shaping the future of their crofting communities.

Crofting Commission convener Susan Walker said, "It is essential to have an accurate understanding of the current profile of crofting and I would encourage crofters to complete the

forms in full, if they have not already done so, answering all of the mandatory questions. The census forms are quick and easy to complete and come with comprehensive guidance notes. If crofters require any support or guidance in completing their census forms I would urge them to contact the census team at the Commission or visit our website.

"The data taken from this exercise will contribute to the work of the Crofting Commission in effectively regulating crofting and securing the future of crofting for generations to come."

For further information visit www.crofting.scotland.gov.uk/croftingcensus.



Attendees at the Crofting Commission assessors seminar

Lessons for crofters and government in Welsh hill farmers' legal challenge

WELSH HILL FARMERS, calling themselves Fairness for the Uplands, legally challenged the Welsh government over its plan to set the moorland rate based on height above sea level under the new CAP.

They won.

The capitulation of the Welsh government came as a huge relief to farmers facing the prospect of a very substantial reduction in their level of subsidy payment. Those above the new moorland line, set at 400 metres (1,312 feet), would have received €20/hectare (£15.80/ha) compared with €200/ha (£158/ha) for land in a severely disadvantaged area and €240/ha (£192/ha) for lowland or disadvantaged area farmers.

SCF congratulated Fairness for the Uplands on their success. "It is very heartening to see the Welsh hill farmers, who are livestock graziers very similar to many Scottish crofters, taking on their government legally over unfair CAP payments and winning," said SCF's agricultural policy working-group chair Joyce Wilkinson. "The way in which the government had decided on a 400m altitude line to define moorland seemed arbitrary, but of greater concern was the differential in payments – £15 per hectare above the line and nearly £160 just below it. It was setting farmer against farmer, neighbour against neighbour. But farmers on both sides of the line joined together

to challenge the fairness of the stipulation. This of course makes us wonder at the fairness of the Scottish situation, where farmers on permanent grassland will receive basic payments of around £180 per hectare and crofters on extensive grazings only £8."

It was not clear at the time of writing what all producers will get in total as the allocation of in-bye to a region was still under way and the allocation of common grazings had not yet started. However, SCF is very concerned that the coupled payments, which it is claimed will raise the basic payment to £28/ha, will not help very extensive sheep graziers enough and extensive cattle graziers will miss out completely. Having sacrificed the front loading of the calf scheme in order to get approval of the coupled schemes, the future for extensive cattle looks very bleak indeed. SCF calls on the Scottish Government to reconsider how to support extensive cattle

as they are core to keeping people in remote communities and to enhancing the environment. We are seeking a meeting with the minister for crofting to discuss this.

"A major driver of the new CAP is equitable use of public money," Joyce added. "The taxpayers of Europe finance the CAP and the Scottish Government's task is to distribute it fairly to support agriculture in Scotland. The system is supposed to eventually become more equitable through convergence over the next five years, but starting with such an appalling rate on region 3 won't help the cattle keepers. If we don't do something now it will be too late.

"We need to take a leaf from the Welsh hill farmers' book," she concluded. "Governments seem to prefer giving excessive public money to those on better land – the very people who can get ample return from the market. This should be challenged".



© Martin Benson – South Uist

Impact of CAP on cattle keeping in non-designated areas

Bruernish
Isle of Barra

Dr Aileen MacLeod
Minister for Environment, and Land Reform
Scottish Government

Dear Minister

New CAP and SRDP

As an active crofter living and keeping cattle on a croft in Barra, I am concerned about the impact the changes to CAP and SRDP will have on our ability to maintain our current crofting activity.

I especially wish to express dismay about the lack of notice. The changes were outlined at a meeting in December 2014 and come into action on 1st January 2015. Had we known earlier we would have given serious consideration to selling all our cattle, before we ordered in winter feed and before all the cattle sales were finished for the year.

Ensuring that payment is made to active crofters and farmers is noted, but as crofters not in a designated area, we are being penalised by a reduction of payments because of the type of land we have.

The changes to the SRDP, which has been very important to us, now leave us with a year (2015) without any income, before we can apply for the replacement programme, in which no payment will be made until 2016.

We were informed that there would be no transition year for us for 2015 as we were not in a designated area. But there would be a five-year automatic roll-out for those who were in designated areas. Why? Because of financial restraints! Would it have been so difficult to give everyone a transition year and allow everyone to re-apply. All those in designated areas were given a 12 point advantage (12 out of 14) in the previous scheme, so they would not

have major difficulties in re-applying.

While I have no problem with designated areas being recognised, it is important to remember that the whole of Scotland is vital to agriculture and to the rural economy. Do we not also have species-rich grassland, Irish ladies tresses, water margins, seals and otters, eagles, sea eagles, corncrakes, hen harriers, peregrine falcons etc? All these exist outwith designated sites, so why are we being discriminated against?

These decisions put one half of the Western Isles against the other – the machair land against the peat land! The better land gains at the expense of the poorer land.

The other programme which will disappear completely is the Land Managers Options. The animal health programme was well used in Uist and Barra and was producing disease-free breeding cattle, under the Premium Cattle Health Scheme. Many breeders were producing native cattle and were attracting mainland buyers. Where is the forward thinking in allowing this scheme to disappear?

The immediate impact of the loss of SRDP funding will be finance for the bull scheme. Can we afford, with so few cattle, to pay £1,300 for a Commission bull in 2015? If we cannot afford a bull then there is little point in maintaining cattle. Yet a key aim of the previous scheme was retention of native breed cattle for the benefits they bring to the grassland and wildlife!

The removal of the animal health scheme will be serious, as this has taken a long time to build up to a level which is recognised throughout the Western Isles. Disease-free status, IBR, Johnes, Lepto etc is important and should not be thrown away.

I trust that action is taken to address the imbalance of funding and the issues raised. We are now having to decide if we can afford to continue with cattle on our land.

Jessie M MacNeil



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Land reform proposals

SCF HAS WELCOMED the Scottish Government's intention to put land-reform at the top of the agenda.

SCF chair Fiona Mandeville said, "We are extremely heartened by the first minister's announcement that land reform will be at the top of her agenda in the new government and we look forward to participating in the next stage of the land reform consultation. Crofting has been central to Scottish land reform since the formation of the Crofting Reform Group in 1997, leading to the establishment of the crofting community right to buy and the new crofting legislation of 2007 and 2010. There is much work to be done to achieve the Land Reform Review Group recommendations to ensure that the common good of the people of Scotland is well served by its land resources.

"Crofting can bring people back to the vast tracts of land currently managed from tax

havens for the benefit of anonymous individuals or consortiums. The Scottish Government's will to tackle, at long last, such misuse of our land is to be applauded. Scotland is not only the European country with the most concentrated pattern of large-scale private land ownership, but also the European country where least is known about the pattern of private ownership. It is long past time this was addressed and we welcome the group's recommendations that land ownership must be accurately mapped."

SCF will be responding to the government consultation on land reform as we go to press, and our comments will be reported in the next edition of *The Crofter*.

Fiona also welcomed the Smith Commission proposals on the Crown Estate. "We are interested to see how responsibility for the management of the Crown Estate's economic assets in Scotland, and the associated revenue generated, translates

to the local level," she said. "We would expect such revenue to come to the areas where it is generated, such as the Western and Northern Isles. However, we question the capability of the highly-centralised Highland Council to return these assets to its west coast communities."

The Smith Commission also addresses Scotland's position in negotiations at European level. "We are at the bottom of the pile with the lowest Common Agriculture Policy payments from Europe," Fiona continued. "Scotland needs more and better ways to support crofting communities and to address the serious and worrying deficits coming to crofters as a result of the new CAP."

She concluded, "We are at a historic time for Scotland. Looking to the future, it is appropriate that our 16- and 17-year-olds have a say in our governance, as they did for the first time in the Crofting Commission elections and subsequently in the independence referendum."



Allan MacRae making the iconic announcement that "We have won the land" in 1993. L-r: John MacKenzie, Simon Fraser, Allan MacRae and Bill Ritchie

Allan MacRae memorial

A PIONEER OF LAND REFORM in Scotland is to be honoured with a fitting memorial.

A fundraising campaign was launched at the end of last year for a lasting tribute to Allan MacRae, former SCF council member for west Sutherland and co-founder of the ground-breaking Assynt Crofters' Trust.

Allan, aged 73, was found dead on the hill in June last year, within an hour's walk of his home at Torbreck near Lochinver.

Trust colleagues who declared at the time that "a light has gone out in the glen" hope the monument will reignite the flame. Vice-chairman Ray Mackay, a close friend for 20 years, said: "It was felt by the directors of the trust that Allan had been more than simply a functionary of the trust. We felt we should do something and the family thought it would be a very good idea to do this."

Allan was a talented stonemason, and the

memorial is envisaged as a curved wall of regular stone featuring a large rock, to signify something rough, elemental and prominent, along with a stone table and stone benches, sited at the trust office at Stoer. "We thought it was very fitting for the man, who was bit of a rough diamond," Mr Mackay added. "What was special about him was the way he connected with people, the obvious transparency and sincerity when he spoke."

"People's hearts warmed to him when they realised he was someone who spoke from the heart and from a tradition that went back many years."

The Assynt Crofters Trust was the first to become successfully involved in a community land buyout 21 years ago.

Allan MacRae led a steering group, partnered by SCU members Bill Ritchie of Achmelvich and John MacKenzie from Culkein, that fought off fragmentation of the 21,000-acre north Lochinver

estate by securing 100 per cent crofter ownership.

The 1993 deal was a milestone in Scottish and crofting history.

It began the modern community land movement that has seen 500,000 acres of land, mostly in the Highlands and Islands, taken over by local communities. Former first minister Alex Salmond set a target of doubling that by 2020.

To many supporters in Scotland and overseas, Allan MacRae was not only the charismatic public face of the trust, but widely considered its heart and soul.

Working closely with his family, the trust has opened an account for donations – the Allan MacRae Memorial Fund, sort code: 83-24-28, account 0015 5249, Royal Bank of Scotland, Lochinver, IV27 4LF.

Thanks to the Northern Times for use of this article

Scottish Rural Development Programme

THE PROPOSED SCOTTISH Rural Development Programme (SRDP) 2014-2020 went for approval by the European Commission in June 2014, with a response expected within six months.

The new programme is scheduled to start in early 2015, so hopefully much of it will be available when you read this.

The key purpose of the SRDP 2014-2020 is to help achieve sustainable economic growth in Scotland's rural areas. The priorities remain broadly the same as the previous programme:

- enhancing the rural economy;
- supporting agricultural businesses;
- protecting and improving the natural environment;
- addressing the impact of climate change;
- supporting rural communities.

The proposed schemes under the SRDP 2014-2020 are listed below. All schemes are subject to European Commission approval.

Less Favoured Areas Support Scheme

To provide essential support to fragile farming businesses in remote and constrained rural areas.

Forestry Grant Scheme

A range of grants for woodland creation, agro-forestry, tree health, woodland improvement, processing and marketing and sustainable management of forests.

Agri-environment Climate Scheme (including support for organics and footpaths)

Targeted support for land managers to undertake management and capital work for environmental purposes.

Environmental Co-operation Action Fund

Facilitation for land managers to work together to deliver collaborative environmental projects.

Beef Efficiency Scheme

To deliver economic and environmental improvements in the beef sector. Further information on the Beef Efficiency Scheme will be made available in due course.

New Entrants

Start-up grants for new entrant young farmers of up to 40 years old (as set by Europe). Capital funding for new entrants, regardless of age, to improve their business.

Crofting Agricultural Grant Scheme

Grants to crofters to take forward improvements on their crofts which will help to sustain their business.

Small Farms Grant Scheme

Targeted support for small farms which face similar sustainability issues to crofts.

Food Processing, Marketing and Co-operation

Support for SMEs in the food and drink sector with start-up grants for new enterprises; and business development grants.

LEADER

LEADER will provide opportunities for individuals, businesses and communities to come together to support rural development and provide long-lasting benefits to the local area. This will include support for non-agricultural small businesses, including farm diversification.

Knowledge Transfer and Innovation Fund

Taking advantage of strong performance in research and development and ensuring that the learning from here and elsewhere can be transferred to on-the-ground improvement. The scheme will assist in the sharing and implementation of innovative ways of improving working practices along with continuing support for monitor farms.

Advisory Service

Expanded advisory service which will provide advice and assistance to farmers, crofters, forest holders and other land managers. SG is aiming for this to be available from 2016.

Broadband

Support for broadband provision in rural areas.

Scottish Rural Network

Supporting and promoting rural development through the sharing of ideas and best practice.

Further information

A series of roadshows are scheduled to take place in early 2015 to explain the changes in the SRDP 2014-2020 schemes.

This information has been taken from the Scottish Government Rural Development website (www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/farmingrural/SRDP) where more details can be found.

MARCH 2ND DEADLINE FOR COMMON GRAZINGS AND REGIONS

Members are reminded that they must check their payment region allocations and if you disagree with the assessment, you must respond to SGRPID no later than **March 2nd 2015**.

Crofting at the Scottish Parliament

THE SCF is the secretariat for the Cross Party Group on Crofting (CPGoC) held in the Scottish Parliament every six weeks.

The group meetings are a forum for those involved in crofting to present issues to MSPs and to gain support in order to influence policy-makers. It is chaired by Jamie McGrigor MSP and has vice-chairs Jean Urquhart MSP and Rhoda Grant MSP. The CPGoC regularly sends letters to Scottish ministers urging action on certain issues, or raises parliamentary questions.

As the name implies, MSPs from all parties attend, which gives weight to any communications that come from the group. This is a very powerful means of informing government and influencing policy on crofting matters and the group was established at the outset of the Scottish Government at the suggestion of the SCU/SCF.

We appreciate that we have a Scottish Parliament that encourages this and MSPs willing to participate. Thanks also to speakers and government officials who attend.

In the past year the topics covered have included:

**Scottish Rural Parliament;
Croft House Grant Scheme;
Doing Better – the Brian Pack 'Red Tape' Inquiry;
Crofting Connections;
Sea eagles;
Care farming and social crofting;
Land Reform Review Group final report.**

Progress on crofting law (including the Sump and consolidation of acts), crofting development and CAP reform are standing items on the agenda. Patrick Krause arranges and reports on the regular meetings and he and other SCF representatives attend to inform and lobby participants on crofting issues.



CROFTING CONNECTIONS

We are the future

Brid McKibben reports

ONE OF THE HIGHLIGHTS of Crofting Connections this year has been widening our work in secondary schools.

We started with a gathering in Assynt in October 2014, with secondary pupils, teachers and crofters, supported by Crofting Connections and the Scottish Crofting Federation. Nearly a third of these pupils live on working crofts, some in community-owned crofting estates. Over half said they would like to work in their communities after finishing their studies.

Pupils discussed the future of crofting and their ideas for crofters producing food for their local communities. They visited Redbraes Croft at Achmelvich, part of the Assynt Crofters' Trust, where they spoke to crofters Anna and Ray MacKay about the range of food produced on the croft, including vegetables, lamb and dairy products from sheep's milk and looked at three different soil types on the croft with geologists Pete Harrison and Laura Stewart from the North

West Highland Geopark.

The main outcome of this event was the production of two short films by Robin Haig – Crofting: We Are the Future and Food from the Croft, the latter forming part of Crofting Connections' response to the Scottish Government's consultation Becoming a Good Food Nation.

In November we were offered several opportunities to invite pupils to answer questions at the screening of the films, helping them to realise that their voices are important in our democratic structures and to gain confidence in presenting the issues which are important to their generation.

Kira Holroyd and Caitlin Muir from Mallaig High attended the first Scottish Rural Parliament in Oban, where we had the first screening of Crofting: We Are the Future. It was exciting and inspiring for them to be part of the historic first SRP, where meeting cabinet secretary Richard Lochhead helped them to realize its significance.

They will be able to use this experience to inform their modern studies course.

Hannah Morrison very confidently answered questions after the screening of Crofting: We Are the Future at this year's Crofting Commission Assessors' Conference in Inverness. It was a great opportunity for delegates from all over the crofting counties to hear such an accomplished young ambassador for crofters of the future.

Callum Armes-Harris, Craig MacKay and Fraser MacDonald from Kinlochbervie High came to the Cross Party Group on Crofting in November at Holyrood for the third screening of Crofting: We Are the Future. They were delighted when they had the opportunity to meet the first minister, who expressed an interest in seeing the films.

They spoke about their dreams and hopes for the future in their own communities and reminded us all that young people need to have the opportunity to speak for themselves to those of us who are working for the future of crofting.



Callum Armes-Harris, Craig MacKay and Fraser MacDonald discuss crofting with First Minister Nicola Sturgeon



Anna MacKay tells the group about her croft produce



Red Braes croft, Achmelvich



Kira Holroyd and Caitlin Muir meet Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Environment Richard Lochhead

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Review of croft house grant scheme

SCF HAS provisionally welcomed a review of the Croft House Grant Scheme (CHGS) as long over-due, but questions whether proposals go far enough to restore the scheme to its original efficacy.

SCF chair Fiona Mandeville said, "We have been pressing for some years for the rates of grant to be reviewed, as they have long since fallen well behind actual costs faced by crofters building new homes on their crofts. In the ten years since the current rates were introduced, they have not been raised in line with escalating material costs. This has made it very difficult for many crofters; particularly the younger ones whom we all want to encourage, who need a home on the croft.

"As we go to press, we have not yet had time to consider the proposals in detail, but we will be taking members' views and responding to the consultation in due course. However, our initial view is that the proposed new rates are not nearly high enough. There are some new ideas for CHGS in the review which we feel will benefit crofters presently excluded from assistance, and this is a positive move, but it is very disappointing that the grant ceilings still fall far short of what is needed. We encourage our members to respond directly to

Scottish Government, and to make their comments known to SCF to be included in the SCF response.

"While even minimally increased grant rates are welcome, a grant is just one component of funding a new croft house. There remains the significant hurdle of lenders' reluctance to make a mortgage available to crofters, due to their lack of effort to understand crofting. We urge the Scottish Government to strengthen their good intentions on crofter housing by pressing mortgage providers to look again at finding ways to offer mortgages to crofters."

Crofting minister Dr Aileen McLeod said: "By law, crofters have to live on or close to their croft which can present challenges in terms of availability and quality of suitable housing. We know those are major factors in rural depopulation, so by offering financial assistance for constructing and upgrading residential properties, CHGS is helping to attract and retain people in our remote, rural and island communities.

"The CHGS launched 10 years ago and although building costs have gone up, the assistance rates we are able to contribute have not. While I am sympathetic to the case for increasing the size of grants on offer, I need evidence to make a decision that will benefit our remote

and rural communities."

The Scottish Government (SG) proposes to replace the three current geographical priority areas with two new areas. These new areas are to be the island (high priority) and non-island (standard priority) areas used for Common Agricultural Policy assistance.

Levels of assistance are to rise to £28,000 and £23,000 for the proposed new high and standard priority areas.

SG believes the cost of improving existing croft housing is broadly similar irrespective of location. The assistance offered will be standardised to a maximum of 40% of the proposed £28,000 and £23,000 in the new geographical areas.

Grants will continue to fund construction or improvement of houses appropriate to the immediate, or near future needs, of the applicant crofter household – with the requirement that all new houses, with rare exception, should have no fewer than three bedrooms.

No assistance is proposed towards the construction of a three-bedroom house costing more than £170,000. But an additional £15,000 would be added to the cap for each additional bedroom required in a house to meet the immediate, or near future needs, of the applicant crofting household. For example, no

assistance would be offered to a four-bedroom house costing more than £185,000 or to a five-bedroom house costing more than £200,000.

Implementation of business plans will, in future, become a condition of grant. Breaching the business plan may lead to action to recover grants.

CHGS assistance would be available on the construction of croft houses on land adjoining the croft, or adjacent if there is no adjoining land. Assistance for the improvement of houses whose historical link to the croft has been removed by decrofting is also proposed.

The Crofting Reform (Scotland) Act 2010 introduced the principle of equal treatment for both tenant and owner-occupier crofters, requiring each to fulfil the same duties and responsibilities. In line with this, the clause restricting owner-occupier crofters to assistance for a limited period of time after purchase of the croft will be removed when replacement regulations are made.

Written responses to the consultation must be received by SG by 31 March 2015. If you wish your views to be incorporated into the SCF response, please get these to SCF HQ no later than 16 March.

The consultation can be viewed online at www.scotland.gov.uk/consultations.



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TRAINING

Croft diversification

SCF vice-chair Yvonne White reports

THE SCF'S SECOND crofting diversification two-day course was held at the Aros Centre, Portree, Isle of Skye at the end of November 2014.

The first diversification course was held at Newtonmore a few months earlier. So far the diversification courses have seen a good attendance of existing crofters seeking to update their knowledge in a particular area or wondering about the ins and outs of how to diversify into other areas. However, this course was not only attended by existing crofters but also those with an interest and appreciation of how vital diversification is for the natural environment.

That said, crofting has never been about monoculture.

Traditionally crofting has been about diversification. Years ago it did not have such a fancy strap-line. Instead it was described, amongst other things, as subsistence living or eking out a living from mainly agriculturally-poor fragile landscapes in the crofting counties. To enable them to eke out a living from crofting, our forefathers had to be adept and skilful at extensive and sustainable agricultural practices.

These included growing turnips, cabbage, carrots and potatoes for the household as well as for animal fodder in the stark, bleak, cold winter months (nothing much changed there), plus keeping a house cow for

milk, as well as maybe a few other cows whose offspring were sold at the local mart. Sheep, hens, ducks and bees were all common on crofts of the past as was growing hay, oats and corn for winter animal feed.

So crofting, by its nature, is in essence about diversification or sustainability. Nowadays we may have polytunnels, machinery and many other tools to help reduce the manual effort involved in crofting, but the diversification element of crofting has remained unchanged.

In the spirit of diversification there were many expert course speakers covering a range of pertinent disciplines.

Day one started with an excellent talk by Siobhan MacDonald and Ross MacKenzie of SAC Consulting, Portree, on breeding and rearing a range of livestock for meat production. This included breed selection, finishing and condition scoring.

Ross's section on pigs was particularly fascinating for those of us who knew little about keeping pigs. The sessions on environmental health, food standards and presenting your croft produce covering labelling, weights and measures, best-before dates and other regulation on croft produce for sale were most useful for those selling or wishing to sell croft produce.

The highlight of day one, judging by the amount of course attendees jumping to their feet taking

photographs, was the practical session on meat production for added value. This involved Alastair Dickie of Polaris Training skilfully demonstrating how to butcher a wedder lamb.

Day two started with a first-class session by Donald Murdie on croft horticulture, covering both polytunnel and vegetable patch growing. There was then a memorable session on permaculture and an informative session by Local Food Scotland.

All in all a most diverse, informative and interesting two-day course. Thanks must go to Lucy and Tina, the SCF trainers, for organising and creating such a fantastic and relevant course for existing, new and potential crofters.



Alastair Dickie of Polaris Training demonstrating how to butcher a lamb

"The problem is the solution"

is how Sandy from Rubha Phopil described the essence of permaculture design.

"Love your weeds— they provide food and shelter for wildlife"

—Sandy Masson on weeds.

Hill crofter training scheme: looking for interested crofters

THE FOUNDATION FOR Common Land (FCL) is a national charity set up to support the continuation of public benefits from active grazing on common land throughout Great Britain.

FCL comprises active commons graziers' organisations and professionals working in the sector and seeks to address the threats and opportunities for common land and its management.

During 2012 and 2013 FCL developed and piloted a hill farming training project to fill a gap identified by a number of hill farmers in

Cumbria who farm common land as part of their farm business. In their view many of the staff they came across working for government organisations and conservation NGOs had limited understanding of how hill farming works and, in particular, the management of common land. This led to misunderstandings and poorer working relationships between the farmers and the professionals.

They came up with the idea of inviting these people on to their farms to learn directly from the farmer how s/he manages the farm and common land and gain

some hands-on experience. FCL worked with hill livestock farmers in Cumbria to develop the idea and obtain the funding to deliver 19 training courses to DEFRA, RSPB, NGOs and conservation bodies.

Now FCL has obtained further funding to roll out this training programme in Wales and Scotland in 2015/16. FCL has approached SCF Training to promote and manage the Scottish programme.

SCF Training would like to hear from any crofters who are interested in being involved with this scheme. You will need to be an active crofter who uses common

grazing, willing to give up two days of your time to travel to Cumbria and meet the upland livestock farmers who were involved in the pilot scheme and host a training day for agency staff and others on your croft. Full support and training will be given by SCF Training and FCL staff and you will be remunerated at a daily rate for your time, travel and expenses.

For more info please register your interest by email to lucy@crofting.org or telephone 01854 612311. We aim to have four crofters in place in February.

TRAINING

Popular practical courses in Orkney

Edwina Lloyd from Voluntary Action Orkney describes the range of courses she organised in 2014.

AT THE END of 2013, Tina and Lucy persuaded us to facilitate the six practical skills courses and the two-day entry level course here in Orkney for the first time. Perhaps rashly, we decided that this was indeed a good idea!

Our normal line of work is supporting and representing the views of community groups with constitutions, governance, fund raising, becoming and remaining a charity, keeping correct accounts, changing structure, dissolving, employment and many others, including different types of training courses.

To this latter, we were to add forestry – not something immediately expected in Orkney's treeless landscape; hen keeping – we have a lot of those; polytunnel management and propagation of shrubs – quite a few of the former and less after a strong gale; dry-stone dyking – LOTS of those in various states of repair; environment needing conserving – much fantastic landscape and wildlife; and land needing drains, ditches and fences – lots of that as Orkney is a huge farming area.

I was eager to learn about these subjects myself, and I did. My main aim was to have community groups, wherever possible, receiving

benefit from the training, whether through hire of a room, or work being done on their site. To this end I tried wherever possible to use community buildings for classroom-based sessions and land owned by a community group to be used for the training.

Hence a charity, The Friends of Happy Valley had trees planted and maintained. Another, The Blide Trust (a mental health organisation) provided refreshments for a few of the courses and had work done in the polytunnel they share with the local day centre.

I learned a lot, met many very nice folk and received much positive feedback about the courses I had arranged and the folk I had brought together.

Add to all this the extra requests for an organic crofting course (spring 2015) and an extra shrub propagation and dry-stone dyking course as well as a call for a pig butchery course – then this year has been a very busy and positive one. Land management will take place in February 2015 and that should complete the requirement for SCF.

It's been a good year for participants and hens, but less so for some pigs. Hey, that's life!

For more information on Orcadian crofting courses contact Edwina Lloyd, Voluntary Action Orkney, on 01856 872 897. SCF Training will also be hosting some training courses on Westray in 2015; contact training@crofting.org for more info.



Entry level class



Dyke building

SCF international sheepdog training

Linda Lyon from Montana, USA, attended an SCF training course. Here she shares her experience.

ON A BEAUTIFUL, sunny October day near the town of Ardgay, I was met by Cara Cameron, a co-ordinator for the Scottish Crofting Federation training programme, who had helped me sign up for a sheepdog workshop from my home in Montana.

I found out about the workshops and training offered by the SCF by searching on the organisation's website. On sabbatical from my university in the USA, I hoped it would aid me in

meeting crofters for my research on sustainable agricultural practices in Scotland and for my own interest in sheep dogs. As a crofter herself, Cara provided great insight into the challenges and rewards of agriculture.

We continued on to the site of the clinic where we were introduced to Brian Ross, crofter and sheep dog trainer. Brian took our mixed group in stride and outlined his philosophy of handling dogs and more importantly, dogs around stock. As a dog trainer myself, I fully appreciated his positive approach to working with sheep dogs.

The border collie is an amazing breed of dog

known for its intelligence, speed and agility... the most difficult part of this is that we do not describe most of the human owners of the border collie the same way! This means that Brian had his hands full teaching us decidedly less intelligent, slower and less agile beings how to help our dogs be successful with sheep!

Training was well underway by mid-day, when we stopped for a delightful lunch provided in Brian's home. Conversations ranged from sheepdog rearing and sheep breeds to the politics of successful crofting. This conversation was quite helpful to me, and most likely to new crofters, as mentorship from those more experienced is as old as time itself.

The afternoon had the dogs back in the field with owners in tow. One of the best aspects of the workshop was how Brian was able to modify the clinic for different levels of experience across dogs and people. A good teacher is one who can help students learn from one another and Brian was quite successful incorporating this concept into the workshop.

As an outsider looking in, I learned a great deal in terms of sheepdog handling and the challenges faced by crofters. Although agriculture is not for the faint of heart, I can only believe that it must be helpful for new crofters to know that educational opportunities are available to help with all aspects of crofting. Most importantly it is great to know that the place to go for sheepdog help is Ardgay.



HUNGRY FOR RIGHTS

SCF food activists visit France



THREE SCF MEMBERS involved in the Hungry for Rights (HfR) project recently spent an intensive three-day exchange visit in Sacy-le-Grand, in Picardie, northern France. This was the first meeting of participants from Scotland, Cyprus, Italy, France and Lithuania. Since the HfR project aims at collaboration across social groups, among the delegates were small-scale producers, members of consumer organisations, migrant organisations and local authorities.

International experiences with direct sales

The first day was spent exchanging countries' contexts and experiences. Four small producers and a lawyer from Cyprus spoke about agricultural biodiversity, the use of traditional products and wild plants for essential oils, core aspects of the project in Cyprus.

Four female farmers from Lithuania were all involved in farmers' markets. "Not enough circulation of people" was a very familiar challenge. The only way small-scale producers can survive there is through direct sales and co-operatives. However, decades of communism seemed to have lowered the zeal for co-operation.

In Italy the project is implemented in metropolitan Milan, with 10 million potential customers. Ethical purchasing groups – collective purchasing groups linking consumers and producers around fair prices and good quality – have been around since 1994. In Milan alone there are 84 collective purchasing groups. Supporting farmers is an important driver. Project participants work to overcome problems of co-ordination in collective groups. Creating food networks; promoting local food at municipal level; and strengthening collaboration with local authorities are all activities in the Italian working groups.

In France, the farmers themselves started forms of direct sales known as AMAP: box schemes with advance payments at the start of the growing season. This allows the grower to bridge the difficult early season cash flow. It includes a contract between grower and consumer. The terms and conditions of such a scheme – between producers, eaters and the organisers' enablers – were being reviewed in a Hungry for Rights working group. Solidarity with small-scale farmers is an important motivation for consumers to join a group. This requires trust, and an interesting discussion developed

between the post-communist Lithuanians and the French and Italians about the motivation of customers.

SCF's input: from Barra to Skye

Although SCF's delegation was small, members' length and depth of involvement in food issues more than made up for the small size of the party. Sarah Maclean from the Barra and Vatersay agricultural and horticultural association, Bùth Bharraidh, and manager of the Hebridean Living project, explained the context of small-island living and crofting and the challenges of running a local shop and marketing local produce. Barra was a best-practice case study for the project. Here it was the scale of small remote island food production and the persistence of the Barra group that drew attention and fascination, especially from the urban part of the audience.

Small-scale local food production based on organic methods was presented briefly by Skye Permaculture's Sandy Masson. This received such interest that an extra session on permaculture was organised at the breakfast table the next morning. This was later reworked into a well-received SCF talk at the recent SCF diversification seminar in Portree.

SCF's contribution to the recent Scottish Government food policy *Becoming a Good Food Nation* was illustrated by SCF member Elisabeth Seary. This was followed by the Crofting Connections video, *Food from The Croft* directed and produced by Robin Haig, shot in Assynt in early October. It was sent in as a contribution to the Scottish Government consultation *Becoming a Good Food Nation*. A Cypriote delegate said it had moved her deeply "to see young people talking about food issues." An Italian delegate was interested to know how these young aspiring crofters see their future in crofting. Unfortunately there was no opportunity to show the second Crofting Connections video, *Crofting: We are The Future* which contained the answer... hopefully the video will go online in the near future!

New entrants models in France

One of the best parts of international visits is to learn new ways of doing things. A very interesting path of farm succession came up in a discussion group during the exchange. Terre de Liens



Sarah MacLean (2nd right) tells the group about Bùth Bharraidh

"It was a wonderful experience and I am looking forward to working with the other delegates throughout the coming months. It was amazing the similarities we found between Barra and Cyprus, with the massive influx of tourists in the summer months and how we can deliver local food to them. I have taken great ideas from the other delegates to add to our work in Barra."

Sarah MacLean



Vegetable vending machine



HUNGRY FOR RIGHTS

Local food



THE SKYE and Lochalsh area group held an open meeting in Portree in October, on the theme of local produce development.

Store livestock production remains by far the largest crofting activity and, after a shaky start to this year's marketing season, prices have settled and demand for the quality stock produced in the crofting areas is strong. This route to market will not suit all crofters or other small producers, however, such as those with slow-maturing native and traditional breeds.

The meeting heard of the continuing progress towards establishment of an abattoir in Skye, which will facilitate direct marketing of locally-produced beef, lamb and pork to satisfy a known demand.

The meeting also discussed how to restart the progress that was made in horticultural production in the area over the last twenty years and whether a producer group for that sector could be re-established.

The SCF area will make contact

with other recent initiatives on local produce, including the Highland Council and Destination Skye and Lochalsh. SCF area chair Yvonne White said, "We had very useful input to the discussion from a variety of crofters and other small producers, ranging from large-scale livestock keepers to small-scale horticulturists. There is lots of high-quality food being produced here and there is plenty of demand from local consumers and from high-end catering establishments. We will need to work together to fulfil the potential for the benefit of crofters and other small producers."

The meeting was funded for SCF Skye and Lochalsh area by the Community Food Fund "Think Local" and supported from SCF HQ as part of the Hungry for Rights alternative food system project.

It will see two follow-up meetings with speakers early in 2015, one for Portree and one for the south end, likely to be held in Broadford, with vegetable production on the agenda.

is a French foundation that has been purchasing abandoned farms throughout France and making them available to new entrants, on conditional tenancies and as an investment partnership. The interest in this project was such that, in less than six months since it started, Terre de Liens has been able to raise €6 million. It has acquired six farms and is in the process of acquiring four more as bequests or donations.

"Farm couveuse" is a educational practice in which a retiring farmer teaches a new entrant who will take over the farm and learns in a couple of years how to make a business plan, find land and start a farm business.

The founder of the foundation has recently been over in Scotland to inform Nourish Scotland's new farmers. A wide-scoping interview with him can be seen on-line and touches on the history, the success of the foundation, on French tenancy law, land transfer control and how this model should become more widespread throughout Europe to encourage more young

people into farming. <http://vimeo.com/111000979> (with English subtitles). More information is also available in the brochure *Terre de Liens Removing land from the commodity market and enabling organic and peasant farmers to settle in good conditions* at www.terredeliens.org/IMG/pdf/2012_terre_de_liensl.pdf

On the same web page is another interesting example of creating access to land for new entrants. The German social enterprise Regionalwert AG (a regional value shareholders society) has 500 shareholders investing on average €1000 in the company. So far €1.6 million has been invested in nine farms belonging to young farmers who are not able to borrow from regular banks. Loans are made on the condition that the farming is done environmentally soundly, socially responsibly and is maintaining the landscape. A short video (in English): www.youtube.com/watch?v=11hmqZmwHg.



ON THE CROFT

Preparing for sheep voluntary coupled support: the hogg payment

UNDER THE NEW CAP some readers, although not all, will be eligible to claim a support payment for each ewe hogg under the Sheep Voluntary Coupled Support scheme (VCS).

This will supplement the lower payment they will receive for their rough grazings of approximately €10 rather than €35 per hectare. To qualify for the payment:

- 80% of your land must be in Region 3;
- you must claim less than 200 ha of Region 1 land;
- ewe hoggs must be home bred.

If you meet these criteria you can claim one ewe hogg for every four hectares of Region 3 land. Some of the detail is not clarified yet; it is thought that in September you will need to supply a list of full tag numbers for ewe hoggs you wish to claim. You will need to notify the department of the tag numbers of any deaths. The retention period will likely run from October to March.

Some people refer to this payment as the Golden €100. However, this figure is not set in stone and may vary depending on the number of animals claimed each year. Also this scheme is to maintain sheep numbers, so if the ewe flock increased nationally, then the scheme may need to be reconsidered.

So if you are a business that will qualify for this ewe hogg payment, what business planning should you be undertaking?

Planning for a different cash flow profile

At present sheep enterprises in this region 3 get their support payments in March and December.

However the new profile will look like graph 1.

If SFP and LFASS are normally used to pay off winter bills, will this need to be reconsidered and changes made? See graph 2

Inspections

We suspect the ewe hogg payment will increase your chances of coming up for an inspection. So, what preparations should you make to ensure this is as stress-free as possible?

- Apply tags in sequence to the hoggs you are keeping and keep a note of the tag numbers at the time, ie 00123-00152 (30 animals).
- Have your hoggs somewhere where you will be able to keep an eye on deaths and make a note of tag numbers so you can inform the department.
- Keep a close eye on tag replacements and make a note in your records, cross referenced with the old tag if possible.
- If you away-winter hoggs you will need to make sure that there is a system in place with the winterer, to record losses etc.

After the retention you do not need to keep any animals as breeding ewes, so this is a good opportunity to carefully select the best sheep as ewe replacements.

Ideally you should select your ewe hoggs as below:

- structurally sound and correct;
- weight – exclude the bottom 10% in weight.
- If you want twins, keep ewe lambs that were twins.

Any ewe hoggs not to be kept for your flock should be marked and sold when practicable.

What should I do if my lamb production is poor?

The 2015 lambing will produce the first animals that will be eligible for the ewe hogg scheme. Therefore it is important to consider the health of your flock.

Speak to your vet about health planning. In order to minimise losses it is important to take preventative measures against diseases which pose a threat to both your ewes and lambs.

If scanning and/or handling the ewes during pregnancy, then the body condition score should be assessed and appropriate action taken. In order to avoid twin-lamb disease ewes should be fed according to foetal load. Thin ewes should be segregated for additional feeding. If you want to assess the adequacy of the diet, then six ewes from each group should be blood sampled four weeks before the start of lambing.

It is important that we get the nutrition of the pregnant ewe correct. 85% of foetal lamb growth

occurs during the last two months of pregnancy. The udder also develops as ewes approach lambing. Nutrient requirements increase by around 50% in ewes carrying a single, and 70% in ewes carrying twins at this time. There is a high demand for protein now, so high DUP feed ingredients, such as soya, are best.

A good idea is to use a protein source, such as soya, fed at 100g/day/lamb carried for the last three weeks of pregnancy – this will stimulate milk production, improve the quality of colostrum and increase lamb vigour.

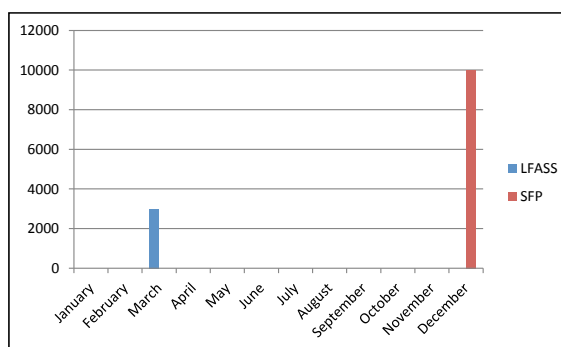
Fluke and worms can play a key role in reducing flock productivity. Screening should be undertaken on apparently healthy flocks as well as those with ill thrift, scour or death. Faecal samples can be analysed at your local SAC disease surveillance centre, should you wish to check for parasites. Ten faecal samples submitted separately can be pooled at the laboratory in order to screen for worms and fluke.

Clostridial disease may lead to lamb losses. Therefore please discuss your vaccination regime with your vet. This not only includes annual vaccination of ewes but the full vaccination course for lambs.

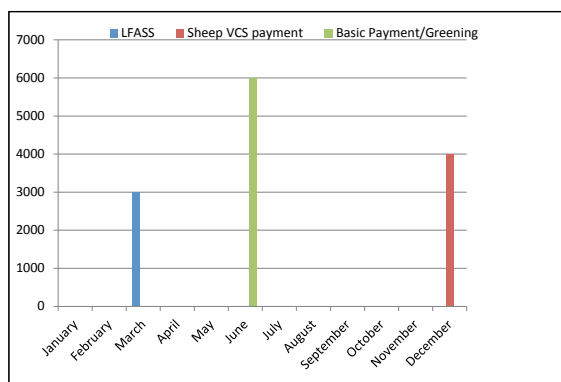
There are various causes of ill thrift and death in lambs and ewes. If ill thrift or losses arise, please discuss these with your vet. Prompt post-mortem examination of fresh carcase(s) or investigation of ill thrift may help reduce further losses.

If you have queries about anything raised in this article please contact your local vet or SAC office.

Janette Sutherland and Fiona Bannerman, SAC



Graph 1



Graph 2

ON THE CROFT

Donald's horti-blog



WE CAN ONLY hope that crofting horticulturists have come through the recent severe storm conditions with a minimum of damage. We have heard of some serious losses and we sympathise with those affected.

We have certainly been reminded of the need to carry out winter maintenance to our polytunnels. They will need to be thoroughly checked over for

any holes and tears, and if these are attended to straight away, that may prevent the loss of a cover. Polytunnel covers are extremely strong, and minor damage may not be a disaster, so long as it is dealt with before it gets any worse. Repair tape is available from horticultural suppliers and it should be liberally applied to damaged areas, inside and out, having first dried the surface with old towels.

While inspecting the polytunnel, look out for any steel or timber parts that are coming into contact with the cover. These should be padded out with offcuts of polythene, bubble-wrap or any suitable soft material. Also look out for anything around the place (or neighbouring premises!) that could become airborne and land on the polythene.

Whenever the weather permits, winter is the time to be clearing ditches and drains around growing areas. The time for digging/ploughing/rotavating will be upon us very quickly, and getting surface water away will make it possible to get on to the ground earlier in the spring.

The huge tides and waves of this winter will have landed a plentiful supply of seaweed on west-facing shores. Make the most of it. Cover any vacant ground with a good layer of seaweed. This will reduce leaching and erosion of precious soil nutrients; and earthworms will incorporate

as it rots down. Anything that is left in spring is dug in. Seaweed also has a slow-release liming effect, especially when gathered from a shell-sand beach. If all else fails use heavy black polythene (the kind used on silage pits), weighted down with tyres or sand bags, to protect the soil. This technique is also very good for suppressing vegetation on new ground prior to breaking in.

If the weather totally precludes outside work, it may well be possible to prepare ground inside polytunnels. The sooner the soil is turned, the sooner it will warm up and become available for early season sowing. Now is the time also to be planning for the growing season. Look through stocks of seeds and assess what can still be used, then do the seed orders.

This is the time also to order things like strawberry plants for polytunnel planting, as well as hardy hedging and trees for shelter belts. It's a very good idea also to work out a rotational cropping plan, thinking about what ground will be required for which crop and when.

Note. Gathering of seaweed is governed in some townships by the grazings regulations. If in doubt, ask.

donald@crofting.org

Mastitis in sheep

IN DAIRY CATTLE, it's all about the udder.

In meat sheep, which form the majority of sheep in the UK, we tend to overlook the udder. Without an udder, however, there is no milk and without milk, there is no lamb growth. Inflammation of the udder, also known as mastitis, reduces milk production and threatens lamb survival. Mastitis also threatens the health and survival of ewes.

Unlike cattle, where mastitis is almost invariably caused by bacteria, sheep may get mastitis through infection with bacteria or with viruses. This distinction is important, because prevention and treatment strategies differ between the two. There is no point in treating viral infections with antimicrobials; and crofters and veterinarians should refrain from doing this. Testing, culling and certification programmes are the best way to deal with viral mastitis, which is mostly caused by the *Maedi-Visna* virus.

In the case of bacterial mastitis, the worst offender is *Mannheimia haemolytica*, formerly known as *Pasteurella haemolytic*. *Mannheimia* generally causes acute mastitis, resulting in blue and cold udders, often leading to the immediate death of the animal or to sloughing off of the udder, with secondary infection and delayed death as a consequence. For those animals, treatment usually comes too late and euthanasia may be the most humane way to deal with cases. However, not every animal with *Mannheimia* is a "dead sheep walking". In fact, it is quite common for healthy animals to carry *Mannheimia*, although usually it is the lambs carrying it in their mouths.

Not every blue udder is due to *Mannheimia*. In rare cases, the culprit may be *Staphylococcus aureus*. *Staphylococcus aureus* may also cause chronic mastitis, leading to localized abscesses or lumps in the udder, or shrinkage and hardening of an udder half. Like *Mannheimia*, *Staphylococcus aureus* can be carried by healthy animals, eg in their nose and on their skin. Both bacteria, and some others, mostly cause disease after teat damage. Damage can be the result of severe weather conditions or lack of milk production, resulting in excessive sucking by hungry lambs.

Thus, the prevention of mastitis may need to happen not via the animals' udders, but via

their stomachs. Adequate nutrition, particularly adequate protein supply in the last ten weeks before lambing, helps to ensure adequate milk production, providing protection for lambs and ewes alike.

The best tools for mastitis control continue to be prevention through good nutrition and hygiene, checking of udders at lambing, weaning and before mating – and treatment of cases in consultation with your veterinarian.

For more information about livestock health matters and the work of Moredun please visit www.moredun.org.uk



ON THE CROFT

Croft tourism tales

Crofters are often encouraged to diversify into tourism, writes SCF director Joyce Wilkinson.

THIS WORKS ADMIRABLY most of the time, but running a tourism business together with running a working croft – as opposed to a hobby croft with a few pet sheep – requires certain talents if you are to avoid the drawbacks. Looking after a herd of tourists on the croft while simultaneously looking after livestock can present a few challenges.

For example, calving. What could be nicer for the holidaymakers than the sight of new born calves out in the sun. Some are lucky enough to be passing the byre or the field just when the cow starts. It won't be long before a small crowd has gathered, eagerly awaiting the birth. What you don't want in this situation is a dead calf; tourists don't like that at all. As we all know, these times are fraught enough without having to deal with the reactions of people who have no idea of the realities.

There will always be a risk of tourists being confronted by deadstock. A particularly busy Saturday in July is not the time to be having to shoot a sick beast in full view of new customers, but the welfare of the animals will always come first on a croft. You can only hope it doesn't end up on Tripadvisor.

Still, the educational value to the guests can't be underestimated. The middle-aged, well-spoken gentleman who happened to be passing by when a heifer was getting a visit from the AI man asked keenly, "Are you getting the calf out?"

only to be told "No, but I am putting one in." An audible silence followed.

The biggest threat to any tourism business being run from a working croft is the very real danger of *E coli*. This is a serious risk, and of course all livestock must be segregated from any areas used by people other than the crofter. The crofter him- or herself is of course a walking *E coli* risk and the dilemma of whether to shake hands or explain why you can't can be tricky.

Any well-run business involving the public will have its rules and regulations, but when it comes to running a croft, the animals don't always abide by the rules. A bad calving on a Saturday changeover day, or a bull deciding to take a short-cut over a fence and ending up in the caravan site, can test even the most thorough risk assessment. The bull in question was horned, black and hairy, but luckily he also possessed another Highland quality: he liked to take his time and was distracted by

a bucket and a rope before anyone spotted him.

There are, of course, benefits to sharing your croft with many thousands of people every summer. Among them there will always be helpful souls who won't be offended by being told "Stand there until you're told to move!" "Hold this and pull when I say!" or "Do you fancy spending half an hour unloading a few tonnes of hay?"

Some even go beyond this to be helpful. Shifting the cows down the road at 5am to avoid the traffic and the hazards of meeting people, a jogger came into view, heading towards the herd at full speed, oblivious to the mayhem he was about to create. "Just disappear!" yelled at full force did the trick that time, as the poor fellow jumped over the side of a bridge and was never seen again.

If you are toying with the idea of taking in a few tourists on the croft, it is very rewarding, but there will always be tales to tell!



Seamus the highland pony used to like sneaking into the campsite

Shetland cattle emigrate to Australia

Former SCF director Paddy Zakaria gives an update on her ground-breaking project.

LATE LAST YEAR I wrote an article for *The Crofter* about my project to start an off-shore herd of Shetland cattle in Australia. The Shetland, "the crofter's coo", is an ancient rare breed with no population outside this country and is therefore at risk if a serious disease outbreak were to occur.

At the time I reported last year, I had been

successful in creating sixteen embryos, using semen held by the Rare Breeds Survival Trust from the only two bulls that qualify for import into Australia, which has very stringent import regulations. If a Shetland herd is to be created from the sixteen embryos then further semen collections would be necessary, to fertilise any females born.

Early this year I shipped the embryos to Australia and I travelled there in March to prepare the recipient Ayrshire heifers for the implanting.

Thirteen embryos were implanted in April and the remaining three are in storage for the future. We prepared twenty heifers, but it is usual that not all prepared recipients will be ready for implanting at the appointed time and seven were rejected.

The success rate for frozen embryos is around 50% so I expected six or seven pregnancies from the thirteen implants. True to the statistics I have seven Ayrshire heifers in calf. The bonus is that all of the donor cows have at least one embryo that has resulted in a pregnancy and there are pregnancies from both the bulls used. This is a great result and will give me the complete genetic spread that I aimed for at the start. The recipients are due to calve in the second half of January and I am about to travel down to Australia for the births.

During the year I collected semen from three more bulls, giving me in total semen from six widely unrelated bulls. Depending on the sex of the calves born, it is conceivable that this will be enough to give the new herd the necessary genetic diversity long into the future.

So, as long as at least some heifers result from the seven pregnancies, the new Australian Shetland herd (under the name of "Zetralia") will be under way in 2015.

Congratulations to Paddy on this achievement.



Balou, a rare Shetland brindle bull

ON THE CROFT

Mialan

HAI WHAUR YE GAUN, ye crowlin ferlie? Sin mar a labhair Burns ri mial!

'S ann nuair a tha iad a-staigh sa bhàthach aig toiseach a' gheamhraidh a thòisicheas beathaichean air suathadh. Ma tha post no rèil nach eil daingean, chan fhada gu lasaich iad e. Agus dè tha toirt orra tachas mar seo? Am bitheantas 's e a' mhiail a nì an cron. Agus dè tha sinn a' dèanamh mu deidhinn? Uill tha sreath de stuthan cemiceach leithid "spot-on" a chuireas as dhith. Chan ann saor idir a tha na stuthan seo ge-tà, pàighidh tu leth-cheud not airson 250ml den stuth spotach

ud. Dè nì thu mura bheil thu airson airgead mar sin a chosg, no ma tha thu an aghaidh pyrethroids a làimhseachadh? Dè b'abhaist daoine dèanamh mus do nochd na cemicails seo?

Uill bha mi a' leughadh o chionn goirid air dòighean organach. An toiseach mu na rudan a dhèanadh tu gus mialan a sheachnadh ann an crodh. Dèan cinnteach gu bheil gu leòr a bhiadh aca agus àite glan le rùm gu leòr dhaibh ma tha iad a-staigh. Uill tha sin ciallach, agus rud eile tha math, 's e sin solas na grèine, nì nach eil cho pailte aig an àm seo bhliadhna! An uair sin ma nochdas na mialan, gabhaidh ola

no siabann a chur am feum gus na mialan a mhùchadh - rudan a dh'fheuch mi fhìn gun mòran soirbheachaidh. Tha cuideachd corra lus èifeachdach ann a bhios a' marbhadh nam biastagan seo.

'S iad sin: an creamh - lus aig a bheil feartan làidir a thaobh marbhadh bhiastan beaga, a' pheighinn riaghail (a tha na sheòrsa de mheannt), agus an ròs-màiri. 'S e gu sònraichte ola bho na lusan sin a bhios feumail an aghaidh na miala, ach tha pùdar creamha èifeachdach cuideachd. Tha fada bharrachd obrach ann a bhith cleachdadh nan cungaidhean seo ge-tà, feumar an suathadh a-staigh far a bheil

na mialan a' bideadh seach a bhith leigeil le leithid deltamethrin sgapadh tron bhodhaig e fhèin. Ach an dèidh sin 's na dhèidh tha a' chosgais nas isle agus tha thu seachnadh cemicail a dh'fhaodadh a bhith cunnartach.

Ged a tha pyrethroids gam meas gu ìre mhòr sàbhailte, tha iad a' dèanamh cron air èisg agus biastagan beò ann an uisge, agus air tàilleamh 's gur e neurotoxins a th'annta dh'fhaodadh buaidh neo-aithnichte a bhith aca air daoine. Mar sin 's fheàrr sinn an seachnadh mas urrainn.

Gabhan Mac a'Phearsain

A long-lived Gotland tup

Tupping time came round in November and once again I had enquiries to use my pedigree Gotland tup, Whitehall Fraser, writes Paddy Zakaria.

THE GOTLAND breed originates from the island of Gotland in Sweden and is a "three-crop" sheep, producing beautiful, fine, lustrous, curly silver-grey fleece, excellent tasty meat, and fine suede-textured furskins which are prized for clothing. Gotlands are a hardy, friendly and easily-managed sheep which, as well as the attributes above, produce ewes suitable for extensive/rough grazing commercial systems when cross-bred.

Each year someone always wants to use Fraser. I mentioned to the enquirer this year that he is getting on a bit, six or seven, but when I checked I was surprised to find that the old boy is actually ten years old.

I thought back to the time Fraser first came to me. I had been keeping Gotlands for a couple of years then, and I was needing to replace the pedigree tup I had, Whitehall Alistair, that had come up from Devon where Gotlands are fairly numerous. I had been contacted by the monks of Golgotha Monastery on Papa Stronsay, Orkney, who were interested in starting a Gotland flock on their island and, to cut a long story short, we decided, between us, to buy two unrelated pedigree shearling tups and fourteen gimmers from Devon.

In due course the sheep arrived.

I did the driving and collected them from Carlisle and took them the three ferry trips to Papa Stronsay. Fraser was one of the tups and the other was Frank. The intention had been to swap Fraser and Frank after a couple of years but somehow the swap never happened and Fraser is still with me.

I ceased breeding pure Gotlands some years ago but, unlike his predecessor Alistair, who was an aggressive and dangerous fellow, Fraser has always been a gentleman to deal with, and this has bought him longevity. His only failing is that he will jump like a stag when the scent of ewes is in the air so he needs to be kept securely inside from October until tupping time. I used Fraser with Herdwick ewes for several years, producing strong, docile hardy progeny which inherited the Gotland fine fleece.

Nowadays I keep him because he is a character and has become a bit of a fixture on the croft, and each year there is always someone who wants to use him. Last year he went to a flock of Gotlands early in the season and followed that with a flock of Shetlands, and this year he has gone to Orkney to a group of Gotland ewes which are descendants of Frank.

Despite reaching double figures Fraser is in fine form, continues his record of never having missed a ewe, and still leaves fine, lively lambs. When I bought him in 2006 I expected I would use him for two years. Nine years later he is still around and threatens to be so for the foreseeable future!



Fraser



Fraser has done his job

ON THE CROFT

Blueberry cultivation on Skye

Ian Brown explains how he does it.

GOT THE USE of a field in north west Skye in 2000. It had last been grazed 13 years before.

The soil was of varying types and depths ranging from boggy to very shallow over rock, but with the main part suitable for growing. As the soil was a bit acid I wondered if blueberries would be suitable. There was nobody growing blueberries commercially on the west coast and advice pointed to various problems, so I looked into things carefully.

It turned out the real problems faced are wind speed and the higher winter temperatures on the west. When blueberries are dormant in the winter, the buds can start to open if there is a spell of warm weather and then if hard frost follows it's possible to lose much of the following season's fruit.

I did a trial of just 20 bushes while planting the shelter belts and putting in wind netting to protect the shelter trees and bushes. Shelter was chosen from trees suitable for salty and windy conditions; and types giving plenty for pollinators, as they improve the blueberry crop.

The ground was prepared by draining, ditching then rotavating in strips using a mini-tractor and incorporating a compost, seaweed, wood-chip and Glenphos rock dust. This is not the conventional way of doing it, but the idea was to make the ground ready to adapt to the sort of conditions in which blueberries would naturally grow in America, which is a forest-edge condition with root mycorrhiza.

As you might gather, organic principals have been followed and it's hard to see any disadvantages with this crop.

The trial was too short to be really sure, but I bought 300 bushes both the next year and the year after that and laid them out with wire supports to hold the bushes. The bases of the bushes were protected with mulch mats.

In the first season we tried putting a bird net over the wire supports but there was damage to the net by wind and by rubbing on the framework. The birds discovered the fruit, and over the years remembered its ripening and returned. It took some years to work out the best protection. The first crop was modest but each year there is more fruit, though that does depend upon the sort of winter it has been. The bushes appear to be adapting to their situation.

The bushes need pruning to remove deadwood and to promote new flowering growth. In recent years the crops have been very heavy, with most bushes about seven feet high.

Some strimming is needed to control the grass and wildflowers between the rows. Every few years more rock dust is applied to the rows to compensate for the lack of minerals in the soil. Picking is over a 10-week period, which varies depending upon the summer, typically mid July to mid-September. In a good year the abundance of fruit is spectacular.

Fruit goes to shops, restaurants, the small farmers market in Portree and via the wholesale market in Glasgow. I've also sold to the Isle of Skye Brewery, who make a seasonal ale with the fruit. The fruit quality and flavour is very favourably commented upon. Some of the varieties planted are the same as those available



Preparing for planting



Newly planted bushes



Blueberries autumn 2004



Birdnet



Blueberries shown in background



Blueberries, background and shelter 2010



Blossom



Blueberry crop

in the supermarket, but in general the strength and character of flavour is much better.

This is perhaps due to long daylight hours and relatively cool temperatures, which means the plants have plenty of time to develop flavour. The fruit is not stored weeks or months in commercial fridges and it's not puffed up with nitrogen or other fertilisers.

I planted about half of the area with blueberries and the rest with other soft fruit; raspberries, blackcurrants, gooseberries and so on. Although more commonly grown, all have some problems in the relatively poor soil and the very damp climate.

In the long term the blueberries have produced better plants, but this is perhaps because I have

more interest in them. They are related to the blaeberry and I have always wondered whether there is the potential for semi-cultivated crops of these in Scotland, similar to the semi-cultivated blueberry production carried out in Canada. After all, they are adapted to our climate. It would certainly need the right approach.

The success of the plantation has been largely down to the generous and open advice and help from numerous individuals and organisations. My thanks are recorded.

Ian is looking for a local person to take over this business. If you're interested, get in touch with him. sales@skyeberries.com

ON THE CROFT

The enigma of crofting

Writing to you from under this stone,
one of the little people,
with a patch of bog and rock:
You may have heard of us; crofters.
A long way from the throne,
the source of decisions, grants, rules and support.
All made on, for, about us.
By faceless office somebodies
who've never had to put two eartags
in a very unwilling sheep.
Don't tell me it doesn't hurt –
have you seen the size of those plastic stubs?

HERE WE GO with the next round of CAP reforms, Crofting Commission reforms, new rules – and more eartags, no doubt. £40 for each ewe lamb you keep from your own stock, if I've got it right? Now what use is that to me? I don't want to get big. All those big farmers in France and England shouting about what big grants and big subsidies they want. What happened to the £233 million that came to the UK because of Scotland's lower level of CAP receipts? Did it get to Scotland? Did it heck!

I've got 10 Shetland sheep, a couple of Hebrideans and three cocky pain-in-the-bum angora goats. They are the most I need and can handle on a nine-acre croft of the afore-mentioned bog and rock. We don't do nasty things to our sheep, mulsing and other wicked practices by big men. I keep them for their wool and the mohair which, funnily enough comes off the angora goats. Not angora. That's rabbits. They all have very different personalities and names and they stay with me as long as they are not dead. Well I suppose they still stay, only buried.

My clever friend on the next island spins their gorgeous wool and mohair. I dye it, weave tapestries on big floor looms with it, sell it in hanks

to visitors and a lady in my village knits items for sale with it. So that's at least three of us....

A new venture has bravely opened on another island. It is a spinning mill and will take my yarn this year and try a mixture of Shetland wool and mohair. I love the connectedness, different skills creating something beautiful and shared. Surely this is worth a few 40 squid? We're doing something for the little people, for us.

No, I have to say, like the latest round of aerial mapping of crofts, which doesn't recognise the vertical rock faces where the goats love to graze, or any rocks at all. Rocks are off this year. Only if you took it and stretched it out flat would you get a true picture of its size. So they make our crofts and subsidies smaller. Yet we need more help if we've got more big rock and less arable.

And here's the enigma: if I've got more good grazing I get a better region number and more grant. Yet my lovely little Shetland sheep and the

angora goats love the heather and rough grazing. So I have to kick them out on the common grazing.

Meanwhile I can't help but want to improve the croft. So we gather and spread seaweed on the land. Every day in the winter I dig up two rushes. A pin-up digger driver comes and carves drains you could see from the moon. We take WWOOFers (World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms) and teach Berliners which end of a spade to use. We stay out in the rain with French boys so they learn that they won't dissolve. And my husband has developed massive shoulder muscles from hammering in fence posts.

Our young ones flee the rain and mud to wear grey and black, work in glass buildings, offices and restaurants, alienating themselves from their roots and the muck. That's life. Is it?

Sallie Tyszk
SCF member, Great Bernera



Warm-water washing

Crofting life as it used to be

SCF member Iris Gallagher offered to share her experiences as a newcomer to crofting, but she didn't expect this new development.

SO HERE IS a bombshell.

The croft house we have been living in for the last 16 months, which we applied for and were given the assignation of by the Crofting Commission, has had a demolition order on it since 1974. We are breaking the law living there. Two very nice ladies from the Highland Council came to explain this to us recently.

I hasten to add that nobody informed us of this before we moved in. Not trying to blame anyone here. This is just a fact. However if we move off, there would be animal welfare issues. We currently have 20+ pigs of various sizes, three cows and two calves, around 30 sheep, a cockerel and his hens and two white rabbits. We cannot leave them even for a day. If we move more than 16 miles away from the croft, the assignation can be taken from us. Apart from

the fact that we could not afford the fuel to travel backwards and forwards.

We have talked with the oracle at the CAB. Jim is full of information and we are looking at all sorts of options – a static caravan, a council house, a wooden shed. Kidding, I think.

We live on the croft with three of our eight children, middle daughter, 25, youngest daughter, 18 and youngest son 12. They are used to living without hot showers whenever they feel like it and no electricity to run the PCs or other hand-held devices. We frequently visit the local library to use computer facilities and keep in touch with the other parts of the family, who live further south.

But living on a croft was always like that, wasn't it? How many people have we talked to who told us exactly that! Our own croft, just south of John O'Groats, had not been worked and lived on for almost 50 years. When we decided to take it on we knew the condition it was in. We went into this with our eyes open. Or so we thought. Somebody, and I really do not know who, should have told us

about the demolition order. But I am not sure it would have made a difference. Because we had planned on working on the house and the byre before we moved. But then our former landlord gave us notice. But that is another story.

So we are still living on the croft and for the most part enjoying it. Yes, I do miss modern conveniences. But we are now used to taking a torch with us after 4pm, as there are no lights on any part of the croft. We also have no telephone landline and it took a while to work out which provider gave us the best mobile phone reception this far north. I have only recently been able to phone my mother in Germany. But we celebrate new achievements and have learnt not to take anything for granted.

One thing that helped me, and still helps me, is the thought that my two grandmothers, born 1899 and 1909 respectively, would have lived like that. And they made it work. Neither of them is still alive, but my respect for them and their life experiences has grown enormously since last year.

Pandora's box

SCF member Angus McHattie on the threat to traditional farming and crofting from re-introduced large carnivores.

WE WERE LEANING against the wall of the house, soaking up late afternoon October mountain sunshine, a large dog and a tired crofter.

The dog barked and pointed towards the edge of the forest, focussing where the pine woods opened out on the grassy banks of a small river. Ten minutes before I had walked to the riverside to take photos of this imposing Alberta ranch-house perched above the river. Suddenly a deer broke cover from the woods and bounded across the river plain about 250 yards from us, clearly disturbed by something.

Then there were two grey shapes stretching out after the deer, larger than dogs and the coyote I had seen feeding on a buffalo carcass in Yellowstone National Park a few days before. They were hard on the trail of the deer, which had now disappeared into the forest on the far side of the river.

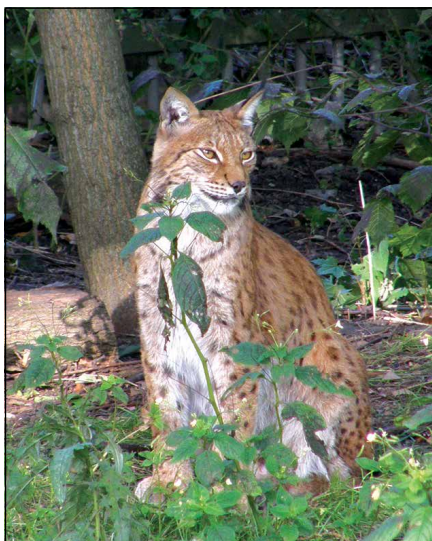
At four thirty the next morning I heard sets of howls carrying clearly on the still moonlight air. Once heard, that cry is not easily mistaken. The presence of the wolves in the immediate area was confirmed by a neighbouring rancher who had seen two young wolves close to his house the previous day.

Many years ago as a trainee biologist I had an academic interest in predators, redefined when I came home to Skye and started lambing close to an active rabbit warren and its attendant fox population. More recently, in Scandinavia, this interest in predators has been reactivated. The summer farm I am involved with is right at the heart of the territory of a well-established wolf pack which has produced cubs annually since 2008. Fresh tracks in the snow this winter show clear signs of wolves a few miles from the summer grazing. I know how to live alongside the foxes and eagles on Skye, but there are now bigger things in this forest – and on Skye two types of eagle to co-exist with.

Time to start learning again.

I have spent part of the last four summers working on a forest farm in central Sweden, grazing cattle, sheep, goats and horses in an open forest without fences for miles, 35 km from the home farm. I have become involved with the association representing the small number of remaining transhumance pastoralists, including a visit to the EU in Brussels to a stakeholders' meeting of the Large Carnivore Initiative. A range of interest groups participated – hunters, farmers and herders, landowners, conservation organisations and government agencies – from 21 countries across Europe with populations of bear, lynx, wolverine or wolf. A clear message came out from the people dependant on the land for their living. The increase in large predators, seen as a great success for the conservation movement, is having a detrimental effect on country life. Significantly, this message did not appear in the official press release following the meeting.

Sweden has been taken to the European court by WWF Sweden and the Swedish Nature Conservation Association for alleged mismanagement of wolves. Any management of the expanding wolf population has been halted



Lynx - soon to be introduced on an estate near you?



Fäbod - a summer farmhouse in the forest



Outdoor stove for processing milk



Traditional Swedish cattle

and any cull is now restricted to preventing active attacks on domesticated livestock by owners or their representatives. Similar restrictions are in place across much of Europe, where both the range and numbers of predators is increasing.

Much of the debate around the increase in the wolf population in Sweden since the late 1980s refers to the reintroduction of wolves to Yellowstone Park in 1995. The 14 wolves initially released in Yellowstone came from Alberta and British Columbia in Canada. I had worked as a volunteer in the 70s in Yellowstone and we have contacts who ranch in Canada, so it was time to do some visiting.

During a trip to North America we met some of the federal biologists who had worked with wolves since the reintroduction; state biologists who monitored populations; ranchers in the front line of predator conflicts; conservationists and people who had been involved with trapping the wolves and living in close contact with a range of large predators.

In Yellowstone we heard that a UK-based conservation organisation was actively seeking information on lynx, prior to consideration of reintroduction. In Sweden, truck-loads of European bison, the wisent, are being relocated

to Romania. Back home in Europe, discussion surrounding re-wilding gathers pace, with the introduction of the Rewilding Europe Capital and Bank system.

This made me think back to the Scottish beaver and sea eagle reintroduction sagas. Are they to be the model for future reintroductions and who is to be responsible for their management?

The one common feature of all my interactions with parties involved in reintroductions; has been a very poor standard of engagement with actual stakeholders – and the consequent effect on active land managers. In many cases I witnessed "interested parties" getting more support than farming families, often in remote rural landscapes, who depend on having access to correct information and the tools to let them carry on with their traditional land management practices.

We must demand that some of the bitter lessons learnt might enlighten the debate, as the inevitable raising of the stakes takes place when discussions of larger carnivore reintroductions come into the public domain.

Pandora's box indeed.

MEMBERSHIP MATTERS

A letter from the chief executive

Dear member

Following my letter in *The Crofter* number 103 in which I notified you that a subscription increase was being considered, this was discussed at the AGM in June and the decision was taken to increase subscriptions to £59 as of December 2014.

I appreciate that you will be very aware of what you spend your hard-earned money on, as we are very aware in the SCF of how we spend membership subscription income. Our aim is to give the best possible service we can to our members, at the least cost. We don't cover all our costs from subscriptions and make up the difference through fundraising for specific projects. But subscriptions are the essential core of our operations.

There are a number of benefits that you have access to as a member of SCF, such as:

- *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;
- the SCF crofting advice service;
- a free dedicated legal helpline through crofting specialists Inksters;
- discounted training opportunities;
- the opportunity to promote your croft tourism business on the SCF website;
- 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;
- a mediation service;
- free host membership of the WWOOF croft volunteers scheme for a year.



© Martin Benson – Ness, Isle of Lewis

Making use of just one or two of these benefits will save you more than the cost of your subscription.

But what members value the most, as our recent survey shows, is strong political representation. SCF is the only organisation dedicated to the representation of crofters, helping to shape crofting policies for the benefit of future generations of crofters and our communities. As a member recently said to me: "Without the SCF crofting would look completely different, if it still existed at all."

All this for just over £1 a week. This is less half the cost of an annual subscription to the *Scottish Farmer*.

I will remind you of some other comparisons. The NFUS, for example, charges £81 for a crofter to be a member and the Scottish Tenant Farmers Association subscriptions start at £144.

I hope that you will agree with this move to keep the organisation healthy and fighting on behalf of crofters and crofting.

Thank you and all good wishes for 2015.

Patrick Krause

Patrick Krause
Chief Executive

What do members really think about the SCF?

THE LAST EDITION of *The Crofter* included a survey asking for your opinions on the organisation.

Over 350 of you replied – almost 20% of members. Thank you for that.

You think that the three most important benefits of membership are political representation and lobbying; information on crofting issues; and information on policy issues. These were considered vital by more than 50% of respondents.

Assisting members and providing advice was also thought to be vital by more than 50% of members.

The Crofter was the service that was used by most respondents – six out of seven have used it. Information on crofting issues and the website www.crofting.org were the only other services that more than half the respondents have used personally.

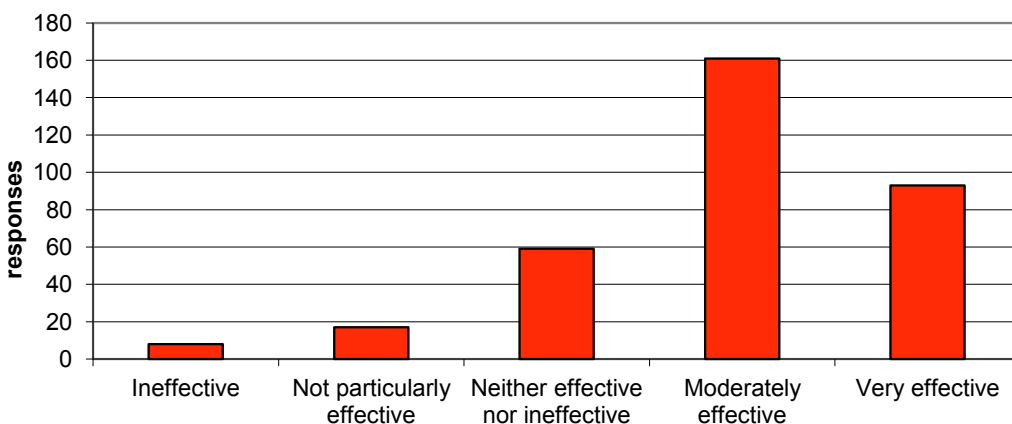
The services considered less important by respondents were Facebook (55%), the discount scheme (28%), the Scottish Crofting Enterprise website and the Scottish Crofting holidays scheme (both 25%). There were also a range of suggestions for new or improved

services on training, help for young crofters, discounts etc.

These findings are very valuable to help the board decide on priorities.

The survey also asked about the effectiveness of the SCF. The overall average score was 3.9 out of 5 which corresponds to moderately effective. Only 7% thought the SCF was ineffective or not particularly effective. 28% thought the SCF was very effective.

Effectiveness of SCF



Respondents are generally older (only 6% are under 40) and have been members for over ten years. Respondents may not be representative of the membership as a whole or of crofters in general, but the lack of young voices is worrying.

Over three quarters of respondents both live on and work a croft. Keeping sheep is the most common crofting activity (59%)

while cattle and other livestock are kept by 40% (note that some will have both sheep and cattle).

Poultry, horticulture, woodland, and tourism are other croft activities recorded by 20 or more respondents.

A follow-up article in the next edition of *The Crofter* will look at some other aspects of the survey and will pick out changes from the last survey in 2010.



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:

- Agricultural and rural business advice
- Enterprise planning
- Comprehensive assistance with IACS, LMO, RP, CHGS and CCAGS (agricultural buildings, hard standings, drainage, grassland improvement, handling equipment, fences and access tracks are examples of eligible expenditure under CCAGS)
- 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:

Balivanich 01870 602336
Campbeltown 01586 552502
Inverness 01463 233266
Kirkwall 01856 872698
Lerwick 01595 693520
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Renewable Heat Incentive is here (RHI)

From April 2014 RHI is available to householders who install an air to water heating system. This world first scheme encourages the use of renewable energy in the home. The domestic RHI is designed to give a large financial incentive to people who install renewable energy technology in their homes. RHI is paid every three months into your bank account for a period of seven years. For air to water heat pumps the amount is 7.3p per kilowatt produced from the heat pump. Full details on how to claim RHI and who is eligible are available on request.

Recently added to our portfolio is the Panasonic range of Aquarea air to water heat pumps, delivering a full heating and hot water solution for the home. Enjoy great savings on your total energy bill. The Panasonic range is fully accredited to deliver RHI.

Commercial RHI will come into effect this year and is retrospective – the payment amount for air to water heat pumps will be 2.5p for a period of 20 years based on the number of kilowatts of energy produced. Available on any commercial property, farm buildings, commercial B&Bs, church buildings, community halls, shops and office premises.

Air to Air Heat Pumps Supplying this highly successful heating system across the Highlands remains the cornerstone of our business. 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 £3,200 including installation (+VAT rated at 5%). The good news is that energy savings can be as high as 80%. Alba is currently working on projects in all areas of Scotland. Please ask for a FREE survey. Installation references are available on request.

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on 01320 366 808
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Angus MacNeil MP

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Tel: 01851 702272 | Email: angusmacneilmp@parliament.uk

Enquiries welcome

Office open Monday - Friday

MEMBERSHIP MATTERS

NOTICE OF ANNUAL
GENERAL MEETING

NOTICE is hereby given that the AGM of the Scottish Crofting Federation will be held in the Spectrum Centre, Margaret Street, Inverness on Friday, 12th June 2015 at 2pm, to consider, and if thought fit, to pass the following resolutions:

1. To receive company's accounts and the report of the directors and auditors for the year ended 30th November 2014. A summary of the accounts will be available at the meeting and the full or summary accounts will be provided prior to the meeting on request to the registered office.
2. To elect persons proposed as directors (Article 10 et seq) and/or ratify the appointment of co-opted directors.
3. To re-appoint Ritsons Chartered Accountants, of 27 Huntly Street, Inverness as accountants/ auditors and to authorise the directors to approve their remuneration.
4. To receive and resolve other motions tabled for consideration at the meeting.

By order of the board of directors.

Company secretary: John Bannister
Date of notice: 30th January 2015

Name of company: Scottish Crofting Federation
Company no: SC 218658
Registered office: Unit 26 Kyle Industrial Estate,
Kyle of Lochalsh, IV40 8AX

Almost half of SCF members have provided HQ with their email addresses. Let's go over 50% in 2015!

Have you received your SCF e-newsletter recently? If not, please email hq@crofting.org with i-croft as the subject.

If you are not sure if SCF HQ has your email address, please send an email to hq@crofting.org with i-croft as the subject.

SCF legal helpline

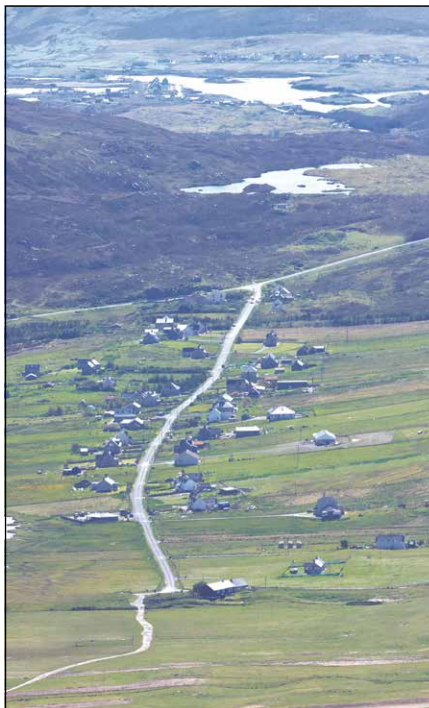
Winter update from Eilidh Ross, Inksters Solicitors in Portree, Isle of Skye

WE MAY STILL BE in the depths of winter, but the SCF crofting helpline has been as busy as ever.

We are now well in to our second year of the crofting law helpline; a joint venture between Inksters and the SCF. The helpline gives SCF members the opportunity to access around 15 minutes of free legal advice from a specialist crofting solicitor – either myself (based in Skye), or my colleague Brian Inkster (based in Glasgow).

The helpline is intended to be the first port of call for SCF members who have a question about crofting law. Members of the Scottish Crofting Federation who need legal guidance simply call 01599 230 300, and their call is either transferred immediately to myself or Brian; or else our receptionist takes their details and one of us returns the call as soon as possible, and in any event within 24 hours. If the matter is urgent, callers are encouraged to mention the urgency, and Brian and I will prioritise the call.

Enquiries over the last few months have been varied, as always, but a few calls have been in relation to owner-occupied crofts – a topic close to my heart! I addressed the Crofting Law Group



conference in Lochmaddy on this topic – namely the problem of crofts which at first examination appear to be owner-occupied crofts, but which are not. The problem is caused by the definition of owner-occupied croft introduced by the Crofting Reform (Scotland) Act 2010. The consequences are potentially serious, leading (depending on circumstances), to an inability to access CCAGS, or a need to involve third and often further parties in decrofting and letting applications to the Crofting Commission.

The problem has been reported to the Crofting Law Sump – a project undertaken by Derek Flynn and Keith Graham on behalf of the Crofting Law Group – and we await the response of the Scottish Government to this and the many other problems in crofting law.

All of us at Inksters feel that the helpline has been a success and we look forward to helping more crofters answer their legal questions.

SCF members (and prospective members) may also wish to note that in addition to the 15 minutes of legal advice offered by the helpline, they will also benefit from a 10% discount of our fees if Inksters are instructed formally to act on their behalf in respect of any business (not just the business which has been discussed on the helpline).

Introducing our new staff members

There are new faces at SCF HQ and on the training project, as a result of Karen and Sarah both moving on.

Sarah continues to produce the monthly e-letter and we thank her for this. If you don't receive this useful publication, which keeps you up to date with news and developments, please provide HQ with your email

address and you will be added to the list of recipients.

We are also fortunate to have the help of HfR project manager Maria Scholten at HQ during the recent staff turnaround.

Here they introduce themselves.



Maria Scholten

SCF project manager

My first contact with crofters and SCF was in 2004 when I flew into Uist to explore small oats and other native crops.

This led to a research project on small oats and brought me more permanently to Scotland. I have been doing policy advocacy for traditional varieties; co-ordinating projects on seed and currently on alternative food systems; running a pilot vegetable box scheme on Benbecula; and helping out with events around local produce.

My first language is Dutch; I studied Gaelic with Ulpan – but should be working harder on it because it is great to be in a multilingual country.

It is an honour to temporarily help out at SCF HQ. Crofting is complex, fascinating and worth supporting.



Katrine Fogt

SCF HQ administrator

After finishing high school I decided to take a gap year and move to Scotland before starting university – five years later, I am still here!

Having been born and brought up in a town in Denmark, the Scottish Highlands is a whole new world to me; however something about the place captured me and I fell in love with the Highlands the very first time I visited.

I am currently studying HNC Admin and IT at the West Highland College and started working for the SCF in November. I am very grateful to have been given this opportunity as it enables me to combine the skills learned in college with my love of the Highlands and enables me to make the Highlands my permanent home.

I look forward to learning much more about crofting and the traditional Highland way of life through my job with the SCF and hope to be of help to our members.



Donna Williamson

SCF training clerk

I was brought up in Ullapool, surrounded by the sights and sounds of crofting and fishing and life in the fresh air.

I've had a varied career so far, working in the arts, retail, administration and still running my own hand-crafted gifts business – and I'm really enjoying my new role as the training clerk for SCF!

I have crofting in the blood, with grandparents on both sides of my family having been brought up on crofts. As a teenager I spent some time helping on a croft near Ullapool – feeding and catching sheep for shearing and digging in the field during the tatty holidays.

I think it is so essential to keep crofting alive in the Highlands and the concept of local produce alive all over Scotland. Our training programme is so important in achieving that. Being the training clerk only makes me a small cog in a big machine, but I'm really proud to play a part in helping people to develop and learn and continue the crofting heritage.

CLASSIFIED ADS

Sell your unwanted croft equipment (and other stuff) for just 30p per word.

Get in touch with ads@crofting.org or phone Yvonne on 01470 532729.

Please take part in my dissertation survey

"Croft Diversification in Caithness and Sutherland"

for a chance to win a £50 Marshalls Seed voucher. For more information, go to www.croftdiversification.blogspot.co.uk

If you'd like a paper copy of the survey, please contact me on 07543913874.

Thanks!
Clem

Thanks to our oldest member

MRS JEAN MACIVER, of North Shawbost, Isle of Lewis, is a 102-year-old lady who has been a member of SCU, then SCF, since 1989.

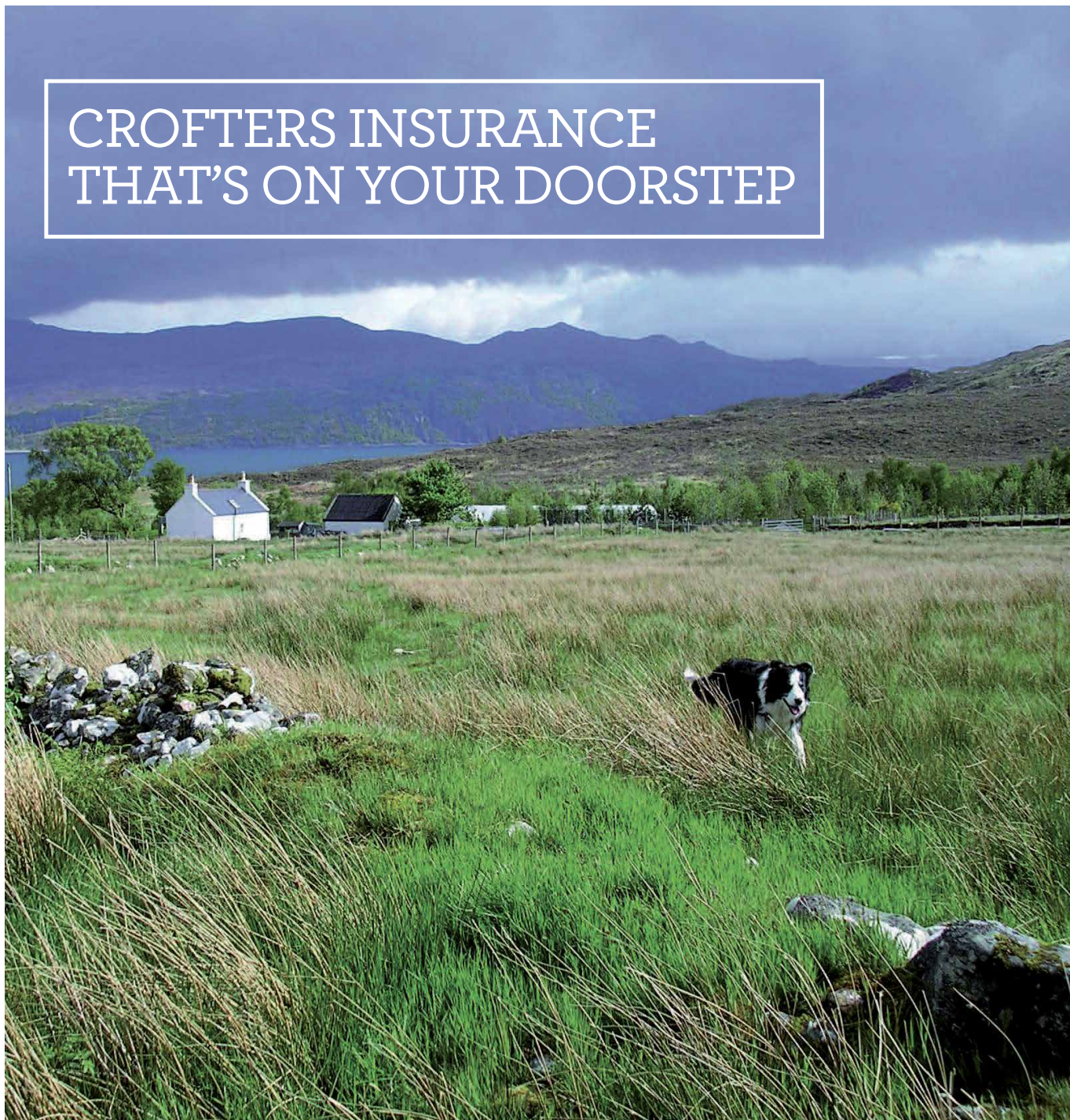
Despite the fact she has not been actively crofting for a number of years due to her age, Mrs MacIver has continued paying her membership, as she likes the SCF and believes in the work we do.

Our oldest SCF member has now been granted honorary life membership in appreciation of her many years of loyal support.

SCF chair Fiona Mandeville said: "We are very grateful to Mrs MacIver for her backing all these years and wish her all the best for the future."



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SCF Gathering 2015:

A gathering of young crofters

HAVING POSTPONED this event due to a series of setbacks, including floods in Ullapool, we are happy to announce that it will take place in March 2015.

It will be held in Glencanisp Lodge on the community-owned Glencanisp Estate in Assynt, from lunchtime Thursday 19th March to lunchtime Saturday 21st March. The event will be hosted by the SCF and Crofting Connections.

This will be the first gathering of young crofters and aspiring young crofters, with the purpose of addressing the question: "What do we want crofting to look like in 2020 and beyond?"

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. There will also be older crofters attending to bring their experience and wisdom to the deliberations. Officials will be invited to participate, as this is an opportunity for young crofters to have discussions with those who formulate policies that affect crofting.

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 taking part in this unique event please contact Maria in SCF HQ. Also we

need young crofters and aspiring crofters to let us know if you have ideas for what should inform the planning of the event. Subthemes will likely include access to land, affordable homes and creation of employment – and you may have other topics that should be included. We have developed an online survey; if you are willing to

participate in it there is a link on the SCF website.

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

Come to Assynt and help to create the future you want to see.



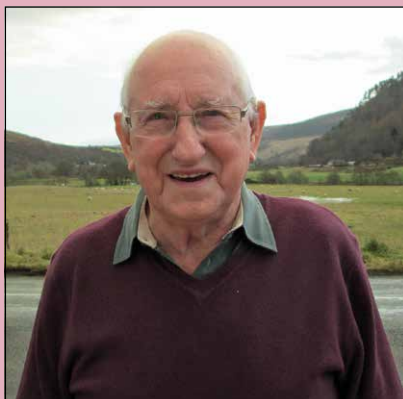
Glencanisp Lodge

Alistair Maciver awarded MBE

Alistair Maciver, a former president of the Scottish Crofters Union, was awarded an MBE in the New Year's honours list for services to the crofting community.

Alistair, from Inchcape in Rogart, Sutherland, was a founder member of the SCU, a branch and council member and latterly a respected SCU president. After the reincarnation of SCU into SCF, Alistair was the organisation's first company secretary.

We are delighted that Alistair's many years of hard work and voluntary effort have been recognised in this way. It is very well deserved and our congratulations go to him and Betty.



How to contact us

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Kyle of Lochalsh IV40 8AX

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Tel: 01599 530 005 Fax: 01599 530 006

Training: training@crofting.org

The Crofter: fiona@crofting.org – Fiona Mandeville, editor

Advertising: ads@crofting.org – Yvonne White, Tel: 01470 532 729

SCF legal helpline: 01599 230 300

visit www.crofting.org for full contact details

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