

## Target croft housing support to those who need it – the young

A SUBSTANTIAL NUMBER of young crofters and aspiring crofters gathered in Assynt in March, along with some crofting 'elders' and policy-makers.

We, the older-yins, were enormously impressed with the young folks' clear vision and perceptions of how things could be improved for crofting to thrive. One of the main themes that emerged was access to homes, in response to the increasing difficulty young people have of ever getting into the over-priced housing market or to build a house, and the decreasing support offered by Scottish Government. Meanwhile, a consultation on a government review of the Croft House Grant Scheme (CHGS) drew to a close at the end of March.

Whilst the young crofters gave good account of themselves, our government's vision, as reflected in the consultation, was disappointingly lacklustre. The impression given was that, in response to widespread calls for action on this issue, minimal changes to the under-resourced, under-performing and under-subscribed scheme were proposed and put out to 'consultation'.

As revealed by the recent *Economic State of Crofting* report, the crofting areas face a demographic crisis (settled young folk are a rare breed) and it is clear that only a far more radical approach to housing support is needed, rather than this 'tinkering with the bodywork when the engine has fallen out'.

The scheme has not been reviewed for decades so even the welcome increases proposed now come nowhere near to what is needed. The very modest uplift, with conditions attached such as the inexplicable stipulation that a first-time-buyer must finance three bedrooms or more, will, we fear, continue to exclude those in most need of assistance by being in effect means-tested in reverse. Only those with a stash can afford to take advantage of the grant.

It is not unreasonable to question whether those who can finance a £200,000 project are actually in need of public aid at all. If we are to achieve a realistic level of assistance for those who really need it – the young – capped support for first-time buyers could be the way to do it.

Based on actual building costs, it is estimated that it would require an assistance package of at least £75,000 to restore the value of the scheme to its historic level. But it doesn't have to

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Young and less young at Glencanisp

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## Squabbling in the Commission

THE INTERNAL STRIFE on the board of the commission is of great concern to the SCF.

The fact that it has been made public by a commissioner is disappointing. Whatever the issues, it has been handled badly. Forcing the resignation of the convener, leaving the board without a rudder, has caused not a little anxiety in crofting communities.

The SCF got on well with the ex-convener and with the new, enlightened way in which the Crofting Commission functions. The SCF has, for the first time in decades, had a good working relationship with the commission under the stewardship of the current board and executive.

How did it come to this very public squabble

that brought the commission into such a poor light? There are naturally tensions within boards; that is the nature of the diverse group an effective board needs. But surely there is a procedure to resolve dispute? If the commissioners were unable to resolve this themselves, is there not a process for mediation in place? The fact that this has been aired in the media is highly unsatisfactory and unbecoming.

The Crofting Commission has a big enough job on its hands dealing with its legacy. Rather than washing its dirty laundry in public its commissioners should resolve their differences and get on with the work they had made such a promising start to.

## Message from the chair...

Fiona Mandeville



### WELCOME TO ISSUE 106 of *The Crofter*.

Let's hope that by the time you are reading this, we will have left the dreich spring weather behind and be enjoying summer. It's certainly been unseasonably cold and wet and some areas have had real difficulty, but I hope your stock and crops are thriving now. Our family cows were very pleased to get to the common grazings and a fresh bite – there was no mistaking their eagerness to get there as we walked them down to Ashaig in May.

There have been unprecedented developments in Scottish and UK politics, and we look to the new MPs to do their best for crofters. We had a promising meeting with crofting minister Dr Aileen McLeod at the Scottish Parliament in March. She and her colleagues were interested in crofting and its potential and took on board our emphasis on the necessity for appropriate support schemes specific to crofting. At a subsequent meeting in Inverness we discussed the croft house grant scheme with her and found her receptive to the issues we raised.

Undoubtedly our most exciting recent development started with the very successful event at Glenanisp in March – Crofting 20:20. This gathering brought

together young crofters, elder crofters, Scottish government officials, agency people and MSPs to discuss the difficulties faced by young people who are crofting or who are mostly trying to get into crofting. We were all inspired by the enthusiasm and ability of the young folk and their determination to have a future in crofting. And these young people ARE the future of crofting, so we must all – SCF, government, agencies – do our utmost to help them.

The young crofters have formed their own branch of SCF and they have been very active since its inception. They also had a meeting with the crofting minister and attended the cross-party group on crofting at the Scottish Parliament. The presentation they made at the parliament impressed everyone with their commitment and with the need for ways to help them meet their aspirations. We welcome the young crofters into SCF and look forward to involving them in policy formation and our advocacy work. The feature on pages 6, 7 and 9 highlights their thoughts on how crofting needs to develop.

I have said before how I hate to see unused croft land reverting to bog and rushes when there are plenty people who would love to work it. The Commission is

focussing on getting unused crofts back into active occupancy, but it is a long, slow job. We also need to encourage older, inactive crofters to make their crofts available to youngsters. The former outgoers' scheme facilitated this process and such a scheme should be an essential part of current agricultural policy and support.

The new CAP does offer extras for landholders aged 40 and under, and that is fine if you have the land to work. But if you don't yet have a croft it's no help at all.

By the time this issue reaches you, it is to be hoped that the Crofting Commission will have a new convener in place. We were dismayed as the events unfolded which led to Susan Walker's resignation. The commission had developed into an open, forward-looking body under Susan's leadership and SCF had a very positive relationship with it. My colleagues and I had always found Susan good to work with and her knowledge and commitment was evident. There will always be areas where the government body administering crofting and the crofters' representative body, SCF, will not agree, but it is in the interest of all crofters that we work together co-operatively whenever possible.

Let us hope that whether the new convener is elected or appointed, the right choice is made. It is a responsibility not to be lightly undertaken and all involved in the crofting world will be watching closely.

The emphasis in the new CAP is focussed on funding going to those who work the land, but we have heard of exploitation by landowners severing agricultural tenancies to benefit themselves.

Fortunately, crofters are safe from this kind of practice. But crofters remain concerned that they will be out of pocket compared to previous years. As we went to press clarity was not yet available on all aspects of the new CAP regime.

In addition to attending the cross-party group on crofting at the Scottish Parliament, I had useful meetings over the past few months with MSPs Jean Urquhart and Mike MacKenzie. Jean is a good friend to crofters and the SCF. She hopes to initiate a major conference on crofting this autumn, which will bring together the many diverse strands which make up our unique way of life. In the Year of Food and Drink, the importance of crofting produce should be emphasised. We will be looking at that inside this issue. Mike has also offered to help us in any way he can.

Dave Thompson MSP is another keen supporter of crofting and SCF and he writes on page 9.

We will be sorry to lose Rob Gibson as an MSP. He also was a strong supporter of SCF and worked hard on behalf of crofters. We wish him well.

It was a privilege to be invited to join Alistair and Betty MacIver for the presentation of his MBE in Golspie by the Lady Lieutenant of Sutherland. Jim Hunter was also there and we reminisced about the heady early days of the SCU, when Alistair was a very active local contact. Many congratulations again to Alistair for this well-deserved award.

We were all saddened by the news of the untimely death of Charles Kennedy. Charles was a long-standing member of the SCU and SCF. Being a Highlander, he understood very well the challenges facing crofters. A popular and hard-working MP who was always available to get involved in issues large and small, he spoke out on behalf of crofters and assisted many individuals. He will be greatly missed. Scottish and UK politics has lost one of its greatest figures.

I'll conclude by encouraging you all, once again, to spread the message that SCF needs all crofters to join up as members. The more crofters we represent, the stronger our voice. And it needn't just be active crofters. People who are keen to get a croft can improve their chances of doing so if they become SCF members too.

As was said many years ago, and is still worth emphasising, membership of the SCF is an investment in the future of crofting.



Alistair MacIver receives his MBE from the Lady Lieutenant, Dr Monica Main

## The cross-party group on crofting

As well as the standing agenda items of CAP, crofting development and crofting law, the following were items for discussion in the parliamentary group:

- Crofter forestry
- Croft registration
- SCF crofting training programme
- Young crofters
- Crofting in land reform

The minister for crofting, Dr Aileen McLeod also attended the meeting in March.

## Target croft housing

*Continued from page 1*

cost the public that. To help remedy the lack of commercial lending available to young crofting families, the support should be apportioned between a grant and a long-term loan, as with the CHGS's very successful predecessor the Croft Building Grant and Loan Scheme (CBGLS). Despite its proven outstanding value for public investment, the CGBLS was axed in 2004, in part due to the revenue generated by loan repayment being evaporated into central coffers and so the loan element appearing as expenditure on the books. Who can fathom the logic of government accounting?

A workable new scheme would comprise £30,000 grant and £45,000 loan set at a realistic interest rate, the revenue of which would return to the scheme. This would mean public assistance would at most be £30,000. Everybody wins.

SCF met with minister for crofting Dr Aileen McLeod recently to emphasise the points made in our response to the consultation. We urge Scottish Government to take this opportunity to completely transform croft housing support with a targeted grant and loan scheme and show the young that we do care about them.

## Support to crofting under the CAP

EVERYONE SHOULD HAVE registered their basic payment claim by now.

The deadline was extended despite all stakeholder groups saying they didn't want an extension. We assume this was because the IT system isn't coping. Have any crofters managed to register their claim on-line? The danger of a registration extension is that the payment date could also be moved.

All should have sorted out which region or regions their land falls into by now and will be getting some idea of what their basic payment will be. This will only really be known towards the end of the year when cheques arrive, as the final calculations are based on how many eligible claims there are – so it is a moving goal. However, we would be very interested to hear from anyone who estimates that their payment will fall – the more evidence we have the better we can put the case to Scottish Government.

The SRDP has at last been approved by the European Commission so schemes will be open for business. The two schemes of most interest to crofters are the Crofting Agriculture Grant Scheme (CAGS) and the Less Favoured Area Support Scheme (LFASS).

CAGS is set to be under-utilised again in its

current format, the main problem being that the money has to be raised and spent by applicants before they can get the grant back. This of course means that only those with considerable capital reserves can fulfil the criteria for claiming the grant – a sort of inverse means-testing.

LFASS is going to carry on in its present setup, paying more to those in the **more** favoured parts of the LFA. The scheme will morph into Areas of Natural Constraint (ANC) in 2017 but SG are already saying that they will do all they can to keep it as much as possible the same as LFASS. We have a fight on our hands.

Apart from these two, look at environment and crofting forestry schemes as they can be very useful.



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## Crofting Register update

INTRODUCED IN 2012, the Crofting Register is the first official register to give crofters legal certainty over the extent of, and interests in, their crofts.

In April 2015 a croft on the Isle of Lewis became the 1,000th croft to be registered on the online Crofting Register. This was a considerable achievement, given the original expectation that it might take up to a generation to fully populate the register.

The number of crofts registered continues to rise at a steady rate and, as at 26 May 2015, is 1156 with 160 registered common grazings.

The community mapping project, jointly funded by Registers of Scotland (RoS) and Scottish Government, continues to develop and grow. Approximately 23% of the total number of registered crofts form part of community applications. The largest is Fivepenny Bove, Lewis, comprising 43 crofts, where the smallest is at Kilmory in Ardnamurchan comprising three crofts.

Community mapping has a number of immediate benefits. Community applications:

- bring communities together around a common purpose;
- ensure that all croft land is captured and protected (once it is in the register it will remain croft land – unless it is formally decrofted);
- provide an organised way of agreeing boundaries up front (minimising the risk of a challenge during the nine-month challenge period following registration);
- reduce the cost of registration for individual applicants – eg only one plan needs to be submitted and this may be based on an Ordnance Survey extract supplied by RoS at a cost of £16 + VAT;
- reduce ancillary costs, eg some communities take out a block advertisement in a local newspaper rather than advertise the registration of each croft separately.

RoS can offer support to crofters and landowners who are considering a community application. RoS is working collaboratively with other government bodies, eg the Crofting Commission and Highlands and Islands Enterprise, and with external stakeholder groups, eg the Scottish Crofting Federation. The intention is to dovetail our respective initiatives so that, where appropriate, we offer support for community registration as part of a package of measures designed to enhance the local economy in rural areas.

Where appropriate, landowners are also encouraged to apply for voluntary registration in the land register as part of the project requested by ministers to complete the land register by 2024.

More information on voluntary registration is available at [www.ros.gov.uk/about-us/land-register-completion/voluntary-registration](http://www.ros.gov.uk/about-us/land-register-completion/voluntary-registration).

More information on the Crofting Register is available at [www.crofts.ros.gov.uk](http://www.crofts.ros.gov.uk).

*Dear Sir*

We are new to crofting, my wife and I having purchased our house and croft only 12 months ago.

In that that short period of time I have seen sufficient evidence of, in my view, unnecessary bureaucracy to write in support of the comments made in recent SCF newsletters and issues of *The Crofter*.

Our plans for the croft are not complicated (access track, polytunnels, trees, chickens etc) but the difficulty we have had in just arranging the transfer of the common grazing rights does not bode well for any other applications we may wish to pursue. The grazing rights transfer has taken 12 months so far, including a visit from the Department of Agriculture, and will still not be concluded for some time yet. I am satisfied that the problem is not with individuals but with the complexity of legal processes.

The staff at the Crofting Commission have been courteous and helpful, yet are clearly under pressure; and our most recent batch of paperwork may provide an explanation as to why. It's not just the volume of paper that's a problem, it's the repetitious nature and complexity of the forms. After a career spent liaising with civil servants, ministers etc, managing funding bids and European projects, I find myself for the first time in many years stumped by some of the questions I am now required to answer. I have researched and read background papers yet will still have to ask for assistance to avoid delaying the transfer process further by submitting the wrong answers.

It is clear that the legislation is, as your chair has stated, incredibly complex; and for any issue of substance one could feel the need for an expensive legal opinion to avoid errors. This cannot be what is intended.

As a new entrant to crofting I am very conscious of our lack of experience and knowledge and recognise the invaluable support provided by neighbours. I'm also aware that everyone else in our crofting community is much better qualified to comment on the changes in crofting over the years than me; but I would like to support any initiative for change and to assist in any way I can.

*Yours sincerely  
Steven Proudfoot*

# First crofting census presents positive picture of crofting

**T**HE RESULTS OF the first crofting census indicate that 97% of those who responded claimed that their crofts are cultivated and maintained, with 87% of crofters indicating that they are currently resident on their croft.

The census was carried out by the commission in October last year. Forms were sent out to over 16,500 crofts, with crofters legally obliged to complete the census forms in full and return them to the Crofting Commission within the three month deadline.

The commission says the forms were well received, with many crofters seeing the benefit of establishing a clear picture of the current state of crofting. An 85% return rate was received.

The census has confirmed that many crofts are still used for traditional purposes. Of the 97% that responded that they cultivated and maintained their croft, 76% kept or bred livestock, 43% cropped, 22% grew fruit and vegetables and 13% planted trees. 11% of crofts were put to another purposeful use – including caravan and camp site, riding centres and golf courses and 20% of crofters indicated that they engaged in conservation activity.

Environment minister Aileen McLeod said "Crofting brings social, economic and environmental benefits to communities, especially in remote and rural areas, and this census has given us a clearer picture of crofting today. This invaluable data will help nurture and sustain crofting for future generations and – where duties are not fulfilled or reported – enable the commission to work with those crofters on the various options available."

*"Crofting brings social, economic and environmental benefits to communities, especially in remote and rural areas..."*

Commission chief executive Catriona MacLean said "We are extremely pleased with the response. It shows the willingness of crofters

to work together to secure the future of crofting and the importance placed on building a strong evidence base on the value of crofting.

"The census shows a positive picture for crofting with a majority of crofters who replied fulfilling their duties and a high number of active crofts. The data taken from the annual crofting census will help focus our work to effectively regulate crofting.

"It also highlighted various possibilities available to those who may not be complying with their duties; and the commission are on hand to advise on options. We are also considering how to reach those who failed to reply to ensure they are complying with their duties."



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## Crofting Commission launches new application forms

**T**HE CROFTING COMMISSION has launched new regulatory application forms and information leaflets to help crofters understand crofting regulation.

The commission is asking for more detailed information from crofters in their application forms to reduce the processing time of applications by limiting the requests for further information.

The application forms have more detailed questions directly relating to crofting legislation and the commission's policy plan, so that the information included in the forms will assist the commission when considering its decision on the application.

The Crofting Commission is also launching

new information leaflets and factsheets to help crofters understand regulatory applications and processes when planning changes to their crofts or common grazing.

The commission is promoting self-regulation and hopes the information allows crofters to better understand their responsibilities in fulfilling their duties. Self-regulation provides more control and management over their crofts and community.

Catriona Maclean, Crofting Commission chief executive, said "Crofting is a form of land tenure unique to Scotland and one we should be proud of. Regulation is there to protect this precious asset for present and future generations. The

commission is working with crofters to help them better understand the crofting legislation and regulatory functions.

"The new forms have clear guidance and instructions to aid crofters in completing the forms with as accurate and detailed information as possible. The information leaflets provide an overview of crofting, common grazings, the duties of a crofter and the role of the commission. There is also a wide range of factsheets explaining each regulatory function."

For further information visit [www.crofting.scotland.gov.uk/applications](http://www.crofting.scotland.gov.uk/applications).

## CROFTING CONNECTIONS

# Crofting is alive and well in the peedie isles of Orkney

**T**HE THREE PEEDIE schools in Papa Westray, Eday and North Ronaldsay have worked together since they joined Crofting Connections in 2009.

For pupils living in small island communities, where crofting is a reality in people's lives and is embedded in the history of the islands, teachers, pupils and crofters share ideas, knowledge and enthusiasm across the water. The latest project of these active young crofters was initiated by the Papay pupils, who are sharing their experience as shepherds and wool processors with the pupils from Eday and North Ronaldsay.

Last May (2014) the Papay school pupils took on the care of two caddy lambs (Shetland crossed with Texel sheep). They were three- to four-week-old orphans. The pupils designed and built a shelter as part of their project on homes and shelters.

### Extracts from pupils' croft records

We bottle-fed the lambs for many weeks, and then weaned them onto solid food. We keep our sheep in the field next to our school, which belongs to our teacher, Verity Branscombe. It is registered as a small holding, but we would very much like

to register our school as a croft in the future.

We took on the responsibility for all aspects of looking after our sheep, including feeding them, moving them and making decisions about their care.

We decided to keep the two sheep and not send them off to market. The sheep had to be of value to our school croft/small holding, so we started to learn about their wool and how to use it to make a profit.

We have now learnt wet felting and needle felting and we have successfully sold products made by pupils at our local farmers market, which has raised money for the food and health care of the sheep.

### A study trip to North Ronaldsay

Our trip to North Ronaldsay taught us how to process the wool, from shearing to being ready for wet or needle felting and also for spinning, weaving, knitting and crocheting.

We are considering increasing our livestock to include other wool-producing farm animals.

We visited the North Ronaldsay rare breeds farm to see the alpacas. We asked about how

they are kept and how the wool differs from sheep's wool. In the summer term we plan to visit Sanday to see angora rabbits. Then we can make comparisons and decide on a second breed of animal to produce another valuable fibre.

We have planned to get our female sheep in lamb in October this year and have discussed this with a local farmer, Mr Cursiter. Also we are very happy to have more caddy lambs this year. We plan to have up to five sheep.

Since this report was written, the pupils have sold an art piece – a felted panel they made – for an amazing £75 at the local farmers' market. The money is being used to buy this season's caddy lambs.

In May, Papay school hosted a visit from Eday pupils who want to learn more about livestock-keeping. Children and adults came together to experience local Orkney music and dance. This involved community members beyond those linked to the school.

Our young crofters also know how to have fun.



Bottle feeding lambs



Needle felting sheep



Needle felted sheep



Papay lambs

## CROFTING 20:20

# A gathering for young crofters

**T**HE IDEA FOR a gathering for and with young crofters had been long in the making and was realised as a collaboration between SCF HQ, the SCF training program, SCF Hungry for Rights project and Crofting Connections. It was also funded through Scottish Government's rural communities team, Crofting Commission, Highland Council and Foundation Scotland's Lairg Community Windfarm Ltd.

The event took place in Glencanisp Lodge, owned and run by the Assynt Foundation. Young and aspiring crofters, aged between 16 to 40, came from the Isles of Mull, Lewis and Skye, from Lochalsh, Rogart and Lairg, from Newtonmore and the Black Isle and from Ullapool.

Crofting Connection schools were Whalsay junior high school, Kinlochbervie high school, Sgoil Lionacleit, Nicolson Institute and Mallaig high school. Chris Bathgate represented Scottish Government's rural communities team. From the Crofting Commission were Susan Walker, David

Campbell and Posy Macrae. Olga Bloemen of Nourish Scotland and MSPs Dave Thompson and Jane Urquhart also attended.

Animate facilitators Joette Thomas and Ian MacKenzie designed a full, well-structured program and led group discussions in a friendly, clear and outcome-oriented way. Participants were organised into five categories, so that each small discussion group had young and old crofters and official representatives.

Delegates were invited to give their visions for crofting individually and in small groups. The small size encouraged everyone, and especially young people, to participate – even reporting back in plenary sessions.

Iain MacKinnon from the University of Coventry gave the keynote talk: *Drawing on the past, working for the future: a vision for crofting in 2020 and beyond*. The next day Ronnie Eunson gave a talk on organic livestock production with native breeds on Shetland. Iain MacKinnon also introduced three films, one on the Machair

LIFE+ project, on farmers' juries and about the Gaelic poet Sorley MacLean. Margaret Bennett introduced the evening ceilidh with poems and songs of crofting resistance and migration.

To enhance the educational element, information sessions were given by Scottish Government, Crofting Commission, SNH and SCF. A special session was dedicated to croft assignment, with Alastair MacIver from Rogart as the croft assigner and Jonathan Hedges as new crofter.

There were visits to crofts in Achmelvich and Clach toll and ranger Andy Summers gave a tour over the Glencanisp estate, showing the different enterprises the Assynt Foundation is involved in.

These were three days brimming with group discussions, exchanges, information, good food and music. Before the closing ceremony, a follow-up had been initiated by young crofters. This very outcome was the best reward the organising team could have hoped for and some of the young crofters introduce themselves in this feature.



Funded by Foundation Scotland from the Lairg Windfarm Ltd Community Fund



Young crofters listen intently



Seonaidh Mackenzie and Margaret Bennett



Maria Scholten

## What is the future we want for crofting?

Megan Rowland reports

**B**ACK IN MARCH, along with about 90 other people, I attended the SCF's YC20:20 gathering.

Kids from Shetland and the Western Isles joined SCF members, MSPs, folk from the Crofting Commission, and representatives from SNH, Nourish, Permaculture Scotland and Scottish Government (SG).

**Day 1** asked "What is the future we want for crofting?" and this remained the theme of the gathering. The main conclusions from this initial session were that crofting is still very much a part of Highland life, and there is growing interest in it. However, the kids we spoke to told us that whilst they have an interest in crofting, they see themselves moving away from the Highlands for work and education but hoped to be able to return later in life.

It was interesting to see people's motivations for wanting to get involved in crofting: from self-sufficiency, to heritage, to a simple love of working the land, to conservation and ecology, to getting involved in local food production and being part

of a community.

A big issue was access to land, another was training and skills development. We discussed the possibility of crofting apprenticeships. Another pressing issue was the policy and legislation surrounding crofting. Folk felt the entire system needed simplifying. A final issue was a lack of infrastructure in the Highlands – everything from mobile phone signal and broadband to access to slaughterhouses.

**Day 2** kicked off with a talk by Ronnie Eunson, a crofter from Shetland specialising in breeding Shetland cattle. The journey and research Ronnie underwent to get where he is today were incredible to hear about. In the workshop run by SNH we discussed how food production systems conflict with environmental systems and ways that crofting land use and environmental land use work together. Using seaweed as fertiliser (as is done in Durness and on the Uists) and not using pesticides and weed-killers such as Round-Up on crofts came to light.

We also considered that, being less intensive,

crofters almost act as stewards of their ground, and there is inter-dependence between crofters and the ground they look after.

**On Day 3** we split up into groups one last time to discuss the action points we would like to see carried forward by SCF, young crofters, crofting elders and by SG. The main themes picked up by every single group were:

- **broadband and mobile connectivity**
- **jobs**
- **access to land**
- **cash flow**
- **support**

It was decided that after the positive energy created over the three days we would attempt to form a group specifically for young crofters. We would become more political and begin to lobby government and put pressure on to make these changes listed above. We would begin to form a network of like-minded individuals and work to bring crofting into the foreground and up to date.

## CROFTING 20:20

## Bringing a bright future to crofting

Young would-be crofter Cheryl McIntyre outlines her hopes for a crofting future.

**I** AM A NEWLY-QUALIFIED primary school teacher working in Gairloch, although hoping to return and settle in Skye where I once lived and worked.

I am in the process of building a small sustainable 'hut' to live in on the north west of the island. I have been in the market for a croft of my own for many years now after working on and managing those of others. Having all the experience, passion and desire to work a croft and be a contributing member of a remote community, I have found my limited capital and lack of family connection a real barrier to becoming a new entrant.

I have been a member of the SCF for three years, joining up after attending the introduction to crofting course. It was through regular contact that I found out about the Young Crofters 20:20

gathering at Glencanisp. The gathering was a huge success. It afforded a chance for crofters young and old to network and share ideas, it provided a platform to share issues affecting crofting today from a young person's perspective, and it allowed contact to be made with official bodies like SNH, the Crofting Commission, and the Scottish Government.

The event acted like a springboard and afterwards I was keen to get more involved in the advocacy side of crofting to have the young aspirant voice heard. During the event at Glencanisp I found myself in charge of collating an email list of young crofters who were interested in forming a group. I set up an initial email thread to open the channels of communication and created a facebook page to publicise our community to the wider world.



Cheryl gets familiar with a goose



John MacKintosh leads a workshop



A pupil from Kinlochbervie

## Young crofters group get political with minister for crofting

**D**ESPITE ITS INFANCY, the SCF's young crofters' branch has been making considerable political headway in recent weeks.

The group has been politically active at Holyrood and across the Highlands and Islands. One of the group's main aims is to highlight the social and economic barriers facing young crofters and the struggle many young people face in gaining access to croft land. In April these issues were presented at the Holyrood cross-party group on crofting by representatives from the young crofters' group.

The attendance of the young crofters at the cross-party meeting was well received by the MSPs, who were inspired by the aims and ambitions of the group. The chair, Jean Urquhart, urged the group to remain politically engaged and concerted in its efforts.

The group's political energy was apparent yet again in May when a meeting was arranged with the minister for environment, climate



Young crofters with Aileen McLeod and Catriona MacLean

change and land reform, Dr Aileen McLeod. The meeting took place at the Crofting Commission's headquarters in Inverness and was also attended by the CEO of the commission, Catriona MacLean.

During the conversation with the minister, who is still new to the intricacies of crofting, the young crofters highlighted the challenges they faced. What inspired the minister most was the way the group provided solutions and new models to

their current situation.

New ideas came to the fore such as the creation of internships with elder crofters and the establishment of hot-spots of demand for crofts across the crofting counties. As a solution to overcoming cash flow issues with CAGGS, a young crofter from Newtonmore convincingly proposed that grant givers pay contractors directly instead of payment of grant in arrears.

Both the minister and the young crofters benefitted from the meeting. There were clear signs of a relationship taking hold and a sense that both parties could benefit. It is hoped that representatives from the group will now advise Dr Aileen McLeod on crofting issues for young people and continue to propose ways to secure its future.

To follow and participate in the journey of the young crofters you can be one of over 500 people to like us on Facebook.

James Shewan, aspiring crofter

## CROFTING 20:20

# The future of crofting

John MacKintosh, former SCU president and a speaker at the Glencanisp event, shares his thoughts.

ONE OF THE great privileges I have experienced is to have been brought up on a croft.

Life for a young person in a crofting community in the 1950s was like living in an open-air classroom where you learned to drive machinery, grow crops, work livestock and perform an unlimited range of repair and maintenance skills –especially as almost every bit of machinery was, in modern parlance, pre-used.

The missing piece, however, was in the education system. Almost all of us who had a secondary education were already on a journey which would take us elsewhere.

Now crofting has become part of the school curriculum. Crofting Connections, crofting induction courses and practical training sessions are available for those who aspire to work a croft. That is a great credit to the Scottish Crofting Federation and the support it has received.

It has become the in thing to work a small piece of land, whether it be a croft in the Highlands or an allotment in an inner city. These reflect the same aspiration to develop an interest in real food, good management of the land and our natural surroundings wherever we live.

But there is another movement. Young people are inspired and motivated by political development in Scotland. They are focused also on what they want to do and how to achieve their ambition much more than my generation was at that age.

The young people I met at Glencanisp are part of that movement for change. Many are



John MacKintosh

*The young people I met at Glencanisp are part of that movement for change.*

committed, articulate and have a clear plan of how they are going to progress in crofting.

Others are curious, enthusiastic and perhaps not yet clear how they could follow their chosen career and at the same time work a croft.

It comes as no surprise, therefore, that young people have formed a branch within the SCF.

That means that they will be able to directly influence policy within the organisation as never before and, rest assured, they are capable of doing that. They have already made their representation to the parliamentary cross party group on crofting.

So what needs to be put in place to get these young people into crofts?

In family situations it is necessary to have a policy on succession. In non-family circumstances the process of assignation has to be simplified and speeded up.

The SCF needs to be more forceful in its aim to have 10,000 more crofts by 2020. Whether these are crofts or another form of tenure is secondary. The real issue is that people have access to land to form small-scale holdings. The majority of these should go to young entrants.

Finance is crucial. The enhanced support for people under 40 in the latest CAP policy is to be welcomed, but of minimal impact for small holdings. Further work has to be done.

In the end crofts often have to be financed from external income and that requires much greater development of high-paid jobs and steady careers in the crofting areas.



## CROFTING 20:20

# Sticking up for crofters' best interests

IT GIVES ME great pleasure to write for *The Crofter*, which continues to be an invaluable resource and remains an informative source of information for those with an interest in a unique way of life.

It was excellent to speak at the Young Crofters conference in Glencanisp on the Assynt Estate. I was able to engage with crofters at what was a busy and highly participative event, which gave me the opportunity to encourage folk to respond to the CHGS and also to make their voice heard in the corridors of power.

Crofters deserve government support, which is why I submitted my own formal response to the recent Croft House Grant Scheme (CHGS) consultation. This included a recommendation that the levels of assistance to the proposed new high and standard priority areas should be at least double the current rate.

An increase of £6,000 for assistance to the new high and standard priority areas is welcome. However if the assistance is doubled to at least £40,000 this would be nearer the 40% being offered for improvements. I also support the

replacing of the three geographical priorities with two new areas and I agree with the SCF's view that remote mainland areas should qualify for the same support as the islands.

It is not fair, for instance, that Ardnamurchan should qualify for the same rate as the hinterland surrounding Inverness, because

high transport costs will affect the remotest mainland areas just as it affects those on the islands.

Crofters are reliant on Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) payments so it is crucial that as much comes to crofting as possible. Under the government's CAP plans, it is estimated that direct funding for

crofters will increase from around £19 million to £33 million by about 2019; and this is to be welcomed.

The reform of CAP has been one of the most important decisions crofting has seen in recent years, with work on the finer detail of the system still on-going. However, we do know that the Scottish Government is very keen that support will go to those who actively farm land and produce products that the public want.

There will be changes in how funding is allocated through direct payments (known as regionalisation), meaning that payments will be made on an area basis to reflect the variation in land quality across Scotland.

There is also good news for young crofters and farmers (40 or under) who will be eligible for a 25% top-up payment, which will help to attract young families into crofting.

The Scottish Government has lobbied hard to ensure Scotland's crofting needs are well represented and was involved in helping deliver for Scotland's crofters. The government will, as I will, continue to stick up for crofters' best interests in the Highlands and Islands, now and into the future.



Dave Thompson at Glencanisp



Lots of musical talent



Dancing appeals to young and old



Watching the eclipse

## Croft mentoring

A POINT THAT was raised many times in the young crofters' gathering was the need and desire to have closer relationships between older more experienced crofters and younger, inexperienced crofters and aspiring crofters.

Discussion led to it being clear that an informal approach would be preferable. We are looking at how to make the connections but we envisage adding to our list of 'mentors' held at HQ, each with a short description of their experience and location, so that younger folk can contact them.

*If you are a more experienced crofter and would welcome having a young person contact you, and perhaps visit you, to gain from your wisdom, please let us know and we will send you a short information sheet to fill in.*

There is always the need for more volunteers. Young and new crofters are encouraged to contact HQ for advice as there may already be someone available to assist.

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



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## CROFTING COMMUNITY TRUSTS

# Is crofting the obvious answer?

David Cameron, chair of Community Land Scotland, introduces this feature on crofting community trusts.

**C**OMMUNITY LAND ownership is already reaching into areas where for many decades people have lived and watched decline.

In many places there is still an excellent quality of life but only for an ever-decreasing number of people – as lack of housing, lack of employment and lack of social opportunities have led to falling population, disappearance of young people and closure of basic facilities such as shops, banks, and schools.

Community Land Scotland and its members are attempting and succeeding to turn this situation round and we are working more and more with aspiring communities where there is a desire to do things for themselves.

The provision of adequate initial finance for land purchase, appropriate technical help and the presence of political will reflected in legislation are essential.

The first two essential elements are now in place and the third is almost there with the forthcoming Community Empowerment Bill and a revamped Land Reform Act being discussed in Holyrood this summer.

All this opens the way for many more communities to follow the lead of, for example, Bhallos, Borne and Annishadder, Sleat and West Harris, where community land ownership has led to transformational changes.

Crofting is at the heart of retaining and increasing the population within these examples and today other

similar communities now have the potential to revitalise many more areas of their own land. Today in the crofting counties there are more opportunities opening up than there have been for a very long time.

But now let's think further into the future.

Has the time come for us to look beyond the present upsurge in communities successfully doing things for themselves?

Should we now be looking at how to answer one of the big questions?

How can areas which have been completely cleared of people be resettled and can crofting play a part in this?

Perhaps the answer to this was heard in the crofting showcase presentation given by Kenny MacLennan, chairman of the Carloway Trust and Murdo Mackay, chairman of the West Harris Trust, at the recent Community Land Scotland conference.

Murdo mentioned that in 1929 the Westminster government bought the 16,000 acres of West Harris from private owners and in a mere four years, by 1933, that land was allocated, houses built and crofters were back living on the same land from which many of their forebears had been cleared earlier to the poorer east coast of Harris and beyond.

The establishment of these new crofts laid the foundation for the inspiring development now being undertaken by the West Harris community who purchased their crofting estate from the Scottish Government in 2010.

Can the 1929 situation be repeated today? Why not? Along with other crofting initiatives, there is no reason why not.

Empty land areas must be resettled and once again the sound of families living and working in strong communities will be heard.

It can be done.



Abandoned hearth, Ardfernal, Isle of Jura

## Community ownership of ministers' crofting estate programme

**C**OMMUNITIES LIVING ON Scottish Government's crofting estates are being offered assistance to investigate buying their own land.

Launching the programme in May, minister for land reform Dr Aileen McLeod confirmed that "... whilst Scottish Government will first and foremost remain a willing landlord, if a crofting community expresses a desire to take control of its own future we will support those ambitions and be an agreeable seller".

Highland and Islands Enterprise, working in partnership with

Community Land Scotland, will assist communities wishing to explore the opportunities and responsibilities of becoming a landowner. Whilst there is no intention to dispose of their estates, Scottish Government strongly believes that local decision-making and self-determination is key to delivering sustainable and resilient communities.

The government has set a target to double the land currently in community ownership to one million acres by 2020. As one of Scotland's largest landowners, with 58 crofting estates comprising

235,000 acres, they are actively encouraging local communities to consider community ownership.

**What does a buyout mean for crofters?**

A community buyout of a crofting estate does not affect crofters' existing rights. Crofters' security of tenure, individual crofters' right to buy and all the benefits, protections and responsibilities conferred upon crofters by crofting legislation will continue under community ownership.

**What support is available?**

A package of support, such as start-up costs; officer and mentoring support; exchange visits; feasibility and business planning assistance; ballot costs; etc will be agreed to best suit your needs and circumstances. It will enable your community to consider the merits or otherwise of a buyout. There is no obligation – the community can walk away at any time.

For further information see [www.hie.co.uk/ministerscroftingestates](http://www.hie.co.uk/ministerscroftingestates) or contact HIE on: 01520 722988 [croftingestates@hie.co.uk](mailto:croftingestates@hie.co.uk)

## CROFTING COMMUNITY TRUSTS

## Assynt Crofters Trust

*Jeanette McCarthy gives update on the first-ever crofting trust.*

**H**ISTORY WAS MADE in 1993, when the small crofting community of Assynt, set out on the first-ever crofting community buy-out of their land: the North Assynt Estate, which extends to some 22,000 acres of hill and croft land.

The trust has enabled ordinary people who live and work on the land to have some control over their own economic future. Almost half of the agreed purchase price for the total estate was raised by crofters and their supporters throughout Britain. Some donations came from those who traced their ancestry to Highlanders who had sought a new life in the colonies during the dark days of the Clearances. The remainder came from public agencies, Sutherland District Council, the Highland Fund and Highland Regional Council in the form of grant and loan.

Today the estate is in the possession of the crofters, free of debt and administered by a board of directors who serve for three years, elected by democratic vote by each of the thirteen townships making up the estate.

North Assynt Estate is still a working estate. There are a variety of sheep and Highland cattle on the crofts and grazings. Inland you will encounter sheilings and plenty of evidence of land tended and cultivated in the distant past. There are birch and hazel woodlands, again with many signs of past management, now often a refuge for red deer as well as many other animals, plants and birds.

The trust has around 200 freshwater lochs, all containing natural wild brown trout. Some also have salmon and sea trout runs. The trust carried out a restocking programme, under guidance from the West of Sutherland Fisheries Trust, with two hundred thousand sea trout fry released over a four-year period.

Anglers are welcomed to the area for some of the finest and most interesting wild brown trout fishing in the Highlands of Scotland. The great fun and challenge of fishing Assynt are the lochs around every corner and behind every mound; it is truly a fisherman's paradise.

The trust plans to open up some of the lochs to less able-bodied fishermen, with a project to install disabled-friendly boats that will allow a wheelchair-bound person to go out on the loch and enjoy the beauty and tranquillity of this stunning landscape, as well as the chance of catching a monster!

The trust welcome donations for this project.

## Stòras Uibhist

**S**TÒRAS UIBHIST has been the community landowner of the South Uist Estate since 2006.

The estate extends to 93,000 acres across Eriskay, South Uist and much of Benbecula. South Uist Estate is made up of approximately 1,000 crofts, with around 850 individual tenants, further grazing leases, a tenanted farm and commercial tenancies. Extensive sporting and fishing rights, along with Grogarry Lodge, complete the assets that were bought by the community.

Since 2006 Stòras Uibhist has significantly increased the amount of support provided to the crofting community. For example, gamekeeping staff work closely with SNH, RSPB and crofters on the goose management programme that has involved a crop protection scheme funded through EU Machair LIFE+; and the adaptive management scheme funded by SNH designed to manage goose numbers to a sustainable level.

Stòras Uibhist has added to the funded aspects of these programmes with significant additional resources of its own during the past few years. This year, however, Stòras Uibhist will be the only funder for crop protection, as the Machair LIFE+ scheme has finished. This ongoing crop protection activity is particularly important for crofters where seed crop is being harvested for re-planting next year.

The deer herd on South Uist has grown over the years to the point where marauding deer are becoming an increasing and almost year-round problem. Stòras Uibhist carried out an aerial deer

count early in 2015 and plans to implement a new deer management scheme to reduce the herd and the impact of deer on crofts, gardens and road safety.

Stòras Uibhist has improved access to the excellent brown trout and sea trout fishing, expanding the number of lochs fished and almost doubling the number of anglers coming to South Uist and Benbecula. The biggest beneficiaries of this uplift in visitors are the local hotels, B&Bs, shops and service providers that anglers use.

Stòras Uibhist has invested in estate infrastructure and economic development for the benefit of the wider community of 3,000. A 6.9MW community-owned wind farm was constructed to secure a long-term revenue stream to fund this activity.

Some of the revenue generated by the wind farm is being spent on maintenance, repair and upgrading of the extensive land drainage system that protects the low-lying machair from flooding. The bio-diverse machair of South Uist has been extensively designated by SNH and provides grazing and arable land for crofters. Without it crofting would not be viable in the Uists.

A community fund provides funding to local community groups and businesses to help expand delivery of the social and economic regeneration remit of Stòras Uibhist.

*Huw Francis, chief executive of Stòras Uibhist*



Smerclate drainage outlet repair



Lochs Show, Laxay, Isle of Lewis

## SUPPORTING CROFTING COMMUNITIES

Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) recognises the importance of crofting in attracting people to live and work within crofting communities, while also creating local employment opportunities. HIE works with whole crofting communities; the inclusive community – including those with and without direct access to crofting.

## HIE AND ITS PARTNERS

We work in partnership with several other bodies to support crofting, to ensure that crofting communities continue to thrive, becoming more resilient and are able to meet opportunities and challenges.

Our key partners include the Crofting Commission, the Scottish Government, local authorities including Business Gateway, Registers of Scotland and Scottish Natural Heritage.



Highlands and Islands Enterprise  
Iomairt na Gàidhealtachd 's nan Eilean



Scalpaigh na Hearadh, Eilean Siar

COMMUNITY-LED DEVELOPMENT

Through each of HIE’s eight area teams – covering Shetland; Orkney; Caithness and Sutherland; Moray, Inner Moray Firth; Lochaber, Skye and Wester Ross; Outer Hebrides, and Argyll and the Islands – we work directly with a broad range of local communities.

HIE’s approach mirrors the way it supports businesses to grow, and is called community account management (CAM). It recognises that each community is different, but all are resourceful, and many face similar challenges such as demographic change, housing, service provision and employment opportunities.

Within HIE account managed communities, there is recognition of the contribution that crofting community development can play in addressing these issues. As a result, many communities have prioritised projects associated with crofting community development.

Our assistance takes many forms and is always tailored to suit the needs and ambitions of each account managed community. In many cases, we have funded the employment of a local development officer who helps the community create growth plans to develop and deliver projects - which make a real and practical difference. These projects are led by the communities themselves, and typically generate income as well as providing services and jobs.

Examples include setting up and managing renewable energy projects and running social enterprises, both of which generate profits to be re-invested in initiatives which benefit the community. In August 2014, HIE was working with a total of 42 account managed communities, 15 of which featured crofting in their growth plans.

- These include Coigach, Ross of Mull and Iona, Glendale and Duirinish, Helmsdale and District, Durness and Laide, Raasay, Scourie, Galson Lochcarron, Durness and Laide, Melness - Tongue and Skerry, Rum, Tiree, Colonsay and Barra and Vatersay.

COMMUNITY RENEWABLE ENERGY

Through supporting account managed communities, we have helped local people deliver successful renewable energy installations. Examples include several communities in the Outer Hebrides which have recognised the potential of using less productive, often communally-owned, ground to develop renewable energy projects which generate not just power, but wider community benefits as well.

HIE’s work developing Local Energy Economies – using the energy innovatively within the communities in which it is generated – already involves the Wester Ross village of Applecross and has huge potential for other crofting communities.

- HIE has contributed £412,000 to renewable energy projects, £151,790 of which assisted 6 projects under crofting tenure.
- HIE facilitated finance via Community Renewable Energy Investment Fund (REIF) to 3 major projects driven by crofting communities.
- The above schemes delivered £1.54m of direct finance and attracted £18.7m from market sources endorsed by Scottish Government.

GEOGRAPHICALLY FOCUSED COLLABORATION

Working with partners, HIE identified an opportunity through public sector collaboration to enhance the vitality and resilience of crofting communities, and opportunities for crofters to diversify their activities and make the best use of opportunities for funding and other support.

This opportunity is through a geographically focused collaboration and has been designed to build on existing partnership work, focused on specific issues including research, co-operatives, stock clubs, marts, and micro abattoirs.

The resulting pilot projects which will be established during 2015/16 are expected to integrate and focus support from public sector partners to deliver greater impact through acting together.



Crofting Connections: Gaelic medium pupils in Argyll learning how to build a traditional thatch roof

The pilots will be delivered in account managed crofting communities working with HIE to design and deliver a growth plan. The Crofting Commission will support croft occupancy and purposeful use, Business Gateway will guide and assist croft business development opportunities, the Scottish Crofting Federation will offer access to skills and training opportunities, and the Scottish Government (through SGRIPD) will provide localised grant support– all delivered in an integrated manner. Other organisations which are also expected to play a role include Scottish Natural Heritage and Registers of Scotland.

This collaborative, multi-agency approach will aim to bring forward the development and resilience of crofting communities. If the pilots are successful, we expect to lead the expansion of the approach across the region.

CROFTING SKILLS

Newcomers and existing crofters can benefit from an extensive programme of practical training delivered by the Scottish Crofting Federation (SCF) with funding from HIE and the Scottish Government Skills Development Scheme.

Courses in subjects as varied as dry stone dyking, fencing, soil analysis, sheep shearing, livestock husbandry, poultry keeping, deer management, fruit growing and thatching are available and crofters have taken up training across the region including:

- Support to 480 participants in Entry Level -Intermediate Courses.40 Practical Skills Learners in 2014-17.
- 344 Entry Level participants in Years 1 and 2 well in excess of 240 target.
- By May 2015
  - 704 people had attended Practical Skills Training Courses
  - 338 had participated in Entry - Intermediate Courses
- A new e-learning module has been developed with Napier University

SUPPLY CHAIN SUPPORT

HIE has funded the Community Retailing Network, now part of the Plunkett Foundation, which supports rural communities to establish co-operatives and community enterprises, including food initiatives.

In 2013 the Plunkett Foundation successfully ran a series of workshops in the Western Isles, Skye and Shetland, bringing together local food producers and community shops with the aim of increasing the availability of local food in the local shops.

CROFT CREATION

Through its community account management work, in recent years HIE has helped create several new crofts on the Island of Rum. Several other communities are also recognising that creating new crofts can play a part in helping to retain and grow population.

We have also worked with partners to develop a strong rationale for the creation of innovative woodland crofts. As a result, new woodland crofts have now been successfully established in Mull, and the Community Woodlands Association is supporting communities to create more around Kilfinnan Forest, Colintraive, Glendaruel, Raasay and Lochcarron.

COMMUNITY ASSET ACQUISITION

We have a long track record of investment in community asset acquisition and is a core source of advice and support for crofting communities considering land ownership.

We are also working in partnership with the BIG Lottery Fund across Scotland to deliver the Scottish Land Fund which creates significant opportunities for crofting communities and others to grow through owning and managing their own assets. With awards ranging from £10,000 to £750,000 and a total value of £9m over four years, the fund is currently open for applications until 30 November 2015.

The appetite for community ownership is nowhere more evident than the Outer Hebrides, as the listings opposite demonstrate. This table shows the prospect of communities acquiring a further 89,000 acres of land, supporting a population of over 4,000 people. Throughout the Outer Hebrides, the areas and communities involved are predominantly under crofting tenure.

CROFTING CONNECTIONS

Crofting Connections is an innovative educational project which will enable young people, aged 3-18 and living in rural communities across the Highlands and Islands, to learn about crofting past, present and future.

The traditional crofting principles of providing food, shelter, clothing, energy and entertainment are very much aligned with the 21st century desire for sustainability and offer tremendous opportunity for outdoor learning and place-based education.

This £325,000 project is delivered by Soil Association Scotland and funded by HIE, the Scottish Government, Bòrd na Gàidhlig, Heritage Lottery Fund and some small private trusts.

Crofting Connections is currently working with 127 schools covering every part of the region. The project is also attracting an ‘in kind’ contribution, valued at £150,000, from crofters, farmers, volunteers, business people and public and third sector employees. The project is firmly aligned with the Curriculum for Excellence and creates a natural link to sustainable living and working in places where people and the environment are valued and nurtured. It is also providing valuable professional development opportunities for teachers. Crofting Connections has a broad reach with:

- 127 Schools (110 primary and 17 secondary) along with 75 crofters 107 community volunteers have participated.
- 105 small businesses and 49 NGO/LA/ Agency Staff have assisted the project.

CAPACITY BUILDING

Strong leadership and management skills are essential within HIE account managed communities to sustain momentum and ensure that the potential identified in growth plans can be fulfilled, both now and in the future.

We provide access to a range of capacity building programmes for communities and opportunities for aspiring leaders, who are involved with and contributing to our account managed businesses, social enterprises and communities.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

We have commissioned The Highland Small Communities Housing Trust to develop a publication illustrating the options for developing affordable housing opportunities on croft land. This will map out the process and provide a diverse range of case studies to showcase the community-led housing developments that have been achieved within crofting communities.

COMMUNITY BROADBAND SCOTLAND

Community Broadband Scotland (CBS) is a Scottish Government programme led across Scotland by HIE. Digital connectivity is key to our communities, and it is essential that all parts of crofting communities are able to access high quality broadband as this is the foundation for economic growth and building stronger communities. CBS helps communities gain access to faster broadband by supporting them to build and manage their own infrastructure.

CBS is currently supporting over 40 communities through scoping and project planning work and has funded 4 community broadband projects to deliver over 750 faster broadband connections in crofting communities.

HIE/SLF SUPPORTED LAND ACQUISITIONS

Galson Estate	56,000 acres
Bhaltois Estate	1,705 acres
North Harris Estate	63,523 acres
Scalpay Estate	1,735 acres
West Harris Estate	16,254 acres
South Uist Estate	93,000 acres
Paicr Estate	26,774 acres
Carloway Estate	11,454 acres

Totals 270,445 acres

COMMUNITIES CONSIDERING LAND ACQUISITIONS

Bays of Harris Estate	31,998 acres
Barvas Estate	34,600 acres
Great Bernera Estate	5,397 acres
Barra and Vatersay Estate	16,890 acres

Totals 89,000 acres

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CROFTING COMMUNITY TRUSTS

# North Harris Trust

Ann-Marie Hewitt, Scalpay development officer, outlines the work of this crofting trust.

THE 25,900 HECTARES of North Harris makes up one of the largest community-owned estates in Scotland.

The trust area includes a large crofting community of 170 crofts. The trust aims to increase employment opportunities, address local housing needs and protect and enhance North Harris's wonderful cultural and natural heritage.

In 2013 the North Harris Trust celebrated its 10th anniversary of community ownership. Over the years the trust has been involved in a range of projects, spread throughout the whole of the estate. The trust's most visible presence is in Tarbert, where the offices are located, but has been involved in activities in virtually

all the villages in North Harris.

In 2011 the owner of the neighbouring island of Scalpay, Fred Taylor, offered to transfer the island to the community for no cost. After a feasibility study and a process of community consultation, in 2013 Scalpay residents voted to join with the North Harris Trust.

Mr Taylor had seen the benefits of community ownership in other areas, including North Harris, and hopes that Scalpay will be able to achieve great things with its own land, with his vision for the future of the community-owned island being one of enterprise, small business and families.

The trust now employs eight staff who run the estate and take forward

projects and initiatives, compared to only two when the trust was formed.

A number of large capital projects have been completed in 2015. The main achievement has been a three-turbine wind farm on the estate – a project which has taken over 10 years of work to bring to fruition. Three zero-carbon business units have been built just outside Tarbert. These address a lack of affordable business space in North Harris and we hope to see improved economic activity in the area as a result.

The trust has dedicated staff to run its significant land management programme and ranger service. Our land management work is wide-ranging and includes control of invasive plant species, crofting

administration, habitat monitoring, native woodland regeneration and the maintenance of our extensive footpath network.

The ranger service runs a popular guided walks programme through the spring, summer and autumn, including the weekly eagle walks run in collaboration with RSPB. These walks serve as a good introduction to the natural and cultural heritage of the area and encourage outdoor participation.

The ranger service also secured funding for the North Harris eagle observatory, which has proved to be popular with visitors and locals alike, with approximately 6000 visitors to the site in 2014.



# West Harris Trust

Linda Armstrong highlights recent developments.

THE WEST HARRIS Trust is a community charity responsible for managing 7225ha of land on the west side of the Isle of Harris.

The estate was purchased from the Scottish Government in 2010 and earlier this year we celebrated our 5th birthday. We feel that we have achieved a lot in the last five years and hope that our work will help to meet our goal of improving the long-term sustainability of the trust and the community which we serve.

A key aim of the trust is to revitalise the community by attracting new residents and creating new housing and employment opportunities.

We have made huge strides towards this aim as we have recently begun construction of a £2.1m Community Enterprise Centre (CEC). It is hoped that the building will be ready to move into by March

2016, providing much-needed office and studio space. There will also be a community venue of about 80sqm which can be divided into two. Half of the area will be for general community use and the other half will be for a café/restaurant on a franchise basis.

There is also a site identified for affordable housing, with Hebridean Housing Partnership planning to build six houses in 2016-17, and four self-build plots, two of which have been allocated.

It is hoped that the project will revitalise the area as well as bringing in some much-needed employment. It is predicted that once the centre is fully occupied it will create 10 full-time jobs.

Outwith the development we have allocated a number of affordable self-build plots which will be home to permanent residents.

A further aim of the trust is to create environmentally sustainable energy for the community via micro-wind projects. Our renewables projects are managed West Harris Renewables, a subsidiary of the trust. These projects are delivered in co-operation with common grazing committees from whom we lease the land on which we site turbines.

We erected a 65KW Harbon wind turbine in Scarista in early 2014 and are currently looking at options to erect a further turbine above the CEC. The turbine will provide energy to the centre, making it more

sustainable by reducing running costs as well as providing an income to the trust through electricity sales and the feed-in tariff.

It is our eventual aim that the trust will be self-sustaining and it is hoped that projects such as the above will help us to achieve this goal.

To follow our progress and see what else we are working on please visit our website at [www.westharristrust.org](http://www.westharristrust.org).



## CROFTING COMMUNITY TRUSTS

## Community buyout in Pairc nears

**F**OLLOWING YEARS OF disputes, delays and frustrations, the purchase of the Pairc Estate in south-east Lewis by Pairc Trust on behalf of the local community is close to conclusion.

At the Trust's AGM on 14th May it was announced that missives have recently been concluded and a legally binding contract with the landlord is in place for the first time. The date of entry, when Pairc Trust will take title to the estate, depends on resolution of the landlord's claim for professional fees involved in negotiating and completing the transaction, and should take place later this year.

Over the last year, Pairc Trust and the landlord, through their respective lawyers, have been drawing up a legal contract to implement the agreement for a voluntary transfer of the whole estate, which was endorsed by the Pairc community in a ballot, the result of which was announced on 1st May 2014. External funding for the purchase and initial revenue costs have been committed by Scottish Land Fund, HIE, and Comhairle nan Eilean Siar.

*The main issues which delayed the process were:*

- Mapping of the estate. Over 260 pieces of land have been sold off from the estate since it last changed hands in 1924 and it was necessary to prepare detailed maps of all boundaries before Registers of

Scotland would allow registration of title.

- Ownership of the foreshore. This will come to Pairc Trust following a letter received from the Crown Estate confirming they have no interest in the Pairc foreshore.
- Whether VAT is payable on the purchase price of the estate.
- The decision by SSE in September 2014 to withdraw from the lease with Pairc Renewables Ltd, following which the lease has been terminated. This required some technical updating of the previous agreement to reflect the legal change.
- Handling of the landlord's claim for legal and other professional fees 'reasonably, necessarily and properly incurred' in negotiating, progressing and completing the transfer of Pairc Estate. Pairc Trust has the right to refer the landlord's claim to an interim auditor for determination and the date of entry depends on when this process is concluded.
- Finally, a procedure has been agreed whereby Pairc Trust is consulted and has the right of veto over any estate transactions during the period between conclusion of missives and date of entry.

*John Randall  
Pairc Trust*



Breasclate and Carloway with Harris Hills



Lemreway

## CROFTING COMMUNITY TRUSTS

## conclusion at last

## Carloway Estate Trust

## Urras Oighreachd Chàrlabhaigh

*Trust chair Kenneth J MacLennan describes how this new community-owned estate came into being.*

**O**N 1ST MAY 2015 the communities in Callanish, Breasclate, Tolsta Chaolais, Doune, Kirivick and Knock Carloway, Isle of Lewis took over official ownership of Carloway Estate, which extends to 11,500 acres, over 200 crofts and a population in the region of 600 people.

We have been on a three-year journey which proved to be exciting, challenging and hard work, but we have achieved the goal the community entrusted us with – and we see it as a great achievement. This is the first step in a process that we hope will see prosperity, development and long-term benefit for the residents of Carloway Estate.

We were in the fortunate position of having a willing seller. The community has expressed their appreciation for the way the Galloway family has managed the estate over many years; and also the professional manner they adopted throughout the buyout process.

A local steering group was elected at a public meeting in June 2012 to investigate the viability of the project and a subsequent ballot resulted in 76% voting in favour of a community buyout. After valuation by the district valuer, funding was approved by the Big Lottery, Scottish Land Fund, Highlands and Islands Enterprise and Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, with revenue funding for a development officer for two years whose remit will be to look at ways to develop the estate for the benefit of its residents and to generate an income stream into the estate.

Carloway Estate also acquired the foreshore of the estate from the Crown Estate in May, which may lead to further opportunities in the future. Tourism, renewables and housing highlighted in the feasibility studies will be investigated further by the development officer.

This is an exciting time for Carloway Estate and plans are in hand for a community celebration event in Breasclate hall on 6th June when the official re-enactment of Sasine will take place.

## Comataidh a' bhaile - deamocrasaidh ionadail

**T**HA E IOMCHÀIDH an dèidh taghadh airson pàrlamaid Lunnainn a bhith cuimhneachadh gu bheil deamocrasaidh cuideachd ag obair aig ìre ionadail, gu h-àraidh sna sgìrean croitearachd.

'S e an comataidh ionaltraidh, no comataidh a' bhaile a tha mi a-mach air an seo. Chunnaic sinn uile an dealbh ainmeil "Pàrlamaid Hìort", agus na fir cruinnichte air sràid a' bhaile a' deasbad obair an latha. Ach tha fhios gun robh rudeigin mar seo a' tachairt sa h-uile baile croitearachd. Sa bhaile againne, bhiodh iad a' cruinneachadh air an "lianag" air Disathairne gus beachdachadh air an obair a dh'fheumte dèanamh – eadar càradh nam feansaichean, cladhach dìgean no fìonal airgead airson an tairbh. Bhiodh buill comataidh gan taghadh leis na croitearan ann an dùil gum biodh iad a' cur air adhart gnòthaichean a' bhaile ann an dòigh a bha ceart is cothromach.

Tha sinn uile eòlach air bailtean far nach eil cùisean idir a' dol gu rèidh, far a bheil croitearan a' tuiteam a-mach air a chèile no dh'fhaoidte dìreach nach tig daoine gu aonta. Bidh sin a' tachairt, ach fhad 's a tha a h-uile duine onarach, bidh cothrom ann cùisean a dheasbad agus fuasgladh air choireigin obrachadh a-mach. Tha e iongantach mar a ghabhas eas-aonta tionndadh gu còrdadh.

'S ann nuair nach eil daoine fosgailte gun tèid cùisean ceàrr. Ma tha iad breugach, no ri cùl-mhùtaireachd chan eil cothrom

aig deamocrasaidh – aig ìre sam bith. Tha ball-pàrlamaid nan Eileanan a Tuath sna naidheachdan an dràsta an dèidh dha fios diomhair (agus ceàrr) a chur gu pàipear naidheachd, breug innse, agus an dèidh rannsachadh cosgail, ag aideachadh gur e bh' ann ceart gu leòr. 'S ann a bha e a' briseadh na h-earbsa a bha luchd-bhòtaidh a chur ann, agus chan obraich deamocrasaidh mura bheil earbsa ann.

Ach ma tha earbsa eadar daoine, tha na cothroman a' fosgladh a-mach. Aig ìre nam bailtean croitearachd gabhaidh sgeimichean coilltearachd agus sgeimichean àrainneachdail cleachdadh gus buannachdan eile a thoirt leotha. Chan e a-mhàin gun tig sruth airgid a-staigh ach pàighidh iad airson piosan monaidh fheansadh, gus trusadh a dhèanamh nas fhasa.

An-diugh tha cothroman ann sruth airgid fhaighinn bho chumhachd ath-nuadhachaidh. Tha gu leòr a ghaoth, uisge agus uaireannan grian againn airson feum mòr a dhèanamh dhiubh. Bha comataidhean airson ionaltradh coitcheann ann an dùthchannan eile cuideachd agus an-diugh tha coimhearsnachdan ag aithneachadh am feum agus a' dèanamh oidhirpean gus an ath-bheothachadh. Ma tha earbsa eadar daoine agus ma bhios deamocrasaidh ag obair ceart, bidh bunait ann airson coimhearsnachdan seasmhach.

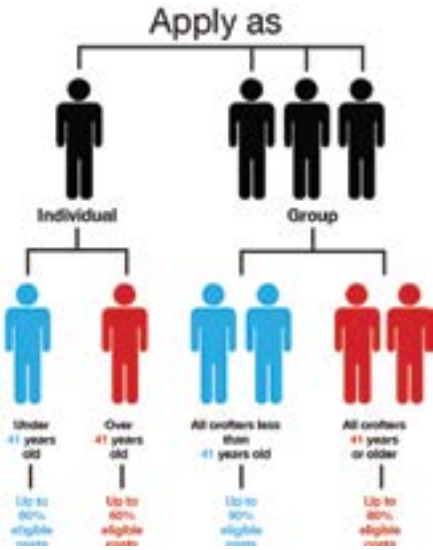
*Gabhan Mac a'Phearsain*

ON THE CROFT

A shed full of advice at Knock Farm

SAC CONSULTING, PORTREE, held a well-received meeting earlier this year on shed design for animal welfare, increasing efficiency and reducing pollution. The Scottish Government Veterinary and Advisory Services Programme and the Farming for a Better Climate Initiative funded the meeting.

It is a good time to be considering shed design as the new CAGS has attractive rates.



NB rates outwith the less-favoured areas are lower. Apart from age young crofters also need to have been in business for less than 5 years. This will exclude a number of crofters who are under 40 from the higher rate

The meeting had several stations that were an excellent guide for crofters thinking of altering and improving their enterprises. This will be on many minds, after the wet winter and late spring experienced in many parts of the crofting counties. It is important to improve resilience to a changing and volatile climate.

The proverb says 'where there is muck, there is brass'. The current reality of cross-compliance and farmyard manure was fully covered by Siobhan MacDonald. This included danger

points, for example, if farmyard manure is stored on concrete it is considered slurry, so it is much better to store farmyard manure on soil or hard core 10 metres away from watercourses. For further information, see: [www.sruc.ac.uk/info/120175/farming\\_for\\_a\\_better\\_climate](http://www.sruc.ac.uk/info/120175/farming_for_a_better_climate) or follow 'Farming for a Better Climate' on Facebook and Twitter. For folk who prefer paper, your local SAC office can provide the *Know the Rules* pack that covers the legislation.

If farmyard manure is managed correctly on the croft, penalties are avoided and an important fertiliser can be produced on the holding. See the following table:

Manure type	Application rate	Available N (kg/ha) *	Total P <sub>2</sub> O <sub>5</sub> (kg/ha)	Total K <sub>2</sub> O (kg/ha)
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For example, if the price of 20:10:10 fertiliser is £300/t and the manure is free (although you have to consider spreading costs), then the financial value in the above example becomes clear. The 20:10:10 is worth £112/Ha, whereas the farmyard manure is worth £105/Ha.

Jim Campbell, SRUC's renewable energy expert, discussed incorporating renewables such as hydro systems on common grazings or incorporating solar or wood-chip boilers into sheds and croft housing. Designing watering systems to cope with freezing conditions was also discussed.

Back in Skye by popular demand was Jamie Robertson, a fellow columnist of the *The Crofter*. He focused on sheds; the role of good shed ventilation to maintain the correct temperature for young animals; and ensuring adequate ventilation to ensure healthier sheds and reduce incidence of pneumonia and other diseases. After the meeting, several participants made plans for their sheds incorporating Jamie's points on ventilation.

Feeding of stock was not ignored. Jim Campbell discussed improving silage and draff storage. This can reduce costs, wastage and prevent farm pollution. Draff was a topical

point at the meeting as a new distillery may be opening in Sleat, providing another source of draff on the island.

A workshop led by Ross MacKenzie highlighted the importance of knowing the type and composition of the compound feed provided to stock. Sometimes the cheapest feed by tonne does not provide the best value. Storage issues were also discussed and crofters reminded that feed storage such as silos are funded under CAGS. This could be an interesting application for a group or common grazings to support small-scale producers, through collaboration to gain some of the savings in bulk purchasing.

Kind thanks to the MacInnes family who hosted this event and to their landlords Eilean Iarmain.

Janette Sutherland  
SAC Portree

The Scottish Government's  
VETERINARY & ADVISORY SERVICES PROGRAMME  
SAC Consulting invites you to a  
'Shed-full of Advice'  
Saturday 7th of February, Starts 11am, Knock Farm, Sleat  
By Kind permission of DJ MacInnes  
Lunch provided

VENTILATION  
DRAFF & SILAGE  
BEDDING  
CATTLE  
POLLUTION PREVENTION

All Welcome



Siobhan Macdonald demonstrates when dung is farmyard manure and when it is slurry



A group of crofters discuss the potential for renewable energy in their sheds, crofts and commons



Top trumps feeds gets underway

ON THE CROFT

Australian Shetland cattle herd established

SCF member Paddy Zakaria reports on her successful groundbreaking project to safeguard the Shetland cattle gene pool.

REPORTED IN the last issue of *The Crofter* that I had seven Ayrshire heifers in Australia carrying embryos of the Shetland cattle breed.

When born these would be the only Shetland cattle outside this country. The embryos were implanted in April 2014 and in January this year I travelled to Australia for the birth of the calves. Thirteen embryos had been implanted in Ayrshire heifers and seven heifers were confirmed in calf, which is slightly higher than the expected 50 per cent success rate for frozen embryos. The calves born would be the beginnings of an independent off-shore gene pool that could be the salvation of the breed if any disease or other catastrophe struck the UK and put the herd here at risk.

While all the embryos were implanted on the same day, the seven calves were born over a period of fifteen days. To my very great relief four

of the seven calves born were heifers – a fear lurking in the back of my mind was that I would get seven bulls!

All five of the donor cows and both of the bulls used to create the embryos are represented in the calves and therefore I have all of the planned-for genetics. I will collect semen from the three bull calves as soon as they are old enough, because although they are all sons of the same sire, they each have different genetics through their dams. At five years old they will be able to be used in the field on the then current generation of heifers and their semen will be kept for the long-term future. If I wish to grow the herd more quickly than by natural breeding I will flush embryos from one or more of the heifers.

The selection of cows for creating the embryos, and bulls for semen collection, has been made

with the aim of ultimately recreating, in Australia, the full gene pool of the breed. The genetics of the Australian herd, even at this early stage, are already very broad, as the five donor cows and the six bulls in the programme are all widely unrelated. Colour has also been a consideration and while all the calves born are black and white, as were their dams and sires, the semen collection has been planned to recreate the wide colour diversity that existed in the cattle in Shetland before later 20thC breeding practices began to select for black and white. In the selection of bulls for semen collection, all existing colours are represented and the future herd in Australia will include red, dun, grey and brindle, as well as black and white. The new herd will therefore look more like the colourful old herds of Shetland's past.

The calves were born at the height of summer, an inevitable result of implanting the embryos in autumn, which is the optimum season for success. Fortunately the summer this year was relatively mild and none of the calves was born on a very hot day. There were a few stretches of days in the mid 30Cs but there were no 40C days and the calves managed to cope, despite the general lack of shade on the exposed, fertile, volcanic plains of western Victoria where they were born. After weaning they will be moved to the cooler, wooded temperate rainforest of the Otway Ranges in southern Victoria until they are old enough for breeding.

The successful birth of the seven heifer and bull calves is the culmination of three years of planning and executing this breed conservation project. Progress to this end was not without difficulty and it is with great relief that I can now sit back and let the calves grow to breeding age. I am also assisting a cattle breeder in Canada to go down the same route that I did, and with luck I will be able to report in the future not only that Shetland cattle are increasing exponentially in Australia, but also that a new herd of Shetlands is firmly established in Canada.



ON THE CROFT

New management scheme for sea eagles

A FEW YEARS ago I overheard a conversation at the Royal Highland Show between a senior representative of a conservation charity and a politician. They were enthusiastically discussing the imminent introduction of white-tailed eagles to the east coast of Scotland. Indeed the birds were shortly to arrive at Edinburgh airport from Norway.

This was at a time when reports from crofters and farmers on the west coast of losses attributed to the species were being vigorously rebutted by the conservation agencies. So the range of the sea eagle was being artificially extended before there had been any evaluation of the impact of their original reintroduction on Rum and

their subsequent spread up and down the west coast. Their success has exceeded all expectations, but is that so surprising given their position at the top of the food chain? Also there is anecdotal evidence that in places they are challenging and out-competing golden eagles.

It is against that background that the Scottish Government has set up the new sea eagle management scheme which will run for the next three years. With it comes the belated acknowledgement that sea eagles do on occasions take live, healthy and well-grown lambs. The scheme, which has been cautiously welcomed by SCF, has funds available to assist crofters and farmers experiencing losses due to sea eagle predation.

Problems should in the first

instance be reported to the local SNH office. SNH say they will respond to all reports and this will usually involve a visit from an officer of SNH or a contracted fieldworker, who will advise on mitigation measures and possibly lend out scaring equipment. The new scheme is also intended to fund management works which could involve, for example, establishing or restoring lambing parks away from the worst-affected areas, or even supporting the cost of sheds or polytunnels for lambing.

Local stakeholder groups, including SCF representation, will oversee and monitor the working of the scheme, reviewing reports from affected crofters and farmers and assessing applications for assistance with mitigation measures. It is very important that

anyone suffering losses reports these promptly to the local SNH office. We are also asking crofters to copy reports to SCF head office. Initially stakeholder groups have been set up in Argyll and Lochaber, Skye and Lochalsh, and Wester Ross. Other groups may be established where the demand arises.

Speaking for myself, I enjoy the sight of birds of prey as I go about the croft, even though I view them with apprehension at times. But let us now hope for some recognition that hill sheep and the crofters that work with them are two of the most endangered species in the Highlands and Islands, especially at a time when some idiots are calling for "reintroduction" of lynx and wolves!

Donald Murdie



The goose saga continues

THE RURAL AFFAIRS, Climate Change and Environment (RACCE) parliamentary committee are dealing with our petition calling on the Scottish Government (SG) to do more about the goose problem in the Uists. As an outcome of evidence gathering, RACCE wrote to SG asking for a response to a large number of questions.

The SG has given a comprehensive reply to the letter and has addressed some of the issues. However, overall we feel the SG letter is somewhat evasive and incomplete. SCF was invited to comment on the SG response. We had a number of specific points to comment

on that we feel were inadequately addressed, or to which we feel the SG response was disappointing.

A general comment is that SG repeatedly refers to Islay where a vast amount of public money is spent on goose management. The total of £1,041,719 spent on Islay in 2014/15, compared to £62,600 spent on the Uists the same year, is startling. The stated Uist budget reduction to £45,400 and then £35,400 in subsequent years is deeply disappointing and SG fails to demonstrate how it would endeavour to make up the shortfall needed to run an adequate control programme in the Uists, as asked for by RACCE.

SG's response to the RACCE comment that "the current approach and methods of controlling geese require to be reviewed." is inadequately answered in saying that the NGMRG "is still at an early stage in some of the work arising from the 2010 Review". Will time-frames like this "ensure that goose populations, and their impact on agriculture and the environment, are effectively managed"?

We thank the RACCE for their interest in this vital issue that has such a devastating effect on crofters and ask that the issues raised be pursued with Scottish Government.

ON THE CROFT

Donald's hortiblog

AT THE TIME of writing for this summer edition, we are still, in late May, waiting for spring to arrive here in Skye, and summer seems a long way off.

A very wet and stormy winter has dragged on and on, reminding us of the dismal growing conditions we experienced in 1993 and 2005. Thank goodness there was just enough dry weather in late April to get the outside cultivation done and the potatoes planted.

It is in years like this that we are very glad of the polytunnels. In spite of everything the weather has thrown at us, we have been harvesting early crops of asparagus, spinach, swiss chard and salad leaves. We made space for a few precious rows of early potatoes which are a very special treat at this time of year.

For the first time we have grown the variety International Kidney. This is the famous Jersey Royal

potato but can only be called that if grown in Jersey as it has a European Protected Designation of Origin. It seems to like the well-drained, mineral-rich soil of north Skye, given a generous addition of seaweed of course.

The tomatoes have needed even more care and attention this year. As usual they were sown in an electric propagator on a windowsill in mid-February. There was a good germination, but like everything else, growth has been very slow. In mid-March they were potted up into three inch pots which took up the entire dining table for the next couple of weeks. Then they were transferred to a polytunnel and kept fleeced over in fish boxes. By late April they were ready to plant out but we still had very low temperatures, even in the tunnels, with night frosts.

We always grow in the soil rather than grow bags or other bought-in growing media which tend to run short of nutrients fairly quickly. Also we're convinced that the soil gives a better taste to the produce. Anyway, the tomatoes had to be planted out regardless, then fleeced over to protect them overnight. They have now had their side shoots pinched out and have been tied in to string supports.

One variety, Sungold, has started flowering. So far so good; now they need some warmth.

The polytunnel strawberries have grown and flowered well in the cool conditions and we have just tried the first fruits; another seasonal treat, but they would have benefitted from a bit more sun to bring out the flavour.

These also suffered an attack of the dreaded red-spider mite which is a hazard of perennial crops in polytunnels. If unchecked the mite forms tight webs over the leaves and can literally suffocate the plant. Luckily we managed to deal with this in time by removing the affected leaves. Now we need to keep a close eye on the plants and wet the leaves regularly, which discourages this pest.

Let's hope for a better growing season with plentiful and healthy crops.

donald@crofting.org



Ticks and tick-borne diseases

THE MOST COMMON species of tick in the UK is *Ixodes ricinus*, the sheep tick, which is distributed widely over the country. It is the vector for tick-borne diseases found in the UK – including louping ill, tick-borne fever and tick pyaemia.

Recently ticks and the diseases they transmit have become of increasing public concern, amidst reports of ticks spreading geographically and increasing in numbers.

Factors contributing to this are climate change, sheep farming economics, a reduction in sheep dipping, environmental biodiversity

management strategies in relation to habitat and the marked increase in deer numbers acting as tick maintenance hosts. Louping ill is the tick-transmitted disease with the greatest economic impact in the UK. However, both tick-borne fever and lamb pyaemia (crippled lambs) can cause serious losses in hill sheep flocks.

Tick control, including optimal products to use and timing of application, is best planned for individual crofts as part of your animal health plan in consultation with your vet. Generally, for most sheep flocks in high risk areas, acaricides are the main form of

control. Current products licensed in the UK for sheep with duration of protection and meat withdrawal times are shown in Table 1.

Any tick control programme implemented should be at least three years in duration, due to the long life of the tick. Cattle should be included in treatment programmes. There is an effective vaccine for louping ill and lambs gain protection via maternal antibodies present in the colostrum of ewes exposed to tick for this disease, but not for tick-borne fever.

Here, tick control is essential and ewes should be exposed to areas where ticks are present before pregnancy to prevent abortion; and tups at least one month before tupping as temporary infertility may result from tickborne fever in naive tups.

A molecular test is now available at Moredun for the diagnosis of acute cases of tickborne fever and can be accessed by contacting SRUC, APHA or Moredun direct. For further information please visit [www.moredun.org](http://www.moredun.org)

Dr Beth Wells, post doctoral research scientist, at Moredun Research Institute.

Product	Active Ingredient	Application Method	Duration of protection	Meat withdrawal
Coopers Ectoforce Sheep Dip	Diazinon**	Plunge dip	3-6 weeks	35 days
Osmonds Gold Fleece Sheep Dip	Diazinon**	Plunge dip	3- 6 weeks	35 days
Paracide Plus	Diazinon**	Plunge dip	3-6 weeks	35 days
Coopers Spot-On Insecticide	Delta - methrin	Pour-on	Up to 6 weeks	35 days
Crovect	High-cis cypermethrin	Pour-on	6-8 weeks	8 days
Dysect Sheep Pour-On	Alphacypermethrin	Pour-on	8-12 weeks	28 days

Table 1: Products licensed for use in tick control in UK sheep flocks

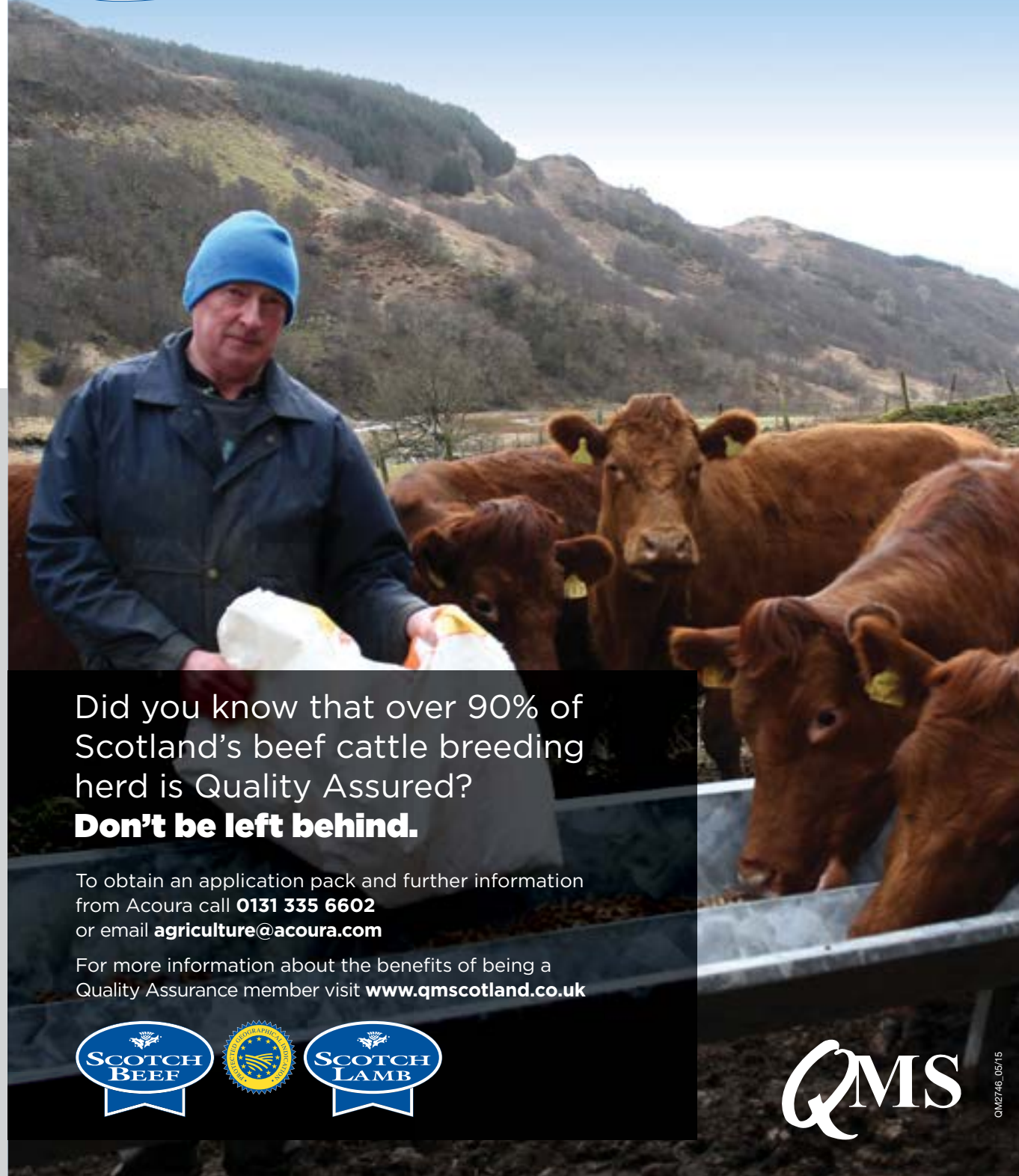
\* Table reproduced with the permission of Neil Sargison, Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies, University of Edinburgh.

\*\*Organophosphate dips and the anthelmintics levamisole and morantel should not be used within 14 days of each other.



## "I'm proud to produce Quality Assured suckled calves"

Neil McCorkindale, Scammadale Farm, Oban



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**QMS**

QM2746\_05/15

### ON THE CROFT

## Food from the hills

**T**HERE HAS BEEN an impressive improvement in the quality of food available throughout the Highlands and Islands over the last two decades, which is of great benefit to locals and visitors alike.

The potential for locally sourced food has been growing slowly but surely, and with it the opportunity for an improved degree of sustainability for local producers.

Thirty years ago whilst travelling the back roads of the north west Highlands before heading up into the hills again, I was amazed to come across a Spanish refrigerated HGV parked up and loading bags of shellfish. The contrast between the third-rate fare we had been offered the night before, and nights before that, and the appreciation of food quality that takes a foreign supply chain on a 2,000 mile plus round trip to NW Scotland was massive. Quality sells if the right effort is made in the right places.

The cattle on our crofts represent a similar opportunity to the shellfish. We can sell local food locally, but it must be of good quality. And that is where the crofter can help.

The opportunity to sell locally-produced meat has been constrained by the lack of processing, but much effort from many people has gone towards making local processing a feasible reality. But any plant, should it materialise, will only survive if it has quality product to sell. Local enthusiasm will sell product once, but if we want the buyers to return we must supply a good product.

The crofts have the cows, and the communities have the bulls. These are the source of any future locally-sourced beef and the basis of all the quality. We can process it right, hang it right, and market it with twenty-first century pizzazz, but it must be good quality to start with to enable any local supply chain to survive.

Random genetics and tardy growth will only dilute the good practice achieved by others. The knowledge of how to produce quality beef has been around for a long time; and it is now time to apply that knowledge rigorously to support the whole local supply chain.

Manage the cows' health and nutrition and be cruelly objective

about bull selection to make sure that we supply what the market wants. If we do that, the buyers will return again and again.

*Jamie Robertson  
Livestock Management Systems Ltd  
Pioneer House  
79 Waterloo Quay  
Aberdeen*



© Cecil Pirie, Stockright Systems, 10 Blackford Avenue, Rothienorman 07876 045133

## Crofters urged to support quality assurance membership drive

**Q**UALITY MEAT SCOTLAND launched a major recruitment drive at the start of this year to increase the membership of its quality assurance scheme. During the first four months of 2015 more than 160 applications from new members were received.

The Scots were global pioneers of quality assurance which was first introduced here in 1990. Currently, over 90% of Scotland's breeding cattle population and 80% of the breeding sheep flock are born on farms covered by quality assurance, along with almost 100% of significant pig farming businesses.

Jim McLaren, chairman of QMS, emphasised the importance of everyone in the industry working together to encourage those who are not yet members to join, and many processors and auctioneers have been contacting non-assured customers to encourage them to become members.

"Whether you are a crofter, farmer, haulier, feed company, auction market operator or a processor, it is vital to the future of these businesses and our industry that everyone is united in support of our whole-chain quality assurance," said Mr McLaren.

A key focus of the campaign has been on



Scottish beef cattle breeding farms that remain outside farm assurance. Neil McCorkindale, who runs 100 cows to produce suckled calves at Scammadale near Oban, is proud his farm is quality assured. "There is no doubt in my mind that quality assurance is vital to the future of my business and the beef industry in Scotland. Consumers expect to be able to buy beef with total confidence that it has been produced to a high standard and quality assurance is the only way we can offer them that guarantee of production and welfare standards. The horsemeat fraud

highlighted the importance of having a Scotch Beef brand underpinned by a robust set of standards."

Membership fee varies with the size of the unit and discounts are available for crofting groups and those who combine assessments with those for other schemes. QMS has reviewed the fee structure of assurance scheme membership with the aim to make it as fair as possible for farmers and crofters with different business sizes. Membership fees for farms with smaller numbers of animals have been reduced, with the fees

for farms with large numbers of cattle and sheep increased slightly to offset this, maintaining the scheme's non-profit-making status.

More information is available by emailing [agriculture@acoura.com](mailto:agriculture@acoura.com) or calling 0131 335 6602 or visit [www.qmscotland.co.uk](http://www.qmscotland.co.uk).

*Pictured is Aberdeenshire finisher Leslie King, who farms near Banchory, and is supporting the QMS campaign.*

TRAINING

Meet the training team

Lucy Beattie introduces a different kind of training feature.

WE HAVE HAD feedback (particularly to Donna and Tina at the 20:20 gathering) that members feel detached from staff and want to get to know them more. Some folks had the impression that SCF is a vast organisation with many staff and a faceless HQ. Far from the truth! Based on Roseanna Greenstreet's *Guardian* "Q and A" articles, we came up with similar questions to give a bit of insight into our training scheme staff. For SCF we changed "cat or dog" to "cow or sheep".



Tina Hartley  
Training Project Manager

Tina lives in Ullapool with her husband, two children, mad dog and lots of bees. Originally from Lancashire, she started out at SCF with next to no experience of day-to-day crofting, but has been a business consultant for a diverse range of enterprises in crofting communities. She claims not to know the back end of a sheep from the front, but has successfully revived a dying beehive with a hairdryer – a story for another day! She brings us a wealth of knowledge and experience in training facilitation, tutoring and business management.

- First experience of crofting?**  
*Running our first entry level course in Ullapool*
- Sheep or cow?**  
*The cuddly one!*
- Favourite time of year?**  
*Summer*
- Coast or country?**  
*Coast*
- What would your superpower be?**  
*Mind-reading*
- Item you could not do without?**  
*Dishwasher*
- What makes you happy?**  
*Sunshine*
- Your guilty pleasure?**  
*Chocolate*
- Your favourite saying?**  
*"Maybe..."*



Lucy Beattie  
Training Project Manager

Born and bred in Leckmelm, near Ullapool, Lucy grew up helping on the farm and ended up studying agriculture at university. When Lucy isn't working on the training programme you'll find her with her family and at the fank, or on the fields with her turkeys, sheep and cattle. Her earliest farming memory, at four years old, is of being chased across the farmyard by a Charolais bull. Working for SCF fits perfectly with her grass-roots attitude to the future of rural communities.

- First experience of crofting?**  
*Watching an older crofter making antler crooks*
- Sheep or cow?**  
*Sheep*
- Favourite time of year?**  
*Spring*
- Coast or country?**  
*Coast*
- What would your superpower be?**  
*Time travel*
- Item you could not do without?**  
*Glasses*
- What makes you happy?**  
*Tea*
- Your guilty pleasure?**  
*Twitter*
- Your favourite saying?**  
*"It'll be grand"*



Donna Williamson  
SCF Training Clerk

Brought up in Ullapool with a crofting past on both sides of her family, Donna now lives with her husband and son in Lossiemouth. Before SCF she experienced hands-on crofting digging potatoes and catching sheep as a teenager. She graduated from art school and uses her creative flare to help us raise the profile of SCF. With time spent working in management and admin, she is our spreadsheet, statistics and social media queen. She also runs her own part-time business, Pebbletree.

- First experience of crofting?**  
*Digging in the tattie holidays!*
- Sheep or cow?**  
*Cow*
- Favourite time of year?**  
*Autumn*
- Coast or country?**  
*Coast*
- What would your superpower be?**  
*Teleportation*
- Item you could not do without?**  
*My to-do lists!*
- What makes you happy?**  
*Waking up to a blue sky*
- Your guilty pleasure?**  
*Watching daft TV shows*
- Your favourite saying?**  
*"Do as you would be done by."*

Abattoir project public meeting

THE SKYE AND Lochalsh abattoir project was given a public launch at a well-attended meeting held in Portree at the start of June. Project officer Rachael Jackson gave a presentation on all aspects of the scheme, representing a year's work to translate the long-term aspirations of Skye and Lochalsh meat supply group into a robust model for taking the project forward. The abattoir will operate as a service for the region's crofters and farmers and the meat processing facilities will be offered for lease to a butchery business. The plant will

fulfil Scottish Government objectives on food security, short supply chains, traceability and animal welfare. The abattoir will be run as a not-for-profit community enterprise. It will be viable with a modest throughput of 100 cattle, 800 sheep and 130 pigs per year, which should be comfortably exceeded, based on the producer surveys carried out. Its business structure will be a community benefit co-operative with charitable status. Three part-time jobs will be created. Following comprehensive surveys, a site within Portree industrial estate has been

identified and negotiations with the owners, Highlands and Islands Enterprise are ongoing. The local community council, councillors and MSPs have all given their support and a pre-planning application has had a positive response. Next steps are to obtain a license from the Food Standards Agency; register the company; raise funds locally; and apply for public and charitable funding. Total cost will be £2m, and all the indications are that raising that sort of money is challenging but achievable. The aim is to start work on site in spring 2016.

MEMBERSHIP MATTERS

SCF area and branch funds

John Bannister and Russell Smith – area representatives for Skye and Lochalsh and East Sutherland areas respectively – give their thoughts for local funding activities.

Money is like muck, not good except it be spread  
~ Francis Bacon 1561-1626

MOST PEOPLE WILL agree that money makes the world go around and therefore its importance for making sure we have enough of it to do the things we want to do. It is important. What's good in our personal life is equally good when it comes to the boring, but necessary, business of funding our SCF areas and branches. Experience has shown us a number of ways where we can obtain the necessary funds at local level. But it's not simply by holding out one's hand, though that may also work in some instances. Knowing where to look and using an imaginative strategy may often bring about results. The obvious questions are: why do you want the money? It may be you want to organise a branch or area study tour; without the funding your members may find it too costly for them. You may want to invite some expert to speak at a meeting (indoor or outdoor) and therefore need to pay for the venue, a guest appearance fee and/or travel and perhaps overnight expenses. The

events and ideas you choose are as wide as one's imagination. Good, relevant ideas may attract business sponsorship or a local authority grant.

Before you start a few essentials are also necessary, such as:

- Have you a good purpose/object/idea for making the request in the first place? Your members may have to share some of the cost, at the very least to show goodwill on their part.
- Is your branch or area a properly-constituted group, with its own constitution, office bearers and bank account (with two signatories)? If not, a model can be obtained from SCF HQ. Some authorities and businesses will only donate to constituted groups.
- Can the sponsor(s) expect some benefit from making a grant? Will they want some publicity as a result? If not specified, it can at least be offered.
- Smaller, but necessary sums of money will help to top up branch or area funds.

Attracting new members can be useful by claiming a bounty from SCF HQ – this is a percentage of a new member's first year subscription. Recruiting is often easier than you may think, especially when attending a local event, show or livestock market for instance. Or have a whip-round at a meeting to cover the cost of hall hire and tea and biscuits.

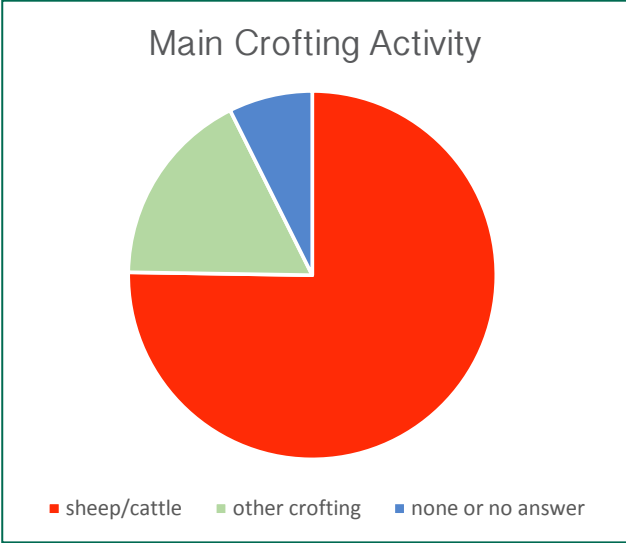
There are a whole range of fund-raising opportunities, from ceilidhs (which take a bit of organising but are good for bringing people together, as well as raising money) to raffles at meetings – which mainly require the brass neck to ask people to contribute prizes and buy tickets. Most people and organisations are willing to donate but do need to be asked and to be told what it is for. Some areas have wind farm community benefit funds and they can be tapped if you can come up with a form of words that meet their funding criteria. SCF is a charity so that helps but, in some cases, you need to show that the whole community will benefit. Good luck!

More of what members think about SCF

IN THE LAST edition of *The Crofter* we talked about some results from the membership survey of last year. Here are some more details. The key question was "How do you rate the effectiveness of the SCF?" About half rated SCF effectiveness at 4 out of 5; with only 7% thinking the SCF was less effective (1 or 2 out of 5). There were no major differences by age. This is the first time we asked this question so we will need to repeat in a few years to monitor our performance. We asked about reasons for joining SCF. The two most common reasons were to support crofting and to be kept informed, which were also the two top reasons when we surveyed members in 2010. More people now cite for assistance and advice than in 2010; and having a voice in crofting policy is less important. Political lobbying was deemed the most important service SCF provides to its members across all age groups. This activity takes up a large amount of the board and chief exec's time. Sometimes we win, but we are not always successful when up against well-funded vested interests. However, it is good to see that the effort is appreciated by members.

As might be expected, assistance, training and mentoring are more important to the younger age groups. The over 60s like local meetings and the gathering proportionally more than the under 60s. Facebook, the

Political lobbying was deemed the most important service SCF provides to its members across all age groups

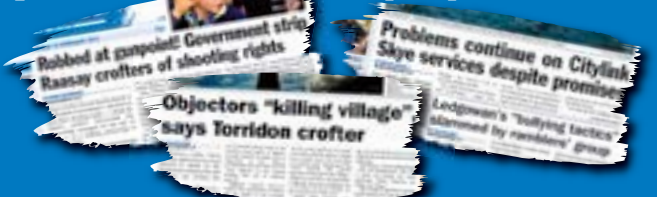


SCF website and training are more used by younger people. Almost 90% of respondents across all age groups use *The Crofter*. With membership services, some comments were about insurance, where we have negotiated a special croft rate with NFU Mutual; and about more or different training, which we will aim to take on board. There were also suggestions of a closer tie-in with SAC, which does occur on an individual level but may be possible at a group level. More local meetings also came up: this was on the list in 2010 so we need to do more. For the first time we asked on the form "What is your main crofting activity?" Of those people who live on and work a croft, 79% keep sheep and/or cattle, what you might call traditional crofting. 17% engage in some other activities – horticulture, poultry, woodlands – but with no sheep or cattle. A small number are just developing their crofts and do not yet have a main activity. Only around 5% mentioned cropping of any sort. Thank you again for completing the form, which provides us with useful management information.

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# Study visit to Senegal

Maria Scholten, project manager, reports.

WITHIN THE HUNGRY for Rights project, a visit to Senegal was organised to study global perspectives on food security, specifically food policy encouraging small-scale food production.

Young crofters Cheryl McIntyre and Alex Munro were able to join on the study visit and contributed to a well-received joint presentation about crofting, land reform and access to land issues.

Senegal is a good example of increased food security and improved public health through active local and national policy, with an important role for small-scale food production. On our trip we were going to see some examples.

The first day took us north of Dakar to meet the project partner FONGS (Fédération des Organisations Non Gouvernementales du Senegal) at their headquarters. FONGS is the umbrella organisation of 31 family farmer associations and it has 120,000 members and 3,000 local groups across the country. It works on the improvement of family farming, food security and the creation of jobs. FONGS provides services to its members such as advocacy; assistance in the commercialisation of crops such as rice, peanut, and native cereals; and seed supplies.

*To increase food supplies and reduce food imports, the city council has made land and water available for small-scale vegetable production*

We saw a micro-bakery project using traditional cereals such as millet and maize, as an alternative to imported expensive wheat. The bread is provided to schools for breakfast.

On the second day the international seminar *How to feed the megapolis? Urban agriculture, local authorities and citizens facing a new challenge* was on the programme.

The municipality of Dakar, the Senegalese ministry of agriculture, representatives of the food and agriculture organisation of the United Nations, the city of Dakar and Milan city council – twinned with Dakar for over 40 years – talked about the challenges facing the megapolis of Dakar, a city covering 82 square kilometres with an estimated 3 million inhabitants and a 30% population growth in recent decades.

To increase food supplies and reduce food imports, the city council has made land and water available for small-scale vegetable production. In the last decade the cultivated area in the Dakar region increased by 3000 hectares, mostly public land.

The next day we visited three micro-gardens (see photograph), set up for training purposes and to help women especially to combat food insecurity by making them more self-sufficient for vegetables and herbs and allowing them to sell surplus.

Four days sufficed to glimpse some of the numerous challenges of this very poor country. The visits to micro-gardens, and the experiences shared by local project workers, gave uplifting insights into the positive role of small producers.



Micro-gardens in Dakar



International seminar in Dakar



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## Rooted in Our Communities



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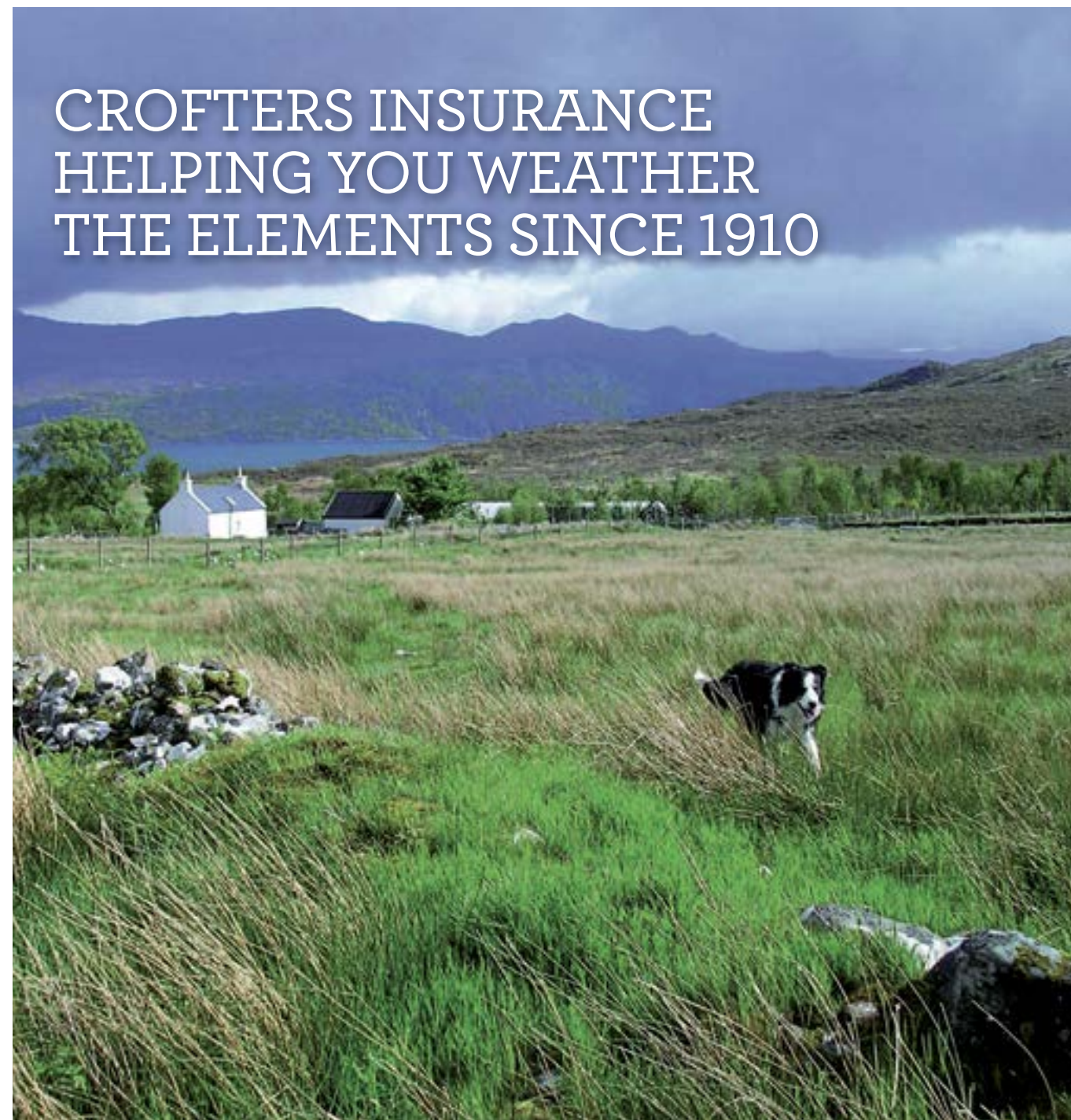
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# Defining the crofting cultural landscape

**T**HE NATIONAL TRUST for Scotland is hosting a mini-conference in Kyle Village Hall on 27th August. The subject of the conference is "Defining the Crofting Cultural Landscape".

Dr Iain MacKinnon, a crofter/historian from Camuscross and John Phillips, Highland

Council ranger will be guest speakers. Kirsten Dallas and Iain Turnbull, manager of the trust's Balmacara estate, will talk about an ongoing landscape character assessment taking place on the estate.

Following lunch, an open forum will discuss key elements of the landscape, the

threats and opportunities associated with the landscape and what is needed to protect it for future generations.

Application forms can be obtained by phoning 01599-566325. Places are likely to be limited so early booking is recommended. The closing date for bookings is 14th August.



Drumbuie township

© Iain Turnbull, NTS

## Tribute to SCF's oldest member



**W**E WERE SAD to learn that SCF's oldest member, Jean MacIver, passed away on 31st March in the Western Isles Hospital – just a few weeks short of her 103rd birthday.

Although Jean had been frail at the end, she was intrigued to see her photo in the last issue of The Crofter.



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