

The best investment we ever made

THIS YEAR marks the 30th anniversary of the establishment of the Scottish Crofters Union, which became the SCF. The late Bob Cowan, chief executive of the Highlands and Islands Development Board (now HIE) said at the time that the start-up funding assistance they gave to the emerging union was one of the best investment they ever made.

Sceptics forecasted the early demise of the Crofters Union, but our organisation has defied them all.



Thirty years after the SCU was inaugurated at a meeting in Inverness in November 1985, crofters continue to have a strong dedicated voice fighting battles on their behalf. No other organisation does this.

No other organisation is run by crofters, for crofters. No other organisation represents crofters to the Scottish and UK governments, to the EU and internationally. No other organisation unites crofters across the Highlands and Islands and brings them together to protect and develop crofting, to sustain and strengthen our crofting communities for the future.

Damage to rural economies

A S FORECAST, due to the appalling weather conditions early in the year, we are now seeing the impact as livestock go to market.

In the crofting areas we are hearing of serious reductions in lamb numbers, calves down on

weight and "no bloom". With silage yields down by 50%, winter feed reserves are low and the demand is likely to force prices of bought-in fodder up.

So naturally crofters have looked at what stock numbers they can support over the winter

and are forced to make drastic decisions; the outcome being that herds and flocks are reduced, in some cases by 50%, including valuable breeding stock.

Scottish Government responded by saying that crofters simply have to make business decisions.

Under the Common Agriculture Policy, in order to provide cheap food, the system is based on income support to producers. So is referring to business decisions really fair advice from the officials who control the whole payments system, the system on which producers base their decisions?

As we have a subsidy-based system, it is the government who must also make a business decision for Scotland, a policy decision.

Does the Scottish Government business plan account for the consequences further down the production line when store animals or replacements are not to be found in the numbers needed? Does it accept the damage to rural economies that will be the result of the loss of livestock from the hills?



The three region debacle

LATELY, in several stakeholder groups, we heard government officials say "Producers have to make business decisions".

This seems to be the new mantra. In itself, it is stating the obvious, as this is exactly what crofters and farmers have been doing for generations, of course. But it comes as a response to crofters saying that the livestock system is broken, and if nothing is done animals will be put away in large numbers.

The problems stem from having three grossly inequitable payment regions. Even though the consultation on the CAP saw the vast majority of responses asking for two regions,

a bitter lobby from the large agri-businesses seemed to push the Scottish Government into announcing three regions. Extensive graziers on Region 3 land, which crofting common grazings are automatically allocated, are getting a mere £7 per hectare. And those on the best land, the arable Region 1 (the only region with no requirement for activity), get around £160 per hectare in income support. Is this a good commercial business model?

The notion that R3 payments would be topped up by a sheep headage scheme to somewhere around £25 is not working as, with such a poor flow of information as to whether

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.... and much more

Message from the chair...

Fiona Mandeville



WELCOME TO THE winter issue of *The Crofter*. But is the winter so very different from this year's so-called summer? The cold spring and very wet summer took its toll on crops, ground condition and crofters' pockets. The low nutritional value of this year's harvest means higher investment in animal feed for overwintering and lower sale prices for stock. We look at these issues on other pages.

SCF called on the Scottish Government to recognise the problem and Patrick Krause attended a number of meetings where remedies were discussed. Funds have been allocated to RSABI and crofters and farmers

suffering hardship are encouraged to contact the organisation for assistance. An article on page 25 explains RSABI's work and encourages take-up of the scheme.

We asked RPID to bring forward payments to ease the financial burden, but uncertainty remains on when this will happen. Many crofters feel they will be worse off and are unhappy with the blanket designation of common grazing as R3 land, the poorest. Areas of Natural Constraint, due to replace LFASS in 2018, will be our next challenge.

Patrick Krause and I met with Colin Kennedy, the new Commission convener and Catriona MacLean, Commission chief

executive, in June. The background to Colin becoming convener was explained to us.

The Commission now consider the matter over and done with; but do crofters?

New initiatives by the Commission were also discussed. These will be highlighted elsewhere in this issue.

At the Cross Party Group on Crofting, held regularly at the Scottish parliament with strong SCF input, frustration has been expressed at the delays in progressing the recommendations in the crofting sump, which would simplify crofting legislation and tie up many loose ends. A plan of action is required, but is not yet emerging.

We continue to work with RoS to make the registration of crofts as straightforward as possible. The most effective way for townships to do this is through community mapping, which strengthens co-operation, lessens the cost and helps crofters identify assets in the community which might be developed to benefit all. The unwelcome cost of advertising croft registration is highlighted in the sump and strongly contested by SCF. The only beneficiaries are the press.

A number of the points made in the SCF response on crofter housing, detailed in the last issue of *The Crofter*, are to be considered by SG. Patrick comments on this on page 4.

Our young crofters have been hitting the headlines and highlighting the difficulties many face in getting a toe-hold into crofting. Cheryl McIntyre writes about the work the

young crofters have been doing on page 13 We encourage more young crofters (and young means up to age 40) to join SCF and help us to help them. Discounted membership rates are available.

The SCF training programme continues to be a great success, introducing new people to the basics of crofting and passing on detailed technical knowledge to established crofters. Visit the training page on www.crofting.org for courses coming up in your area.

An exciting new training initiative is hand-on experience of crofting for conservation professionals. Working in partnership with the Foundation for Common Land, we have developed new courses for conservation and agency staff. This project aims to help conservation professionals understand the practicalities of crofting, encouraging effective co-operation on the challenges we face and how crofters and conservationists can work together. Read more on page 23.

Over the autumn SCF has been participating in a series of crofting road-shows organised by the Crofting Commission. This has been a useful opportunity to meet members and non-members and for concerns to be raised. I hope you managed to come to a meeting in your area.

By the time you are reading this, a major crofting conference will have just taken place in Inverness, looking at how crofting has evolved since the Schucksmith report five years ago. Professor Mark Shucksmith will be the keynote speaker. Frank Rennie, the first SCU president, will also make an address. We will report on this event in the next issue.

I wrote on page one that SCF is the only membership organisation working solely for crofters and our crofting communities. It is the only organisation that brings together crofters, policy-makers, agencies and training bodies to co-operate in the consolidation and development of crofting.

This is why it is essential that all crofters support our work through membership. The more crofters we represent, the stronger our voice. And if even more people would support our work by joining SCF, then we could do even more.

Please encourage your friends and neighbours to become members. It has been said before, but it is worth repeating – SCF membership is an investment in the future of crofting. If you care about crofting, you can't afford not to support our work.



The first ever SCU conference. Left to right: Angus McRae, Frank Rennie, Jim Hunter, Fiona Mandeville in the corner

The three region debacle

...Continued from page 1

they would qualify, people are reluctant to take part in the scheme for fear of the potential penalties that could ensue.

On top of this, crofters who would definitely get in, were they farmers, are excluded due to the averaging of livestock numbers on common grazings. Even the industrial-agriculture lobbyists who fought tooth and nail for a three region system are realising their error, and the problems it is causing in crofting areas.

By the time you read this you should know what your direct payment is. Please let us know if you are losing out as we have to feed back to the Scottish Government what the reality of this patently unfair system is.



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Crofting stakeholder group demands a plan of action

FOLLOWING THE SCF's call on the Scottish Government to form a plan of action for crofting, the minister for environment (and crofting) Dr Aileen McLeod invited the crofting stakeholder forum – a group comprising representatives of all organisations involved in crofting matters – to put forward its recommendations on the main issues needing urgent attention.

A workshop was convened in October and the group identified five priority areas:

- crofting legislation
- new entrants
- housing
- crofting development
- financial incentives

The specific recommendations for each priority that have been presented to the minister were:

- **Crofting legislation:** this group to develop the bones of a new crofting act;
- **New entrants:** make crofts available;
- **Housing:** through a meaningful grant and loan scheme, help new entrants and crofters to access affordable housing;
- **Crofting development:** responsibility to be handed to a funded lead body;
- **Financial incentives:** ensure current and future Pillar 1 and Pillar 2 policies have a positive impact on crofting.

The minister will consider the recommendations and respond with a plan of action.

The cross-party group on crofting

SCF FOUNDED, and is secretary to, the Scottish Parliament cross-party group on crofting which is chaired by Jamie McGrigor MSP with Jean Urquhart MSP and Rhoda Grant MSP as vice-chairs.

As well as the standing agenda items of CAP, crofting

development and crofting law, the following were items for discussion in the recent parliamentary group meetings:

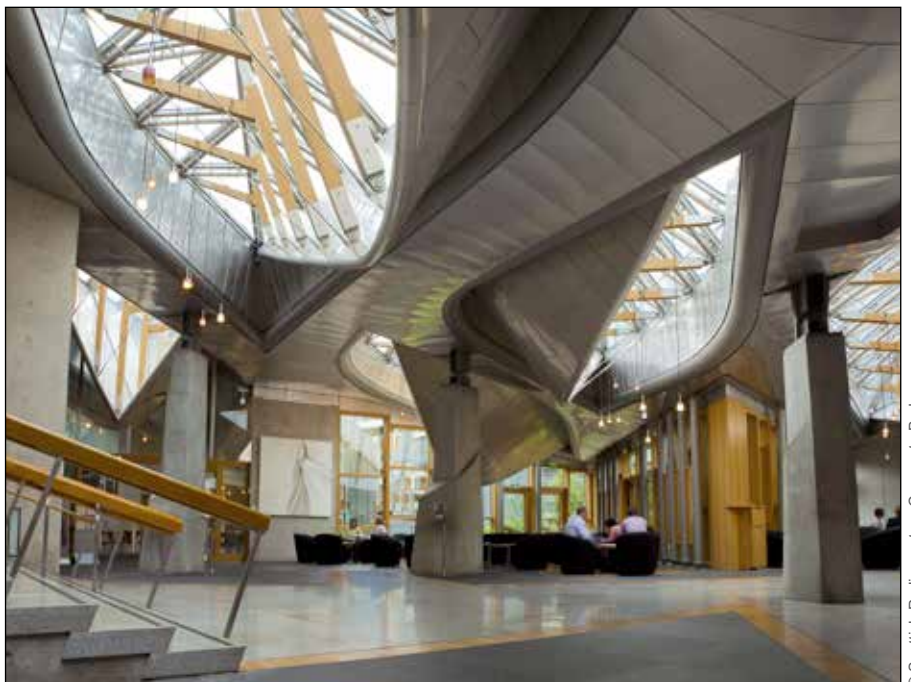
- Crofting in land reform
- Crofting regulation
- Rural communications (broadband and mobile)

The minister for crofting, Dr Aileen McLeod also attended

the meeting in October.

This group is an important and powerful vehicle for raising crofters' concerns in the corridors of power.

In addition to MSPs, meetings are attended by representatives from many bodies which impact on crofting, and by individuals with an interest.



Garden lobby at Holyrood

© Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body

Croft house grants – should you wait for the revised scheme?

SCF member and solicitor Eilidh Ross MacLellan makes some observations

ALMOST EXACTLY two years ago, I wrote an article for *The Crofter* about the changes to crofting grants which were introduced by the Crofting Reform (Scotland) Act 2010.

In short, those changes were intended to equalise the availability of the Croft House Grant Scheme (CHGS) and Crofting Counties Agricultural Grant Scheme so that tenant crofters and owner-occupier crofters were equally able to access those forms of financial support.

It remains the case that the regulations which are necessary to implement the changes to the CHGS have not been enacted.

In the meantime, further changes to the CHGS have been proposed by the Scottish Government. A consultation exercise was carried out, ending in March this year, on fairly wide-ranging

proposals including, notably, raising the assistance offered from £11,500 (low priority area), £17,000 (standard priority area) and £22,000 (high priority area), to £23,000 (non-island areas) and

to build on their crofts have been waiting to hear whether these proposed changes are to be introduced.

As this edition of *The Crofter* went to press, the minister for

of the proposed new scheme, namely (1) the restriction to only two geographical areas and the question of whether some mainland areas ought to be eligible for the higher rate of payment; (2) increasing the amounts awarded under the scheme; and (3) tighter selection criteria and the possibility of a loan element.

We understand that the loan question is a longer-term matter, but that the other elements are likely to be progressed within the current parliamentary term.

A week ago, the situation looked uncertain enough not to wait for the revised scheme to take effect. With the minister's announcement this week, some crofters will bide their time in the hope that the new scheme will be better for their own circumstances than the current arrangements.

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£28,000 (island areas).

For a crofter building on Skye, for example, the assistance would therefore be increased from £17,000 to £28,000; a considerable amount of money.

Since March, crofters planning

crofting Dr Eileen McLeod gave the first indication since March of the Scottish Government's intentions for the scheme.

The Scottish Government has indicated that the intention is to reconsider certain elements



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Croft House Grant Scheme

AS REPORTED in the last issue of *The Crofter*, SCF submitted a response to the Scottish Government consultation on the Croft House Grant Scheme, the main thrust being for targeting of the scheme to those who really need it: young crofters.

Our campaigning on this important matter is bearing fruit and we are involved in a more focussed discussion with Scottish Government on how this could be implemented. The intention is to have changes to the scheme go forward in this parliamentary session.

STOP PRESS

AS WE went to press, we received a letter from minister for crofting Dr Aileen McLeod, intimating that she wishes to discuss SCF suggestions for the reintroduction of a loan scheme, reconsidering the geographical areas and introducing a method of targeting the scheme to those who need it most.

As the reintroduction of a loan scheme will be a "longer term piece of work", the grant arrangements will be introduced sooner. The minister

expects that it will be possible to lay new regulations before dissolution of the Scottish Parliament at the end of March 2016, with grant changes coming into force shortly after that.

We welcome this move, which shows that the minister and her colleagues have taken on board the points SCF made in our consultation response. We look forward to working further with them to establish a grant and loan scheme which fulfils its purpose of assisting and enabling young crofters to set up home on their crofts.

A quagmire of slow irrational bureaucracy

Dr Aileen McLeod

Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh

Dear Dr McLeod

Once again, CCAGS/CAGS has added to its reputation as a quagmire of slow, irrational bureaucracy – which disadvantages the working crofter through a drip-drip-drip of seeming trivia. The aim of the regulations, being interpreted in the most restrictive manner, seems to be that no crofter might possibly come away with a penny extra.

This is not trivial, but at the core of the crofting problem. Over the years, CCAGS has become harder and harder to use; returning less support for more work; restricting what is eligible; multiplying the paperwork; and insulting both our intelligence and our honesty.

Is it any wonder that CCAGS is under-subscribed?

Some examples:

CCAGS grants required self-funding of 100% up front, followed by a wait of months for payment. Previously, there was a 50% advance, as is common in many small grant schemes such as the Big Lottery. This would make a big difference to smaller crofters, who arguably are those most in need.

Doing away with standard costs resulted in a bureaucratic jumble of seeking several quotes (in locations which may have only one supplier) and relying on the whims of the department as to the time allotted. Recently, one of our members – who is the guy you would hire if contracting



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the work – was paid for 46 hours on a job which took 132.

Why is moveable equipment excluded? One of the major problems of small crofts is the cost of suitable machinery – and one which our Crofting Environment Improvement Association (CEIA) has successfully addressed with other funding.

When planting trees, the second year practice of beating up, ie replacing failures, is regarded as maintenance by CCAGS and not paid, although it is a required part of a forestry planting.

We used to get one letter, a Permission to Start, and now we get two: an Acceptance of Grant which on returning, generates a Permission to Start. Why is the department wasting money, staff and crofters' time in this duplication?

When making claims, CCAGS threatened crofters with terrible penalties for over-claiming;

yet in the three years we have used the scheme, errors of £50-£100 in the department's favour were routine, and no redress possible.

AND NOW, a new bombshell. Crofting groups (except for common grazings) are excluded from the new CAGS.

As a disincentive to crofter co-operation, you couldn't make it up!

Endless ill-informed bureaucratic revision has made schemes intended to help crofters virtually unusable and not worth it.

Please, Dr McLeod, take on this penny-pinching pettiness and make support schemes fulfil their legal aim of helping crofters, rather than grinding them down.

Mary Norton
Secretary, CEIA
North Uist

A brawl in the fank

Dear editor

This much we can be certain of.

There has been a carefully-engineered coup d'état within the Crofting Commission and crofters are the last to know what has gone on and why. We had high hopes of real progress when we were allowed to elect the majority of our Commissioners, but instead of getting on with the urgent work of defending and advancing our precious crofting system, our Commissioners have resorted to fighting each other. It's been about as edifying as a brawl in the fank.

The Commission board has recently stated that they regard the convenership issue as closed, and the chief executive has, we are told, found no evidence of impropriety on the part of any of the Commissioners. Well that's all very convenient for them, but we are left with a conspiracy of silence on the matter of the removal of Susan Walker as convener.

Who was behind the campaign of whispers and leaks to a local newspaper and one of its former columnists, who sensed an opportunity to cause minor embarrassment to the Scottish Government – and indeed succeeded in that objective?

A few years ago, crofters would have dismissed all this as the typical carry-on of a remote and self-serving quango, but now there's a difference. The Commissioners (most of them) are our elected representatives; and as their constituents we are entitled to expect them to account openly and honestly for their actions, just as if they were our MSPs or MPs.

Significantly, the change of convener has rapidly been followed by the issue of a new operational plan for the Commission; and what a drab and watered-down document that is. Anything suggesting vision or aspiration for crofting has been unceremoniously dumped.

Now it may well be argued that the new Commission has had more than its

work cut out clearing up the burach left by its predecessor; and that with its current staffing resources it struggles to fulfil even its most basic functions; but all this looks like a return to the bad old days of institutionalised decline.

I only hope I'm proved wrong, but now we hear that the panel of assessors, that should be the Commission's contact with the grass roots, is to be reduced in numbers, functions and influence.

Yours sincerely

Donald A.C. Murdie

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CROFTING COMMISSION



Colin Kennedy, Convener



When I was elected in to the role of convener of the Crofting Commission in June this year I outlined the main objective for the board,

which is to deliver the express will of Parliament contained in crofting legislation and effectively regulate crofting. This work is well underway with the first step being the revision of the Commission's Policy Plan.

The Policy Plan explains to tenant and owner-occupier crofters, landlords, organisations and agencies how the Crofting Commission will make decisions in line with legislation. It also explains why crofting must be consistently and firmly regulated, in line with

crofting legislation (and case law as it develops) by identifying the many benefits that effective regulation of crofting can bring to the crofting community. We have updated the Policy Plan so that the organisation's policies are being considered from a precise legal perspective and looks at what we can achieve as the regulator of the crofting system.

Along with the updated Policy Plan the Commission has undergone a number of key operational changes to improve our service to crofters which chief executive Catriona Maclean goes in to more detail below.

The recent crofting roadshows were a good opportunity to meet with crofters to talk about the changes currently happening within the Crofting Commission, answer questions and listen to how we can help crofters. This included

discussing the change in the role of the assessor. We value the input of assessors and we are committed to maintaining the current network so as many crofting communities as possible are represented and supported. Assessors will no longer be asked to provide input to regulatory applications and the role will be more focussed on providing support and guidance to crofters. This is to minimise the risk to assessors of potential conflicts of interest and the possibility of being called to stand at the Scottish land court when commenting on regulatory applications. This will provide assessors with the opportunity to have a more hands-on approach for supporting crofters and mentoring new/aspiring crofters whilst advising the Commission on crofting matters within their crofting community.

The Commission plays an integral part in ensuring that crofting thrives through effective regulation. The Commission has been working closely with crofting stakeholders to create a 'Vision for Crofting' that aligns with the Scottish Government's 'Future of Agriculture' document and demonstrates how crofting contributes to national outcomes.

The Crofting Census has been extremely important in gaining an accurate understanding of the current profile and wellbeing of crofting and I would like to thank crofters for completing last year's Crofting Census. I hope that we see the same high return levels again this year to help develop the case for crofting.

Changing times at the Crofting Commission

Over the last year the Crofting Commission has undergone significant change with a comprehensive review and streamlining of the organisation's processes. A number of improvements have been implemented which aim to ensure crofters receive the best possible service.

A milestone in this work will be the roll out of a new computer system in the winter, which will secure all of the Commission's historical data on the Registers of Crofts and create a simplified case processing system for staff. Chief executive, Catriona Maclean explains:

"The Commission processes over 1,000 regulatory applications every year and we want to make the process as easy and smooth as possible for crofters. During the transition to the new system

there should be minimal impact to crofters, but as with any new system there may be teething problems so we ask for customer's patience in the beginning.

"The data gathered from the first Crofting Census, issued last year, resulted in 9,000 updates to croft information. This is enabling the Commission to carry out a complete update to the Register of Crofts, the scale of which has not taken place since the creation of the Register 60 years ago.

"Once the new system is in place, we will develop an online version of the Register of Crofts, allowing direct access to the public information held, and aim to introduce online applications for regulatory processes as soon as we can.

"The Commission has a commitment to be an open and



transparent organisation, and to support this we are also changing the way we administer regulatory decisions, beginning with a pilot for assignation applications. This means we will ask applicants for more information up front but this should mean that decisions can be

reached more quickly.

"These are all major changes in the way the Commission processes casework and I welcome the continued support of crofters while we try to improve our service to them. I hope that they will start to see the benefits from our efforts."

Where there's a will, there's a way

Vice-convener of the Crofting Commission I G MacDonald highlights the importance of a croft succession plan.

Crofters need to understand the possibilities available to them if they are no longer able to comply with their duties. There are either short-term options such as sublet or short-term let of a croft, or longer-term options such as assigning the tenancy of the croft or transferring the ownership of the croft.

We strongly advise all crofters to make provision during their lifetime for the succession to the

tenancy of the croft and arrange for a crofting solicitor to draw up their will. This will help to prevent an intestate succession which is a complicated area of law.

By creating a croft succession plan, crofters are able to have a say in the future of the croft and provide an opportunity for a younger person to continue the work after you and help to secure the future of crofting.

We are on hand to support and advise crofters on the options available to them. For more information visit www.crofting.scotland.gov.uk.



Contact the Crofting Commission:

T: 01463 663439

E: info@crofting.scotland.gov.uk

www.crofting.scotland.gov.uk

A letter from the chief executive

Dear member

The impact of the weather this year will be felt for a long time and by now you will know what your direct payment will be. I appreciate that you will therefore be particularly concerned with what you spend your hard-earned money on. Possibly your SCF membership comes under scrutiny.

You will see from the articles in this issue that we achieve a huge amount on your behalf as the only organisation dedicated to representing crofters and we also offer you many valuable individual benefits.

But as costs rise we can't continue to do so much on the money we get in, so we have to make a hard decision: do we cut back on what we do or do we charge more to do it?

We are very aware in the SCF of how we spend membership subscription income. Our aim is to give the best possible service we can to our members at the least cost. We don't cover all core costs from subscriptions and make up the difference through fundraising for specific projects. But fundraising is getting more difficult as there simply isn't as much funding around.

I don't think that we can afford to do less. Crofting is constantly under threat and it is only by having strong representation that we can help crofting to not only survive, but thrive.

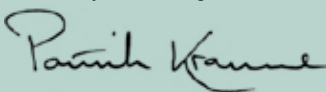
We therefore have to put subscriptions up this year by £4, taking full membership to £63 from January.

I will remind you of some comparisons; the NFUS for example charges £84 for a crofter to be a member and the Small Tenant Farmers Association charges full membership at £169.

To fill your car up once costs more than the SCF annual subscription.

I hope that you will agree with this move to keep the organisation healthy and fighting. Put a tank of fuel into the only organisation dedicated to representing and promoting crofting.

Thank you and all good wishes for 2016.



Patrick Krause
Chief Executive



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Shepherd's Network conference

Hilary Burgess, SCF member and vet from Shetland, reports on a conference for pastoralists across Europe at Fort Ehrenbreitstein in Koblenz, Germany, in June this year. The event was organised by the European Shepherds Network.

THIS MEETING was funded through the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) as part of a project to create a global pastoralist hub. More than 50 pastoralists from 17 countries signed a common declaration, entitled the Koblenz–Ehrenbreitstein. This is a list of demands targeted at politicians and policymakers in Europe to sustain pastoralism in Europe. I was funded to attend by the FAO through my previous work on sheep EID.

Delegates identified many common problems which pastoralism was facing in their countries.

Predation by protected species was an issue in Scotland following the introduction of sea eagles. Saami reindeer herders also reported problems with sea eagles. For many countries wolves were the issue. Wolves grab their food on the move, leaving pastoralists' animals alive but with severe injuries. In Eastern Europe hunters shoot herding dogs.

Such losses and the psychological impact on the shepherd are considerable.

In Shetland there have been problems with eligible areas and issues on measuring land areas around coastlines.

In Eastern Europe there are problems with forest grazed by sheep being ineligible for funding. Loss of culture and identity is a major theme across regions, with communities and their ways of life under strong pressure from

economic and political forces. Another major theme is the role of pastoralists in conservation and preserving the natural environment.

There are of course differences. In Germany they access funds from pillar 2 for conservation

of the European legislative process and definitely before the implementation phase. A local or national issue may be ignored by politicians. If it can be internationalised, success is more likely. It is also important to form alliances with other organisations outwith the agricultural sector. Saami advice that complex problems need simple solutions seems sound.

Group discussions were summarised for inclusion into the declaration. This involved much discussion through a lot of translators and a great deal of time. Luckily it was completed before the evening entertainment, which was a talk by vet Anita Idel on the subject of 'Cows are not climate killers.' She discussed how sustainable use of permanent grassland can have a positive role in storage of greenhouse gases.

Before departure the next day there was an exhibition by the German shepherds of their sheep, products and way of life. Representatives of the EC, FAO, local government and press were presented with the declaration.

Trying to achieve anything in European agri-politics can be extremely frustrating and difficult. I left Koblenz very encouraged that through the Shepherd's Network we have potential to link with other organisations across Europe with similar issues and priorities.

It is never going to be easy, but it surely must help to have friends across Europe.



Pastoralists at Koblenz

of rare breeds. In Austria funding is available for farmers practicing summer grazing. In some countries livestock grazing is encouraged in national parks, whereas in others it has been banned. In some areas of Germany shepherds have been blocked from accessing all their traditional grazing areas by local government or developments. In other parts of Germany and also parts of France these movements are still possible.

For positive European lobbying it is important to be involved in discussions right from the start

CROFTING CONNECTIONS

Gaelic at Laxdale Primary School, Lewis

ON THE OUTSKIRTS of Stornoway, Laxdale is a semi-rural island school; the second largest primary school on the island.

191 pupils attend, including 56 children in the Gaelic medium (GM) classes, with a further 17 children in the Gaelic nursery, Sgoil Araich Lacasdail. Gaelic language, heritage and culture are central to the learning experience of all children at the school.

Over the past three years, involvement with Crofting Connections has helped the school take a fresh and vibrant approach to Gaelic learning and teaching; providing a real-life context – crofting and the outdoors. And while they learn a language, they learn skills which also open doors into the future.

How did it come about? The push for Gaelic through crofting and outdoor learning came directly from discussions with parents and staff. In June 2013 the school acquired a new polytunnel through funding from Croileagan

Lacasdail. As a condition of the funding, the school had to promote Gaelic language in the Laxdale area and so, the “Gaelic polytunnel”. The polytunnel is now central to the school's approach of promoting pupil-led learning, and Gaelic.

Each class developed different aspects of the crofting theme through the whole-school crofting and the outdoors project. All took part in an outdoor trip which, as one pupil said, brought the learning to life. They visited local crofts; loom sheds; the Hebridean Seaweed Company; the Scottish Salmon Company's Barvas hatchery; the Lewis and Harris auction mart; the blackhouse at Arnol; and 40 North Foods.

Musicians, craft workers, crofters and more visited the school to share their skills. Many parents and friends from the community came to the whole-school exhibition and open day, as well as the Croft Café run by P6 pupils.

Few of the children are from purely crofting backgrounds. Head teacher Christeen MacLeod

says that, at the outset, she was surprised that the children knew so little about crofting or about their own culture. That has changed radically over the past three years.

Classroom observations of Gaelic show that using crofting as a context for Gaelic language has been successful across all stages. Crofting Connections has proved to be a rich learning context for children in both GM and English medium classes and children are more motivated to speak Gaelic.

The benefits go well beyond language acquisition, with staff and pupils inspired to improve and progress. As Christeen says, “We have all learned, children and teachers, not to be afraid of trying something new on a big scale.”

This report is based on a case study by Shirley Henderson.

The report on the evaluation is now available on our website:

www.croftingconnections.com



Gaelic bunting



Crofting year



Laxdale Open Day music



Visitors and pupils at Laxdale Open Day



Laxdale Open Day

Some light from the west?

SCF member Angus McHattie reports on a recent event in Ireland

IN OCTOBER, the European Forum for Nature Conservation and Pastoralism (EFNCP) held its first members meeting for many years in Corrofin, County Clare on the west coast of Ireland.

Delegates from organisations all over Europe met with EFNCP directors at a conference focusing on high nature value farming. The event ran alongside the Burren winterage school, an annual event celebrating the walk with farmers' cattle to their winter grazing on the Burren. Farms on the Burren, a limestone-based karst landscape, are small in size, similar in scale to many crofts.

EFNCP is a forum for practitioners, scientists, scholars and their organisations interested in the maintenance of low-intensity livestock farming.

This type of farming is widespread on less productive land in many European countries, using semi-natural pastures and meadows like most crofting areas of Scotland. It is the most important farming system for conserving biodiversity across Europe, and provides other environmental services such as managing water-catchments and preventing wildfires.

Low-intensity livestock farming is a type of high nature value farming which faces socio-economic decline throughout Europe. But this is not inevitable. For many years these farming systems have been discriminated against by policies such as the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). EFNCP is working

for a wholesale reform of the CAP, with a shift to consistent economic incentives and practical support for high nature value farming systems and farmers.

The first day of the event saw forum members, staff and the board discuss EFNCP's policy work, exchanging views and ideas to improve networking and communication. The second day of the conference featured seminars where speakers from Croatia, Sweden, France and Spain gave reports on a range of HNV farming projects. On Saturday afternoon delegates were divided into four parties to visit neighbouring farms involved in winterage on the Burren.

One aspect of the Burren which is different to crofting is that cattle are moved up onto higher areas by the end of October and are outwintered on the dry limestone pavements with their associated grasslands. As part of a LIFE project, a special concentrate ration has been developed, which is fed at two kilos a day instead of hay or silage, reducing costs to the farmer and providing environmental benefits through more extensive grazing and a drop in poaching and overfertilisation of feeding sites.

The evenings in between were filled with events and ceilidhs with the local community and more informal sing-along events in the local pub, where many took the chance to network and show some of their own country's culture.

EFNCP is keen to forge closer links with SCF.



EFNCP Board



The Burren, a limestone-based karst landscape



Charolais bull on the Burren

The work of EFNCP

OUR CHALLENGE in the UK is the same as in other countries: how to make the management of high nature value (HNV) farmland socio-economically, as well as ecologically, sustainable.

Farmers and crofters who deliver those things which the public want, but are not paying for through their shopping basket, should be properly supported by taxpayers so that the hard work of managing semi-natural farmland can be appropriately rewarded.

This is more difficult in the UK due to the extreme contrasts within the farming sector; and by the long history of social and political esteem accorded to intensive farming. Though presenting itself as a commercial player on the

world market, it is the intensive large farm sector which receives the bulk of state support.

The support which is given to HNV farming is hardly ever designed to favour farming systems at the level of the holding. Usually it's targeted at the management of particular parcels, so at farm scale it's frequently uncoordinated with other subsidies and policies.

EFNCP wants to see a coherent policy for HNV farming. In the CAP that means a truly integrated programming approach which properly identifies HNV farming, its benefits and needs; targets and measures which are appropriate in design and scale and which monitor the health of HNV farmland and HNV farming systems, evaluating the success or otherwise of CAP

measures and changing them accordingly if necessary.

In recent years, we have carried out a number of projects in England and Wales aimed at clarifying the HNV farming concept and improving the identification of HNV farming, as required for monitoring and evaluating rural development programmes. The projects also looked, to a varying degree, at the needs of HNV farming and how these could be addressed, including through locally-targeted initiatives. We have now moved on to supporting local project actions.

Scotland is unique in the UK in having worked up a functional HNV farming indicator. Our work in Scotland has therefore concentrated on analysis of the effectiveness of policy measures



in supporting HNV farming; and advocacy to improve these policies. We have been focussing on two overlapping subsets of HNV farming, namely crofting and common grazings.

www.efnkp.org

HUNGRY FOR RIGHTS

Crofting inspires other European countries at Hungry for Rights final forum



Scottish delegates

SOMETIMES YOU have to go away to see what you have at home," remarked one of the eight Scottish delegates after the final forum of the Hungry for Rights project in Italy in October.

Each project partner was in charge of a workshop: France and Lithuania on the theme of alternative distribution systems; Italy on local food policy and local food policy councils; Cyprus on the use of commons such as land, agricultural biodiversity and seeds. For Scotland, the two-hour workshop on new entrants was delivered by five networks and organisations, with each of the seven-person-strong Scottish delegation presenting.

"An inspiring trip"

We were very fortunate to have a musician with us to start the session in good Highland fashion. Fergus Walker did the piping in to loud cheers.

SCF director Sarah MacLean (Barra and Vatersay Agricultural and Horticultural Association, Bùth Bharraigh) spoke about educational activities with the young pupils in the Croitear Òg project on Barra, using skiff-building as an example.



Sarah MacLean and Viv Montgomery

The SCF Young Crofters started with the film *Crofting's New Voices*. This film was shot by Robin Haig during SCF's Crofting 20:20 gathering in Assynt in March as part of the Hungry for Rights project.

"Showing crofting to outsiders, and seeing them wanting to use the good elements of crofting, makes you see how unique the system is."
~ Viv Montgomery

A beautiful silence fell over the audience during the film when Ena Macdonald expressed in Gaelic the need for a reawakening among young crofters. Cheryl McIntyre spoke about how SCF Young Crofters was set up and what actions have been taken. Viv Montgomery

"really worthwhile"

spoke about representing SCF Young Crofters in the newly formed Scottish Government's new starters group. Each of the three young crofters



Viv does her talk



also explained her own crofting situation, showing pictures of their crofts on Skye, in Newtonmore and Dornie.

Common Good Food is a new organisation based near Edinburgh and working across Scotland, aiming to translate the use of commons and some of the tradition of crofting to a lowland context. The organisation grew from the work of Fife Diet and will be providing practical support for new small-scale food production. Eva Schonveld and Fergus Walker gave a lively picture of their ideas, a very interesting link between rural crofting and new urban forms, between Highlands and Lowlands, between tradition and innovation.

"I feel I learnt so much"

Finally, Clare Fennell for Nourish Scotland gave a pithy overview of their work on policy, consultations, events and specifically the training through the new farmers programme.

The positive responses to the talks, the questions from the audience, handled swiftly and aptly by Clare, were not the only outcomes; learning from one another within the Scottish group itself was important to all delegates.

European exchange visits like these run from morning to late evening and in the last hours Scottish and French sat around the table to further explore common themes and possible future collaborations.

A big *merci beaucoup* to the French speakers in the Scottish team! A big *moran taing* to all delegates who came along and worked really hard to share and connect.



Scottish products showcased

SCF YOUNG CROFTERS

Learning from different lands

SCF young crofter Cheryl McIntyre describes a recent visit to Canada

THE ELDERS VOICES Summit took place on Vancouver Island, BC, Canada in September.

The event was the first of its kind and focussed on resilient places and resilient people, significantly held on coastal Salish territory belonging to Canada's First Nation peoples. There was an international presence with representatives from New Zealand, Australia, the United States, from all across Canada and from Scotland.

Five Scottish delegates represented their different organisations and were also there on a personal learning journey: Robin Haig and Cheryl McIntyre from SCF Young Crofters, and Mags Hall and Fergus Walker from Common Good Food. The party was led by Dr Iain MacKinnon, research fellow on the governance of land and natural resources at Coventry University (and belonging to Skye) who saw the summit as an opportunity to engage a youth perspective, learning lessons and stories to take

home to Scotland.

What struck me most was the land-based learning day where we rose at 5am to watch the sunrise, dig a hole, and prepare a fire in order to learn the traditional methods of WSANEC pit cooking. While the wild Pacific salmon and root vegetables steamed amongst the collected leaves and branches in the pit, traditional stories of the land were told and another way of thinking and understanding was offered to those gathered around.

I would like to express thanks to the Canada UK Foundation for their financial support to get us there, and to our 'Elder' Iain (who had a significant birthday whilst we were there) for inviting us all on the journey.

The summit was the formative meeting of an international resilience network which has been formed on the principle that traditional and indigenous forms of knowledge can have an important role in the well-being and development of communities.

A major theme to come out of the summit was an aspiration to create learning opportunities between the generations and this will be a focus for the new network. This was also a major theme of the Young Crofters gathering in Assynt earlier this year.

Iain MacKinnon, who is an advisor to the new resilience network, has said that the network could be a means of supporting opportunities for crofting youth and elders to come together to learn and to share their experiences.

It may also provide a chance for crofters to meet with people from other places who are interested in maintaining and supporting their traditional ways of life.

facebook.com/youngcrofters
(website coming soon)

commongoodfood.org
canadaukfoundation.org
eldersvoicesummit.com



TIXEN traditional food preparation, stories of the land and traditional plants



WSANEC elders land-based learning



Shamanic drumming and healing of the land



Intergenerational resilience: Youth and elders panel on the Tsawout First Nation Reservation

SCF YOUNG CROFTERS

We feed the planet



SCF member and film maker Robin Haig reports

THE SLOW FOOD Youth Network held an event recently in Milan, called We Feed the Planet.

The event brought together over 2000 young small-scale food producers, chefs, scientists and activists from around the world to discuss how to sustainably and organically feed the planet in the future. Slow Food Scotland sent three delegates: a young farmer from Fife; a young community gardener from Edinburgh; and a young crofter from Dornie – myself.

Over four days we had workshops and talks

from the likes of Carlo Petrini, the founder of the International Slow Food Movement and Alice Waters who runs Edible Education in America, right down to personal stories from a Dutch pig farmer and a Sri Lankan rice grower. We covered everything from the taste of food, to diversification, to food poverty to the CAP. The range was diverse and the subjects thought-provoking and inspiring.

I came away feeling even more positive about the future of crofting and its role in feeding Scotland and our communities. I learnt the importance of connecting with other small-scale food producers, chefs and consumers if we are

to make our crofts commercially viable.

Many people producing a little, rather than a few producing a lot, is key – both commercially and environmentally – to sustainability. And crofting is doing just that.

Useful web links:

- Slow Food Youth Network: www.slowfoodyouthnetwork.org
- We Feed the Planet: www.wefeedtheplanet.com/en/
- Nourish Scotland's blog about We Feed the Planet: www.nourishscotland.org/2015/10/

Lots of activity

Cheryl McIntyre reports on a busy schedule

THE YOUNG CROFTERS branch of the SCF (SCFYC) was created in spring this year after the Glenanisp event in March, Crofting 20:20, where the question was posed: "What do we want crofting to look like in 2020?"

Our group has been set up in an attempt to make sure the answer to that question is as positive as possible. We have been doing this by attending events and participating in projects related to agriculture, community and food across Scotland and internationally.

SCFYC members James, Maddy and Rob helped out at The Shieling Project in October clearing Sam's byre of over four decades of debris! Sam is running a fantastic project educating pupils and teachers about traditional crofting skills and what life was like up the shieling.

Maria Scholten of the SCF, along with Cheryl McIntyre and Robin Haig of Young Crofters, took part in a panel discussion after the screening of two African films focusing on small-scale agriculture, drawing parallels with crofting in Scotland, at Document International Film



Helping with the Shieling project

Festival in Glasgow. *Crofting's New Voices* – a short film by Robin Haig – was also screened in the Outer Isles as part of the Hebridean International Film Festival.

Young crofters Vivian Montgomery, Cheryl McIntyre and Robin Haig were presenting and learning at Hungry for Rights in Milan along with Nourish Scotland, Common Good Food and Croitear Òg of Barra. The previous week saw Robin Haig represent young crofters at *We Feed The Planet* which took place in October – a unique event that brings together thousands of young people from all over the world together to think about the future of our food system.

SCFYC held another meeting and visit to Vivian Montgomery's croft in Newtonmore. The meeting attracted new members and provided a chance for us to meet and hear feedback from each other on all that has been going on.

We have also been speaking at the rural policy cross-party group, new starter farm group, Foundation for Common Land, Nourish Scotland's *Towards a Citizens'*

Agricultural Policy conference, the crofting stakeholder forum and the last stop of the crofting roadshow in Portree.

Cheryl McIntyre, Iain McKinnon and Hazel Smith went to the SCF cattle training course on Benbecula and Maddy Norval and Rob Humphrey taught a session at the introduction to crofting course in Duror.

Follow us on Twitter @SCFYC

Find us on Facebook: facebook.com/youngcrofters

ON THE CROFT

Donald's hortiblog

OUR LATE good neighbour in Lewis used to speak of the little October summer.

An established meteorological phenomenon in the days when there was a lot more certainty about climate than there is now, crofters used to rely on it to get the main-crop potatoes lifted and stored and hoped that it would coincide with the autumn school holidays.

Thank goodness we had the little October summer this year. Not only was it the only summer we had, but as well as getting the tatties lifted, we managed to catch up on a few of the jobs we had planned for the summer.

It was, as predicted at the start of the season, a very challenging growing year – but by no means a write off. One of our main summer crops is tomatoes, and in the end they cropped well, albeit at least a month late. They needed even more attention than usual to cope with the inevitable botrytis (grey mould) that is always a problem, but made worse this year by the cool, damp conditions. Affected parts of the plant, whether leaves, flowers or fruits, need to be removed as soon as the mould is seen and that will keep the plants healthy.

Our best-performing varieties this year were the dark-pink plum tomato *Olirose*, and our old favourite *Sungold*. Both ripened and developed their full, superb flavour despite lacking heat and sunshine.

This year it has been good to take part in the start of the new farmers' market at Glendale, Skye, which has been a resounding success. It ran every Tuesday throughout the season. Free-range chicken, lamb, beef and lobsters were on sale, as well as horticultural produce, all produced within a few miles of the venue.

It took us away back to 1999 when we were involved with the launch of the Stornoway farmers' market, which is still going strong and has extended to Tarbert, Harris. It now runs two days a week in the peak summer months. After a downturn in the recession, the farmers' market movement is again going forward and demand exceeds supply.

At Glendale we were usually sold out in a couple of hours, so there's plenty of room for new producers. Again it shows the need for those wishing to produce food to be connected with available land; not rocket science surely?

We still have sprouts and leeks to come, and an excellent crop of carrots in the ground, but essentially the growing season is over. But the next one starts now.

Out go the tomatoes to make way for our main winter crop, garlic. The polytunnel soils are cropped intensively so need to be fed. That means at least five trailer-loads of seaweed. We've just had the first winter gale with high tides, so here we go.....

donald@crofting.org



© Horticulture: A Guide for Crofters

Implications for winter and spring after a hard summer

THE COLDER and wetter season that many in the crofting counties experienced this summer may have resulted in the following consequences:

- poorer grass growth
- poorer silage quality
- poorer silage yield
- potential reduced cow fertility – more barren and later-calving cows
- increase in foot rot
- higher fluke challenge

The checklist below suggests some husbandry aspects to pay particular attention to this winter and spring. Weblinks provide useful resources by SRUC and others. For those without internet connections, please contact your local office and they can provide hard copies.

Winter/spring 15/16

- Condition score ewes. Consider feeding each ewe Hi-pro soya bean meal fed at 100g per lamb carried (Technical note TN658) www.sruc.ac.uk/info/120202/technical_notes
- Check ewes' feet and take advice from your vet if you notice any problems or lameness.
- Don't forget to check your tups' feet during their off season.
- Condition score cows. www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/69370/pb6491-cattle-scoring-020130.pdf

[attachment_data/file/69370/pb6491-cattle-scoring-020130.pdf](http://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/69370/pb6491-cattle-scoring-020130.pdf)

- Feed budgeting – do you have enough forage to last the winter? Seek advice from your local consultant.
- Do you have 'passenger' ewes and cows that you should sell rather than winter or keep for another season? NB Always consider subsidy implications of changing stocking rates and seek advice if necessary.
- Are water supplies in your shed frost-proof?
- Walk your fields. Are some in need of reseeded to rectify poaching damage during the wet summer?
- In the long, dark winter have you applied

for CAGS grants for spring/summer improvements? www.ruralpayments.org/publicsite/futures/topics/all-schemes/crofting-agricultural-grant-scheme/

At the time of writing this article, the timetable for subsidies being paid out was not known. Making contingency plans in case payments are delayed is advisable, for example speaking to banks or suppliers for extra credit.

If your sole income is from crofting and you are facing hardship, you should consider contacting the RSABI as they will have advice support and perhaps some financial assistance. Contact details 0300 111 4166 or www.rsabi.org.uk

Janette Sutherland, SAC Portree



© Martin Benson – Isle of Lewis

ON THE CROFT

Crofting Federation resolutely opposed to introduction of lynx

THE SCOTTISH Crofting Federation has expressed strong opposition to proposals to introduce lynx to the wild in Scotland.

An organisation called the Lynx UK Trust, based in Cumbria, is applying to Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) for what it describes as a re-introduction, although the species has been extinct in Scotland for 1,500 years. In a consultation paper issued recently, the trust lays out plans to set the animals loose over a large number of sites in Scotland including a number in the Highlands. The paper says that the prey of the lynx is mainly "small ungulates" like roe

deer, but that each adult lynx will consume "0.4 sheep per year".

SCF chair Fiona Mandeville said, "There is an arrogant assumption here that any losses of sheep to introduced predator species are acceptable. Experience of small farmers in Scandinavia suggests in any case that losses are likely to be much greater. The most threatened species in the Highlands is the hill sheep and any further threat to its viability must be resisted. SCF will resolutely oppose introduction of any further predator species in the crofting areas, and we will be communicating our views to the Lynx UK Trust and to SNH."



Co-existing with predators

REWILDING THE Scottish Highlands has nothing to do with conserving biodiversity. It will reduce species and habitats. Flora and fauna developed in these areas for thousands of years, dependant on wild and domestic grazing animals, with a large impact from human activity, because – like it or not – humans are a part of nature.

I have lived and raised my family in rural areas in east Africa and in Scandinavia. As an agriculturalist, keeping larger and smaller domesticated animals, I have learnt to take precautions to survive with all kinds of carnivores. It is not easy, but possible, when the community around the farm knows what management is needed.

In places where the rural population is decreasing, few understand that animal husbandry could not survive if predators are not properly managed.

70% of the world's population is fed and nurtured on less than 25% of the arable land we know of. This is possible because people depend on keeping cattle on grazings not considered arable – forests, mountains and semi-deserts, land often considered wild, but nevertheless grazed and managed. These small-scale farmers rely on a low-cost, resource-effective way to keep their herds. That does not include expensive fencing materials needing many hours of maintenance, which in the end will

not stop predators when their food becomes scarce on their side of the fence.

Most small-scale farmers and pastoralists depend on dogs, whether it is the big Carpathian one that can rip a wolf apart or smaller ones just to alert the farmer, who then can call for hunters. Dog breeds and keeping methods

have developed alongside animal husbandries all over the world, but it doesn't mean that it is a good idea to bring big herding dogs into a community where hikers and their pets used to pass freely.

Can we of the western world claim the right to re-wild our landscape; or should we rather take responsibility for our own food

production, reducing the clearing of rainforests where intense industrial farming produces our imported needs?

*Pauline Palmcrantz
Siljansnäs, Sweden
www.fabod.nu*

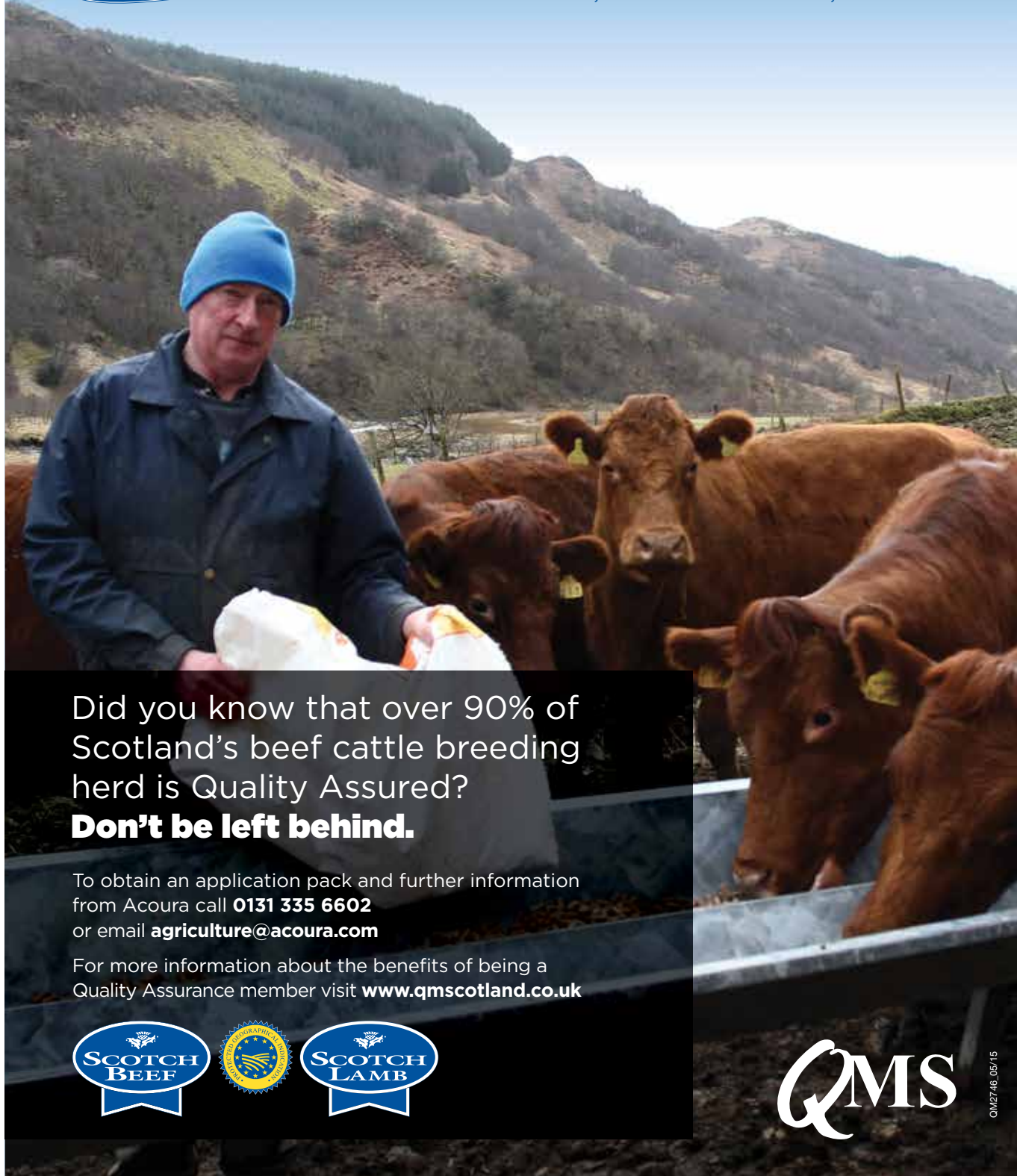


Wolves range not far from Siljansnäs village



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ON THE CROFT

New sheep scab diagnostic test developed at Moredun Research Institute

MOREDUN HAS developed a novel diagnostic blood test for sheep scab infestation, available at SAC Veterinary Services.

Sheep scab is a highly contagious endemic ectoparasitic disease of sheep caused by the sheep scab mite *Psoroptes ovis* and is currently notifiable in Scotland. The disease costs the industry >£14M per year including costs associated with lost performance, preventative measures and treatment.

The mite causes an intense irritation of the skin surface. The mites abrade the skin surface with their mouthparts while feeding and deposit allergen-rich faecal pellets directly onto the skin, provoking an allergic reaction. This results in sheep rubbing, kicking, scratching and nibbling the affected area, causing inflammation and a scab to form at the site of infestation.

These welfare issues are further compounded by sheep being unable to rest and also suffering from disrupted feeding patterns due to the intense irritation.

The mite is usually transmitted by direct contact between sheep. However, because mites can exist off the sheep for up to sixteen days, fence posts, trees, farm equipment – anywhere infested animals seek relief from the irritation by scratching and rubbing – can also be a source of infection. During the early stages

of sheep scab, infestations are not obvious and animals often appear clinically normal. This sub-clinical stage can last for several weeks – during which animals can act as a source of infection.

Scab can also be introduced from neighbouring flocks, the introduction of new stock, animals returning from wintering or from shows and this has implications for treatment, quarantine and biosecurity.

For control or eradication programs to be successful it is crucial that all infested animals are identified, including sub-clinical cases.

It is wise to assume that all sheep being brought onto the farm are infested and should be treated and then quarantined for at least two weeks before mixing with the main flock. During quarantine, observe for signs of infestation (nibbling, rubbing, scratching, deranged wool, areas of wool loss). If scab is suspected then the sheep should be examined by a vet to identify the parasite and advise on treatment.

The new test detects host antibodies to a protein found only in the sheep scab mite, which means that the test can accurately detect that an infestation is due to the scab mite and not another ectoparasite. The test can detect infested animals at an early stage and before the onset of clinical symptoms, which will be important in the effective control of the parasite.

SAC provides veterinary surgeons in

Scotland with free ectoparasitic examinations of skin scrapings taken from sheep. It is hoped that integrating the results of the skin scrapings with this new blood test will provide a more powerful and reliable diagnostic service for sheep scab.

The Sheep Scab (Scotland) Order 2010 states that flock owners or their veterinary surgeons must notify the authorities of any affected or suspected cases. SAC receives funding for disease surveillance from the Scottish Government Veterinary and Advisory Services programme.

Moredun runs a membership scheme to keep farmers, vets and SQPs up to date with livestock health research. If you would like a free factsheet on sheep scab or are interested in becoming a Moredun member, contact The Moredun Communications Team on 0131 445 5111 or visit www.moredun.org.uk.



Update on ticks

DUE TO outdated information given in the table in the article on ticks in the last issue, please disregard the table and heed the following paragraph.

Generally, for most sheep flocks in high-risk areas, acaricides are the main form of control. Diazinon is the active ingredient contained in plunge dips licensed for use in the UK, with deltamethrin, alphacypermethrin and cypermethrin available as pour-on applications, of which there are currently 15 different brands on the market.

The correct method of application is critical for the product used and the product data sheet should always be consulted for details of meat withdrawal periods and duration of protection, as these vary between active ingredients and brands.

Please accept our apologies for any confusion which has arisen from this.

Moredun Research Institute

The petition to Scottish Parliament on wild geese

SCF LAUNCHED a petition "Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to address the problems created by increasing populations of wild geese in the crofting areas as a matter of priority; reassess its decision to stop funding existing goose management programmes, and assign additional resources to crop protection and adaptive management programmes to

ensure this threat to the future of crofting is averted."

We have now won a review of the national goose management strategy, though Scottish Government is attempting to have SNH review the strategy – which is managed by SNH. We are therefore pressing for an independent body to oversee this.

To be continued.



© Martin Benson – Islay

Some SCF contacts across our area

Alasdair MacMhaoim, North East Sutherland 01408 641 474

Ena MacDonald, North Uist 01876 510 268

Finlay Matheson, Strathcarron 01520 722 482

Fiona Mandeville, Skye 01471 822297

Helen Murchison, Lochcarron 01520 733 242

Jim McPherson, Caithness 01955 641

Joyce Wilkinson, Lochaber 01687 450 375

Julian & Carol Wormleighton, Lismore 01631 760318


Neil MacLeod, Lewis 01851 702 673

Sarah MacLean, Barra 01871 810 043

Steve McCombe, Harris 01859 502 161

Russell Smith, Sutherland 01863 766 144




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ON THE CROFT

Crodh dùthchasach agus crodh coimheach

BHA TARBH Limousin sna naidheachdan an t-seachdain seo chaidh, a reic aig pris faisg air ceud mìle nòt gu leth.

Ged a tha pris cho àrd sin gun teagamh sam bith na bhuannachd don tuathanach, thug e orm smaointinn, dè na thu a' ceannachd le beothach mar sin. A bharrachd air a mheud 's a chumadh, 's e an cuideam a bha e a' cur air, gach latha nuair a bha e a' fàs, as adhbhar gun robh e seasamh a-mach bho chàch - rudeigin mar dhà gu leth kilo sa latha.

Ciamar as urrainn sin a bhith?

Uill chan eil fiosrachadh agam ach amharas gun robh e ga bhiadhachd le rudeigin a bharrachd air fraoch is fionnach. Agus ma tha agad ri ceic àrd-phrotein a cheannachd a-staigh gun an ìre ud de chinntinn a ruigheachd, a bheil

sin idir ciallach ann an saoghal anns a bheil talamh àiteach a' sior fhàs gann. Oir 's e sin a th' againn, agus àireamh an t-sluaigh a' dol am meud, fhad 's a tha talamh ga chall tro bhlèith, fo rathaidean, fo bhailtean mòra agus fo phàircean chàraichean.

Ma tha sinn ag iarraidh na "miltèan-bidhe" – an t-astar bho bheil sinn a' faighinn ar biadh – a lughdachadh, nach eil sin fìor airson nam beathaichean cuideachd? Agus, le bhith cur am feum nan stòrasan ionadail tha na cosgaisean gan lughdachadh. Tha mi cluinntinn bheachdan mar seo bho dhiofar dhaoine, agus tuilleadh ùidh ga sealltainn anns na briodachan dùthchasach. 'S e sin crodh a tha buntainn ris an àite agus a' soirbheachadh ann. 'S a Ghaidhealtachd, tha crodh Gaidhealach agiann a tha, gun teagamh

sam bith, a' freagairt air monadh is mòinteach ach a tha car mall tighinn gu ìre. Tha briodachan eile cuideachd, leithid crodh Sealtainneach, crodh a tha cruaidh, glic agus math airson an dà chuid feòil agus bainne

Tha ionaltradh gu leòr air na monaidhean againn, bu chòir dhuinn feum a dhèanamh dheth, Cuideachd, ma tha sinn a' cumail crodh, beothaichean a bhios a' bruchdadh methane, chan eil uiread idir ga bhrùchdadh, tha mi a' leughadh, nuair a tha iad air ionaltradh – am beathachadh nàdarra aca.

Mar sin, ged a tha iad nas lugha, 's e crodh dùthchasach seach crodh coimheach, air ionaltradh nàdarra, as fheàrr don àrainneachd, as saoire a thaobh cosgaisean, agus gun teagamh sam bith as fheàrr ri ithe.

le Gabhan Mac a' Phearsain

Peat is like snow

YEAR OF soils? Peatlands? Re-wilding?

It's more important than ever not to confuse conservation and agriculture.

The Inuit apparently have more than 20 words for different types of snow to distinguish various conditions and possibilities, even danger. So why do we use only one word for peat?

Materials called peat range from growing natural bog landscapes to burnable black fuel to millennia-old agricultural fields. All they have in common is a very large proportion of plant-based organic matter, usually greater than 50%. It is their history that makes them different. How, and to what extent, have natural conditions, time and human effort made them what they are?

Natural conditions including climate, geology and landform lead to the formation of soil with a very high organic matter content. In some places, conditions allow for continuously-growing natural bog or blanket.

Time results in mosses, or other plants, dying, becoming compressed and gradually decomposing. Eventually, they become burnable peat (and with much more time and pressure, coal).

Human effort, since agriculture began in the Neolithic, gradually transformed many hectares of natural soils into more productive and workable fields. On highly organic peaty soils the action of digging or ploughing aerates the soil, making it more capable of supporting grasses and crops, as does careful siting of arable fields or lazybeds together with various forms of drainage.

In the climate of the west of Scotland, it may be that the human effort of tillage resulted in permanent change to the structure and characteristics of the soil. Research suggests that blocking drains to try to undo centuries of agriculture may not result in a restored bog ecosystem.

Most would agree that these three – bog, fuel and field – are clearly different, and each have their place. In particular, re-use of neglected agricultural land would contribute to food security and community sustainability. Even when derelict and covered in rush, many small fields retain their hard-won potential.

Careless language confuses us. We need to call things by their right names. The word peat is best used for the burnable black stuff; bog or mire to describe a growing natural landscape; and highly organic soil to describe past and present agricultural fields.

Peat is like snow – we need a lot more words to enable us to say what we mean. But at least, until terminology catches up, let's avoid confusing agriculture, conservation and a nice warm fire.

This article by Mary Norton Scherbatskoy is based on research in the past five years at the Blackland Centre, Grimsay, North Uist – a partnership between the Talamh Trust and the Uist crofting group CEIA, with assistance from research and teaching staff at the University of Edinburgh/ SRUC. The Blackland Centre develops assessment methods and practical approaches for regeneration of small-scale agricultural systems such as crofting on black soils.



Productive blackland

CROFT WOODLANDS

Woodlands? Why woodlands?

SHELTER, FIREWOOD, winter grazing, timber, grant income, seasonal or full time employment, clean air and lots of wildlife. Not to forget that woodlands look beautiful. That's why. Mankind has used woodlands since the beginning; and you need to make sure you benefit as well.

The benefits of a well designed woodland, and one that is well looked after, are endless.

If you thrive to gain the most out of existing woodland or create new woodlands you need to engage a specialist. A professional forester will advise you on the status of your woodland and suggest where you could plant a new one.

You should engage somebody who has done crofter forestry and grant applications for over 20 years and assisted common grazings, sheep stock clubs, community projects and individual crofters and estates for many years. A person who knows what is possible locally, and what is not, and how to maximise income and benefits to you.

Sylvestrus Ltd specialises in new woodland creation and carries out all the work as well.

The new rural priority grants are finally up and running and there are great incentives for new native and commercial woodlands. Opportunities also exist to gain funding towards access roads or machinery.

However, the scheme is competitive and money is limited, so only the best projects will succeed. It is fair to say that grant applications can be laborious, but the results are equally rewarding. Just let your professional adviser get the grey hair instead of you.

If you are looking for quality advice for a new medium-to-large scale planting or harvesting project, deer fencing or funding applications for machinery and access etc, contact Sylvestrus Ltd, Inverness-based forester advisors.

References from all customers are available on request and why not visit www.sylvestrus.co.uk.

*Dietrich Pannwitz
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CROFT WOODLANDS

The right tree in the right place

Croft woodlands advisor Willie Beattie explains how a new initiative aims to help more crofters benefit from woodland

I'M THE LEAD officer for a Woodland Trust Scotland project which aims to support crofting communities to create new woodlands and manage existing woodlands.

Over the next five years we will be working in partnership with the SCF, Forestry Commission Scotland, Point and Sandwick Development Trust, Coigach-Assynt Living Landscape and others to deliver free advice and support throughout the crofting counties.

Our main aim is to help remove the barriers which have prevented the creation of new woodland and the management of existing woodlands, by working closely with individuals and communities to help deliver specific benefits. Major hurdles have included complex grant systems and cash flow, which we will discuss and address on an individual level.

We can offer a free site visit from a woodland advisor to discuss options, follow-up information including a site report, a map and an outline of budget and cash flow, as well as help with funding and grant applications.

Trees and woodlands have multiple benefits when the right trees are replanted in the right place and individual goals are clearly defined. This is where we want to work closely with individuals – through grant application, establishment and longer-term management of woodlands.

In our first few months, motivations for woodland creation and management have included shelter for crops, livestock and buildings, creating sustainable sources of firewood and employment, increasing local amenity and attracting visitors, providing opportunities to involve schools, as well as increasing biodiversity and expanding areas of existing native woodland.

The Scottish Rural Development Programme forestry grant scheme will be the main source of funding, but alternatively Woodland Trust Scotland also offers direct support for tree planting on a small scale through a programme called MOREwoods, which is very straightforward and doesn't involve land registration.

At time of writing we have one project officer working in the Highlands with local professional support in the Orkney and Shetland Isles. By the end of 2015 we will have a project officer working in the Western Isles and by spring 2016 another project officer in Argyll and Lochaber.

We will also be working with SCF and others to offer training days and workshops on woodland establishment and management

over the five years.

Woodland Trust Scotland held the official launch of the Croft Woodlands Project at Ian Mhor Croft, Knockfarrel, Dingwall on Monday 26 October. John Finnie MSP spoke to inaugurate the project and planted a tree in the presence of 16 representatives of various organisations, including Derek Flyn and Bill Ritchie from SCF.

For more information about creating or managing woodland on your croft email crofting@woodlandtrust.org.uk or call 0343 770 5847.



Launching the project at Knockfarrel

Trees for the crofting community



WOODLAND
TRUST SCOTLAND

Trees provide important shelter for your livestock, crops and buildings and a valuable source of woodfuel for you.

Free advice and support to help the crofting community plant trees and manage woodland is now available.

Get in touch with your local croft woodlands advisor and find out how useful trees could be.



Support is available throughout the crofting counties, with the exception of Argyll and Lochaber. Support will be available in these areas in mid-2016.



0343 770 5847



crofting@woodlandtrust.org.uk



Woodlandtrust.org.uk/plant-trees

TRAINING

A day on the croft

Hands-on experience for Katrine Fogt, SCF HQ administrator

WORKING IN the office and not being from a crofting background, I have very limited knowledge of what actually goes on on a croft.

Having worked for SCF for a year now, I am finally getting my head around all the rules and regulations, all the red tape – though ask me about calving, shearing or any day-to-day croft job and my face will most likely resemble a question mark.

When Angus invited me to come and spend a day on his croft, I therefore jumped at the chance.

One cold Thursday morning I donned my wellies and went, bursting with excitement, to spend the day 'helping' Angus with his cows. Honestly, I doubt I was much help! I did try to keep my wee squeaks and yelps to a minimum, though when a rather angry-looking cow – who has just had her calf taken away – charges towards you, keeping wee squeaks and yelps to a minimum can be tricky!

Despite this the day went surprisingly well. I helped load and move the cattle to a new field. Angus was incredibly welcoming and knowledgeable and surprisingly didn't mind my thousand and one questions, or the fact that I ended up taking photos of absolutely everything – possibly delaying him quite a bit!

Angus walked me round the croft showing me

the implications of the bad weather and explained how it was going to affect him over winter. It's one thing hearing about these things, but quite another standing in a field so scarred by the small machines used to cut the silage that the marks left in the ground were deep enough to swallow up my whole wellie.

The afternoon was spent cow-proofing the new field. Cows, I learned, are very good mothers and will, naturally, go looking for their missing calves. Angus therefore mended the fence. I took photos. He told me to turn right when bringing materials for the job, I went left ... Despite this, we (read Angus) got the job done and the cows seemed happy in the new field.

I thoroughly enjoyed the day, learned a tremendous amount and went home feeling it had been quite a success. However, the next morning Angus let me know that within hours three out of five cows had decided to go walk about – one seemingly had been heading straight for the Co-op! Angus ended up spending the evening rounding them with the help of a few other crofters. Cows certainly do not adhere to the eight-hour working day.



The cows in their new field

Back in the comfort of the office, I can only say a massive thank you to Angus for putting up with the office girl and showing me what crofting is actually about. Now I can day-dream a bit more realistically about life as a crofter. Hopefully I will also be slightly more helpful to our members now I have a better understanding of crofting and the sheer effort and determination it takes to be a crofter.

Note: Angus really appreciated Katrine's help and found her keen and receptive to what he was showing her.

Mentoring for crofters (old and new)

A WEE REMINDER for all members: SCF has a panel of crofting mentors to advise and assist on a wide variety of crofting matters.

A few years ago we thought about how SCF could assist new and established members with their practical crofting queries. Within the membership there is a wealth of knowledge and experience covering animal husbandry, land management and diversification. How could this be made available and disseminated throughout the membership? This, we thought, would become more and more important for the health and wellbeing of the crofting system at a time when much-needed new entrants are coming forward and established crofters are moving into diversified activities such as tourism, forestry, horticulture and renewable energy. There will be those who, having acquired a croft in a run-down state, will wonder "Where do I start?"

Like most of the things SCF does, the mentoring scheme would have to rely on the input of volunteers who would be willing to offer advice and share their experience. So the call went out and 38 experienced crofters, with a wide geographical spread and range of experience, kindly offered their services.

How to access the mentoring service

A list of members prepared to act as mentors is maintained in head office. This contains the

mentors' location and area(s) of expertise. The member seeking assistance should contact head office staff who will note the nature of help required, location and contact details. HO staff will contact the nearest suitable mentor and pass on all details of the request for assistance. The mentor will make contact with the member seeking assistance. Most of the mentoring would probably be done over the phone/email, unless the two parties were geographically very close. Any financial arrangement, such as payment of expenses, will be for the two parties to agree.

Just a couple of caveats: in offering this service to members, we will provide assistance in good faith and to the best of our ability, but neither SCF nor any individual mentor can take responsibility for any advice given. Matters of crofting law, regulation and dispute are excluded from the mentoring scheme. The legal helpline is available for members with problems of crofting law. Long-established crofters will have experience of most common livestock problems which they may be willing to pass on, but this service is not a substitute for qualified veterinary advice.

Finally, there will always be a need for more experienced crofters to act as mentors. If you believe in the future of crofting and feel able to pass your knowledge to the next generation, and to the new crofters we need, please make yourself known to Katrine at head office.

Training panel meets in Inverness



Photograph by Lucy Beattie shows from left to right: Siobhan MacDonald (SRUC), Jacqueline McDonnell (HIE), Lynsey Muir (LANTRA), John Bannister (SCF – panel secretary), Roddy MacLeod (FCS – panel chair), Becky Shaw (SNH), Standing: Lucy Beattie (SCF / TLC training manager), Kevin Patrick (LANTRA), Finlay Beaton (CC).

The photo shows the little known – to SCF members at least – training panel in session at its most recent meeting held in Great Glen House, Inverness. The panel is an important element in the Federation's training programme and gives advice and critical review of the SCF training programme. It meets three times a year at various locations and has been operating since 2007, when SCF first instigated it.

TRAINING

Croft training for conservation professionals

Lucy Beattie, SCF training manager, explains

AT THE BEGINNING of the year we put out an appeal to members to serve as trainers in a very different type of course which SCF is running in association with the Foundation for Common Land.

The project, piloted in Scotland and Wales this year, is funded by the Prince's Countryside Fund and offers conservation professionals a chance to engage with crofters in a unique hands-on training day.

In June four crofter trainers and a facilitator went to the Cumbrian fells to meet hill livestock farmers who ran similar courses at their holdings in 2013/14. Two days in the lush green pastures of Cumbria were quite a change from the Highlands, which had suffered one of the wettest winters and spring for a long time. Common ground was found between the participants north and south of the border, who face similar challenges when producing livestock on marginal hill ground.

September kicked off the first Scottish day at Knock of Clune Croft. Luckily the weather had taken a turn for the better. The course was led by SCF member Viv Montgomery, supported



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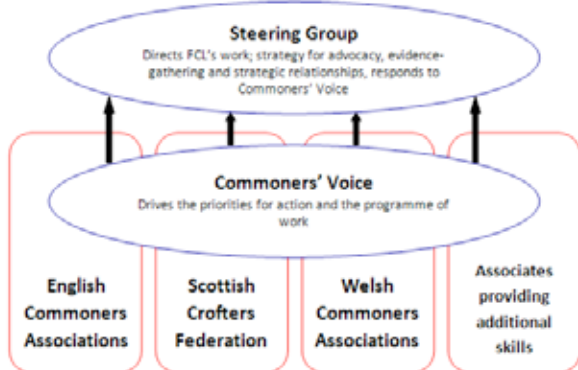


*"Seeing what life is really like
for a crofter and getting a better
understanding of life on the
croft"*
~SSE wayleave officer.

surroundings of the Monadh Liath Mountains. Participants took blackface ewes through the fank and got to grips with checking teeth and udders to ensure the ewes were correct above and below, checking tags and learning how to

turn ewes safely. One attendee said: "It gives me an appreciation of the volume of work involved – both practical and paperwork – for what is a modest financial reward."

Ali McKnight ran a mini-workshop on agri-environmental schemes and how they work in practice. Ali explained that crofting, by its nature, is valuable for biodiversity as well as landscape and cultural diversity, as recognised by the definition high nature value farming. Ali used a local agri-environment scheme as a case study to demonstrate how communication and understanding others' viewpoints is vital;



by fellow crofter trainer and SCF director Finlay Matheson (Arinackaig), facilitator Gwen Jensen and expert speaker Ali McKnight of Agroecosystems Ltd.

The eight participants ranged from self-employed conservation advisors to the John Muir Trust; Scottish Natural Heritage; Scottish and Southern Energy; Highland Council Ranger Service; and Cairngorms National Park staff. The project is closely monitored to see what knowledge attendees want from the day; and evaluated to see if this has been achieved and whether their professional practice will change as a result of attending.

The first port of call was the fank, via a tour of the croft and common grazing in the magnificent

and how the lack of it causes confusion. One conservation agency staff member commented: "I thought we all benefitted from some valuable bridge-building," a sentiment echoed by the crofter trainers who felt they were able to significantly improve their engagement with agency staff.

Bacon rolls, Gwen's mum's baking and the extremely good hospitality were also noted by all who came. Bookings for other dates in Wester Ross at Arinackaig, Breakish and Raasay have been taken.

Next on the agenda: common grazing, herd and flock health, sea eagles and sheep stock clubs.



Viv explains the use of the fank



Learning how it is for crofters



*"It's all about the next
generation...protecting the
traditional way of life and
making it sustainable for the
future is hugely important."*
Viv Montgomery.

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MEMBERS PAGE

It's good to talk in times of stress



DON'T SUFFER IN SILENCE. Call RSABI in confidence.

With an increasing number of calls to the newly-launched RSABI helpline, Scotland's unique rural charity is reminding everyone that it is here to help.

RSABI (formerly known as The Royal Scottish Agricultural Benevolent Institution) has been helping crofters and farmers for well over a century. There are currently in excess of 40 crofters throughout Scotland receiving direct financial assistance from the charity and there is scope for more to come forward. RSABI has recently revised its welfare guidelines, with help now available to crofters wherever a reasonable level of land-based activity can be demonstrated, providing meaningful income and employment. The helpline is open to all crofters and their dependants; and there is a range of grants and long-term assistance available, for example, upon retirement or following a family

bereavement.

Support at a time of crisis for crofters like Jane

With her parents now deceased, and receiving just a basic pension, Jane struggled to make ends meet on her croft. When her own health began to fail, RSABI became involved, contributing a grant to assist with essential home repairs. The RSABI case officer also assisted Jane with benefits to ensure she received everything she was entitled to. RSABI's intervention made a significant difference to Jane's quality of life.

The new helpline – **0300 111 4166** – which has been open since May, takes calls every day of the year from 7am to 11pm. It provides a single point of enquiry for anyone, regardless of age or circumstances, handling everything from questions about the benefits system to delivering support on critical personal matters including money troubles and emotional

distress – it acts as an entry point to RSABI for anyone who may require financial assistance.

RSABI is committed to substantially increasing the number of people it helps. With volatile markets, poor prices, the changing subsidy landscape and on-going weather-related problems such as experienced in Orkney this summer, crofters and their families have plenty to consider. As ever, RSABI is there to help.

Help is just a phone call away

John Macfarlane, RSABI's welfare manager commented, "Whilst the helpline is not inundated, there is new capacity to deal with the increasing number of calls in these increasingly difficult times."

The benefit of making the call to the helpline, or putting RSABI in contact with someone for whom there is real concern, can be considerable.

John added, "Several recent callers have simply not seen a way forward. Talking with RSABI helpline staff about their issues has led them away from deep concern and has begun to illuminate a way ahead."

Scotland's crofting sector is rightly proud of its immensely successful record of hard work in tough circumstances and the fear of losing pride can discourage many from picking up the phone to make contact. With the new RSABI helpline very much up and running, trained staff are now just a phone call away to support our crofting community.

It's good to talk in times of stress. Don't suffer in silence.



Call in confidence today
0300 111 4166

Email: rsabi@rsabi.org.uk

www.rsabi.org.uk

Members' legal helpline

Do you have a crofting legal problem?

You should contact the Legal Helpline, offered to SCF members by Inksters, Solicitors (Isle of Skye, Inverness, Wick and Glasgow). The number to call is **01599 230300**.

The helpline provides a service to SCF members whereby crofters can call Inksters and speak to one of our team of specialist crofting solicitors, to receive around 15 minutes or so of (free) legal advice on crofting law.

The helpline is now in its third year. We receive calls on a regular basis from crofters in all parts of the crofting counties, about all sorts of problems. We cannot solve everybody's problems in 15 minutes, but we have found that 15 minutes is sufficient to establish whether there is a problem which requires further attention.

We hope that in all cases crofters have left better informed than they were at the outset.

Inksters are proud to be involved in this joint venture with the SCF and we look forward to continued development of the scheme.

Eilidh Ross MacLellan

Crofting in Cantabria

Fiona Mandeville reports on a recent visit to the north of Spain



Cabañas on the hillside



Lamborghini tractors are common



Croft house with hay cart

CANTABRIA HAS interesting similarities with the Scottish Highlands and with crofting. They even have high rainfall, by Spanish standards.

This is a green, mountainous region where agriculture is pre-dominant, reputedly the highest density of cattle per hectare in Europe. More than 90% of Cantabria is rural. Farmland covers 40.5% and forestry 51%. The region borders the Atlantic.

Nearly 40% of the land is above 700 metres, with steep slopes of 30%. Agriculture plays a key role in conserving the environment, landscape and cultural heritage. In the western parts the old Cantabrian dialect, or "mountain language", is still spoken. It is listed by UNESCO as an endangered language.

The land-holding pattern is a mixture of owned and tenanted farms and common land. The feudal system has a long history in Spain.

Farms in Cantabria are an average of 24.5 ha, with 79% under 20 ha. With a total of 34,816 livestock farms, nearly 32,500 focus on meat production and just over 2,000 on milk. Nearly 10,900 ha produce corn for animal feed. Hay and silage are made in the fertile valleys. When I was first there ten years ago I saw harvesting done with horse-drawn equipment.

The farming population is aging, as young people leave for urban areas. The average

age of active farmers in Cantabria is 49 years. However, these small farms retain populations in remote localities; strong communities remain high in the hills and deep valleys.

Driving up through the mountains, we saw cattle and horses grazing at 1,200 metres, where they range from spring till the end of October. Grass grows at this level, with heather and bracken higher up. Stock is brought home for the winter, as the mountain roads can be closed due to snow. The steep hillsides are scattered with cabañas – stone sheilings – which provide shelter for herders, stock and feed. Bears and wolves are frequent predators in the highest parts. Griffon vultures, with a wingspan of 2.5 metres, prey on fallen stock and can kill weak, young or unhealthy animals.

Friesian and Charolais are common in the valleys, along with Herefords and Brown Alpines. On the higher slopes we found a rare native breed, the Tudanca, local to this area, characteristically grey, with white round the eyes and down the back and large horns, resembling the ancient auroch. They thrive on the steep slopes, being agile and strong, frugal and hardy. Tudancas were formerly used as working cattle but are now prized for their quality meat.

Sheep and goats were in the minority. Horses are bred for their meat.

Holm oaks, beech and arbutus clad the

hillsides, with chestnut, walnut, orange and fig at lower levels. Most farms and rural residents have productive vegetable gardens, and local markets sell a plethora of produce. Local cheeses are very varied and cured meats and black puddings plentiful.

The houses and hamlets scattered throughout the mountains and valleys are very beautiful, constructed from honey-coloured stone with terracotta roofs. They have wooden balconies covered in masses of colourful geraniums and other flowers. These traditional houses sit very harmoniously in the landscape.

Hydro-electric schemes make use of the high rainfall and countless wind farms birl on the hills and mountain passes. Spain has embraced this technology much more than Scotland. The many turbines do not detract from the spectacular scenery.

Fishing is common on the numerous fast-flowing rivers and remains an important industry along the Atlantic coast.

Cantabria has a very ancient history. A few miles from our friends' home, the Cuevas de Castillo have the oldest known cave art in Europe – vivid images of bison, antelope, outlines of hands – created over 40,800 years ago and still breath-taking today.

If you are considering a visit to Spain, I do recommend this region.



Tudanca cow



Traditional Houses



Not turnips, pumpkins



Cattle on the move



Horses on the move

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SCF BOARD

Sarah MacLean, SCF's newest board member



I AM DELIGHTED to have been asked onto the board as a director.

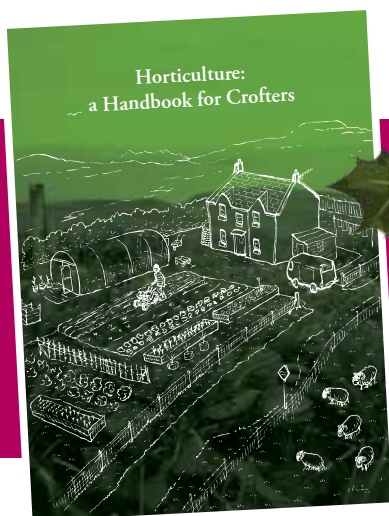
I was brought up in the Scottish borders and was very involved in Young Farmers. After university I worked for The Royal Highland Educational Trust as their farm links project officer, linking schools with farms so young people could learn about food production and the countryside. I also helped set up some of the first local countryside initiatives.

I moved to Isle of Barra in 2001 where I became involved with the Agricultural and Horticultural Association.

After running island markets for a number of years, I have been instrumental in setting up Bùth Bharraigh Ltd, one of the founders of the island produce show and the founder of Croitear Òg.

I am passionate about community economic development and community resilience and am enjoying my involvement with the Hungry for Rights project through SCF.

I am married to a fisherman/crofter and have two young children. We have sheep, free-range laying hens and grow vegetables and soft fruit.



The ideal Christmas present

Horticulture – a handbook for crofters

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

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

Please contact SCF HQ to order your copy.

Crofting Talk

SCF's Alistair MacIver MBE will be giving a talk on crofting to the Gaelic Society of Inverness on Friday 5th February 2016.

FREE offer worth £30 for SCF members

Through World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms UK (WWOOF UK), we have a partnership deal exclusive to SCF members.

You will be able to get FREE membership as a host – worth £30 – for one year. Through WWOOF you can get willing hands to help around the croft and, in return, the volunteer gets meaningful experience of crofting.

To find out if you are eligible to be a host visit www.wwof.org.uk/information_for_potential_hosts.

In a nutshell, you simply need to be growing food and/or keeping animals in a sustainable way, have an organic mind-set (you do not have to be registered organic) and be willing to share your space with your volunteer.



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