

SCF calls on the new Scottish Government to implement five Actions for Crofting

SCF IS asking all parties, should they win the upcoming elections and form the new Scottish Government, to take forward Five Actions for Crofting. The five actions, in any order of priority, are:

- croft-proof financial incentives
- simplify crofting legislation
- make crofts available
- increase affordable croft housing
- fund a lead body on development of crofting

These actions were identified by the Scottish Government crofting stakeholder forum and

by the Future of Crofting Conference held in Inverness in December 2015. They have been sent to minister for crofting Dr Aileen McLeod and to the Scottish Parliament rural affairs committee. SCF wants to see these actions taken forward into the next session of the Scottish Government.

Financial incentives

Funding under the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) pillars 1 (Basic Payments) and pillar 2 (SRDP) are the main support mechanisms for agriculture and rural development. It is essential that current and future policies have a positive impact on crofting. The CAP has to move away

from the out-dated and unsustainable large-scale industrial model and all aspects of the CAP need to be croft-proofed.

Simplify crofting legislation

Crofting legislation needs to be made fit for purpose. 126 items have been identified as problems and anomalies in the legislation. They are collated in The Sump, which needs to be actioned. This can only be done effectively with a new act. A panel of experts – practitioners and stakeholders – should be given the task of

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© Martin Benson – Looking towards North Uist from Benbecula

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...and much more

Crofters' anger at NFUS for late payments

CROFTERS HAVE voiced their anger at NFUS Scotland for causing the delay in basic payments, following the disclosure by Scottish Government that the industry demands for three regions is a major reason for the delay.

Cabinet secretary for rural affairs Richard Lochhead named the industry insistence on having three regions and an associated headage scheme as a major contributor to the difficulties in getting payments out, and the consequential hardship for crofters and hill farmers. He said that NFUS was warned of the possible consequences of a three region system but remained resolute.

Ironically it is crofters, who were against having three regions, who are suffering most due to the complications of administering the system. Many crofters have ground in more than one region, often as a mix of region 1 inbye and region 3 hill ground and appear to be disproportionately affected by delays associated with processing these.

This is having a direct impact on basic payments; and the sheep headage scheme has yet to be addressed. Many crofters are saying that they are not attempting to claim headage payments, even though they are probably entitled to, due to the obvious chaos and

therefore a fear of subsequent penalties.

If anyone is getting paid it certainly does not appear to be crofters. SCF local groups are reporting that only a small number have been paid anything at the beginning of March, and that even this is a reduced instalment.

Our feedback suggests that only a small proportion of crofters have received letters illustrating what they could expect – a ludicrous state of affairs. Crofters are unable to plan for their enterprise if they are left in the dark as to what they may get paid.

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Message from the chair...

Fiona Mandeville



WELCOME TO edition 108 of The Crofter.

I hope that by the time you are reading this, spring has arrived, the ground has dried out a bit and grass and stock are showing signs of growth. It has been a challenging few months in many ways.

Crofters are used to challenges, of course. That goes with the territory. But this year they have been compounded. Low-quality silage due to last year's poor summer; higher feed costs as a result to keep stock in good health through the winter; then to add insult to injury, the painful delays in receiving the payments we rely on to see us through this period, thanks to problems with the government's new IT system and the complexity of three tiers insisted on by NFUS. And while some folk, farmers in the main it seems, have been lucky enough to receive their payments, as I write this, far too many crofters have not yet even received their letters of allocation, far less any money.

Severe cash flow issues are faced. Mr Lochhead has acknowledged the crisis and committed to a loan fund, but producers have first to try to borrow from their banks at normal commercial rates. Some have been forced to reduce stock or give up altogether. A welcome intervention as we went to press was the announcement that LFASS payments would be made by the end of March, which will go some way to alleviating the current difficult situation.

As essential producers of quality breeding stock to supply the food chain and provide the high-end meat that consumers and restaurateurs demand, crofters

have a key role to fulfil.

But we cannot do it without understanding and support. Crofters have a work ethic that commits us to making the most of our agriculture at the edge – contending with elemental forces such as gales and prolonged rainfall as a matter of course; caring for our stock as they graze the mountains and moors of the crofting areas. These elements are part of what makes our produce so desirable, but when we see the level of support given so generously and unnecessarily to large-scale farmers on much easier ground, far more than crofters on the poorest ground receive, we feel even more marginalised.

The new EU programme, Areas of Natural Constraint (ANC), is supposed to compensate for the kind of challenges faced by crofters. The programme name makes that clear. Europe understands. But the large farmers are demanding that the new scheme remains close to its predecessor LFASS, so that they can continue to receive the highest rates. SCF will fight this vehemently. We met with Lochhead and made our concerns clear. But we have a long fight ahead of us before the programme is finalised in 2018.

Rest assured, we do our utmost to fight the crofters' corner. But you can help, by encouraging your neighbours and family who are not already SCF members to join us. The more crofters who take out membership and give us their support, the more clout we would have; and the more financial resources we would have to meet everyone's expectations of us.

A recent, and very welcome, example of our successful lobbying is the announcement of increased grant rates for croft houses. We are pleased that the minister and her colleagues finally listened as we pointed out the extra costs of building in remote mainland areas, not necessarily just on islands; making clear that the grants had fallen well behind inflation; that this scheme is vital in retaining rural populations – especially the young, who are crucial for crofting's future.

The next step is getting the loan element of the Croft House Grant Scheme reinstated. Academic studies have proved that a loan is

good value for the taxpayer and essential to help young folk who cannot obtain a mortgage. We have met with the minister and her colleagues on this and await the outcome of her considerations.

Our very successful conference in Inverness in December, arranged in conjunction with the Scottish parliament's cross-part group on crofting, was a high-profile, well-attended event where the significant challenges facing crofting were discussed. You will find a report on this event on page 5. It was great to catch up with long-standing SCU stalwarts such as Bill Ritchie, Frank Rennie and Jim Hunter. Professor Mark Shucksmith reminded us what we crofters identified as the issues needing addressed when he conducted his enquiry into crofting in 2007. The event endorsed the five action points you see on page one.

Those issues remain before us and SCF looks to the new parliament and will work with relevant bodies towards a stronger crofting community – where young people can obtain crofts; where older crofters are willing to make way for energetic new blood; where croft land is actively worked; where crofting's legal complexities are simplified and made fit for the 21st century; where support systems are supportive to those most in need; and with a development agency geared to supporting crofting initiatives at a local, individual level.

With your help in recruiting new members to our organisation, we can work together towards these goals.



Crofting at the mercy of the elements

Crofters' anger at NFUS for late payments

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There is also widespread discontent with those who did receive an illustration of what their payments may be as, in many cases, it is a significant reduction. The reduced payments are largely due to the allocation of croft land in the three region system. This will therefore incur appeals and further delays.

Crofters did not ask for this. The SCF has always advocated a two region system which would have been far simpler and would have favoured crofters. In the government consultation on the CAP the majority of responders favoured a two-region system. Mr Lochhead said, "It was always made clear to the industry that more complexity would have an impact on the timetable. NFU Scotland has confirmed they knew about that and accepted it."

The possibility of crofters going out of business is real.

In addition to a safety net loan that farmers and crofters can apply for if in dire straits, Lochhead recently announced that LFASS payments would be made by the end of March – a timely recognition of the very serious problems faced by crofters.

SCF chief executive Patrick Krause said: "The SCF very much welcomes this initiative. A lot of crofters will be really pleased to hear payments will be made by the end of March, as LFASS is so important to us. It is great to see the Scottish Government is being so creative in finding ways to ease crofters' cash flow concerns during this difficult time."

Areas of Natural Constraint

THIS SCHEME will replace the Less Favoured Areas Support Scheme (LFASS) in 2018. It is income support to prevent land abandonment. There are eight biophysical constraints which will include day length, slope, soil, climate and so on.

It comprises two elements: **Designation of land within the ANC.** The bigger the area the more dilute the budget. This will be at parish level (not farm level). Scheme design. Based on income foregone and additional costs. It does not include transport – ie distance from market.

The minimum payment set by EC is 25 Euros per ha. It will have to be degressive ie 25 euros on first x number of ha then getting less per ha.

It is area-based only (LFASS was historic) with no links to production. Scottish Government

intends to have no complicated multipliers (LFASS used these to pay more to better land).

The payment is variable only by constraint or farming system. SCF will push for crofting to be seen as a system in its own right.

The next stakeholder meeting will probably be early May, with a workshop in June. There will be a consultation in the autumn for decision in early 2017. Implementation will be in 2018 and first payments in 2019.

The industry lobby will want to keep it as much like LFASS as possible – paying more per ha the better the land in the defined area.

Crofters need it to be very different from LFASS – paying more per ha for more constraint. This is what SCF will be lobbying for.



Area of natural constraint?

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developing the bones of a new act and it should be left to crofting-accredited lawyers, under the guidance of the panel, to write the act.

Make crofts available

There are many people who want to come into crofting and crofting needs incomers – especially young folk. The Crofting Commission must be given the resources to follow up on the annual census and to bring existing crofts back into use and made available for in-coming crofters.

Simultaneously new crofts must be created, as it is recognised that making existing crofts available is a long-term project. Consideration

must be given to extending crofting legislation beyond the existing crofting areas, and creating new crofts in both existing areas and beyond.

Increase affordable housing

A considerable step has been taken by the government in reviewing and upgrading the Croft House Grant Scheme. This is to be applauded. But we can do more to help new entrants/crofters get access to affordable housing in rural and island communities by reinstating the loan element that the scheme used to have. The old Croft Building Grant and Loan Scheme (CBGLS) was an extremely effective way of using

public money to increase rural housing. Several academic studies have shown this to be the case. We need an upgraded CBGLS back.

Development of crofting

There must be a funded lead body on crofting development. When the Crofting Commission lost the remit for crofting development it was not passed to another body to take responsibility. HIE was directed by ministers to take responsibility for crofting community development. This is not the same thing. There must be a body, HIE even, given ministerial direction and funding to take responsibility for crofting development.

Crofting agriculture is systematically marginalised

THE SCF has reproached the Scottish Government for systematically marginalising crofting in agricultural policy.

Most of the problems suffered by crofters under the new CAP seem to stem from the Scottish Government ignoring crofters' views in favour of the industrial-agriculture industry lobby.

The debacle over three payment regions is a case in point. Public consultation showed that the majority, including SCF, wanted two regions. Despite this, a three region system, which NFUS had been lobbying for, was foisted upon us at the last minute by the Scottish Government, flying in the face of the consultation results. This is now causing inestimable problems and is blamed by cabinet secretary Richard Lochhead as a principle cause of late payments this year.

But it goes further; indeed, the entire thrust of CAP reform to a fairer and sustainable system has been thwarted by this big farmer lobby. For example, a fundamental opportunity to move to an area-based system has been delayed for five years when we could have instigated the change straight away, as other countries have. Every time the CAP seems set to fulfil Scottish Government objectives of a fairer and greener Scotland, the same government capitulates to industry lobbying. Scotland has had to create an ever-more-convoluted payment system to continue defending the indefensible.

The immediate consequences are catastrophic.



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Credit from banks and feed merchants is drying up, sheep stock clubs and common grazings cannot pay share-holders, and the ewe-hogg scheme is a damp squib. This then causes stock prices to fall as there is no money circulating. It is the classic vicious circle that impacts on the whole rural economy and threatens the survival of remote communities.

Of course the emergency at the moment is the lack of payments, but the root of the problem goes much deeper. As we have indicated to the Scottish Government, the absence of any meaningful reference to crofting in the Future of Scottish Agriculture consultation document, says it all.

This does not bode well for the last part of this agricultural policy reform, the move to an Areas of Natural Constraint (ANC) scheme which will

replace the widely criticised Less Favoured Areas Support Scheme (LFASS). LFASS has been misused by the Scottish Government for decades as a top-up for agri-businesses on better land. The new ANC scheme could use public funds for what they are meant for, to avoid land abandonment in areas facing natural constraint. This will be regions 2 and 3 and smaller units of region 1 – croft in-bye. There is no way large region 1 farms will be abandoned so why do they get higher LFASS payments? But the industry lobby, again, opposes change and the cabinet secretary has already indicated he is minded to keep it as much

like LFASS as possible, if he is in the job after May.

The SCF, the crofting stakeholder forum and even the agencies – the Crofting Commission and SNH – have all called on the Scottish Government to use the CAP public money to deliver public goods rather than to shore up a failing model of large-scale agri-business. There are parts of our government struggling to help crofting in areas such as housing and capital grants, but it is uphill whilst the cabinet secretary for agriculture continues to fold to industry opposition to agricultural reforms.

This is going to hit crofting areas hard for the next six years. The current fiasco over getting any payment at all is a bitter blow right at the outset of what is now going to be a testing few years for all of us.

Crofting legislation

THE CROFTING Law Group conference was held in March and an invited panel of candidates for the Scottish Parliamentary elections attended and took questions.

One of the five priorities for crofting, unsurprisingly, highlighted by the future of crofting conference in December, was the need to make crofting legislation fit for purpose. This has been an issue for decades but has come to a head with The Sump, formed to collect the problems and anomalies in crofting law. One hundred and twenty six issues were submitted by lawyers, organisations and members of the public. So a prominent question to the panel was, no doubt, "How will you deal with The Sump if your party is in government?"

Why is crofting legislation in such a guddle? There are too many amendments that have not been consolidated, to be sure, and it could be suggested that too much responsibility has been put on too few unqualified civil servants to do the conversion of the 'Will of Parliament' into an amended act.

As well as the many omissions and anomalies, there is detail in the act that should be in the regulations, not in primary legislation. For example, crofters who comply with the requirement to register their crofts are bound by the act to advertise this in a newspaper for two consecutive weeks – which costs the crofter far more than the registration itself. How did such prescriptive nonsense get into primary legislation? This was either ignorance or mischief at play.

In this vein, SCF is petitioning the future Scottish Government to create a new crofting act. There has already been too much tinkering for yet another series of amendments to be efficacious.

There needs to be a panel of practitioners (including crofters) to design the bones of a new act and then specialists to write it.

As the proverb says, "horses for courses". Give the job of designing a crofting act to those who use it and the writing of croft law to crofting legal practitioners specialising in croft law.

Crofting Commission elections 2017

THERE IS a flurry of elections: the Scottish Parliament, the EU, and on the horizon, the election of crofting commissioners which takes place in May 2017.

Crofters are urged to consider standing as a commissioner. It is essential that we have interest from crofters and enough candidates to run a vibrant election. If you are interested please respond to the call for candidates when it comes out.

The future of crofting

THE FUTURE of Crofting, a conference held in Inverness in December to look at progress made on crofting reform in the seven years since the Committee of Inquiry on Crofting, concluded that there is still much unfinished business to attend to.

Opening the event, minister for crofting Dr Aileen McLeod drew attention to the five priorities for crofting she is currently considering, presented to her by the Scottish Government crofting stakeholder forum:

- **Simplify crofting legislation with a new act.**
- **Make crofts available for new entrants.**
- **Increase affordable croft housing.**
- **Fund a lead body on crofting development.**
- **Ensure that CAP support has a positive impact on crofting.**

Professor Mark Shucksmith gave a summary of the findings of the Committee of Inquiry on Crofting, the most comprehensive and participatory research into crofting since the Napier Commission of 1883 that led to the 1886 Crofters Act. The findings of the committee, unsurprisingly, almost exactly mirror the priorities presented to the minister by the crofting stakeholder forum. All the evidence taken is still available on-line and should be revisited.

This evidence and recommendations were presented to the Scottish Government in 2008 by a Scottish Government committee of inquiry, so why do stakeholders have to present almost exactly the same demands today?

Mark led a conference theme: regulation is being carried out now by a semi-elected body and legislation is being tackled. But is crofting development? He concluded that this is unfinished business and it is for crofters to take it forward.

Former SCU president Professor Frank Rennie referred to Professor Shucksmith's conclusion that crofters need to take charge of their own destiny with the assertion that "we need to be more involved in these things." He continued: "I don't hold with this idea of a crofters committee on the NFU – crofting is nothing to do with farming ... crofting is a key cultural facet that we need to push."

He concluded by saying that we need more crofts, which gained wide agreement.

NFUS did not have a representative at the conference to reply to this. There seemed to be concurrence when Scottish Government officials revealed that the Future of Scottish Agriculture consultation document only mentions crofting in one of the nine outcomes, recognising its contribution to Scottish society.

SCF will redress this by putting in a strong response to the consultation.

SCF's vice-chair Russell Smith reminded us that it is not all optimism: the market for store animals is down; a lack of off-croft work; an increase in red-tape such as tagging; cuts to support payments and the move from LFASS to the ANC scheme is being frustrated by industrial agriculture interests. However, he concluded that "if you want population in rural areas, crofting works".

Commissioner I G MacDonald talked about the new Crofting Commission and its primary

functions of regulation, reorganisation and review. He concluded that the commission has been sorted; now for crofting development ...

Brian Inkster, crofting lawyer, pointed out that 126 crofting legislation problems had been identified and gathered in The Sump and presented to the minister for crofting as options for action; 1. a full new bill, or 2. just deal with nine priorities for now, or 3. just deal with two that are critical; succession and mortgages. The minister has been asked to convene a committee of specialist practitioners to deal with this.

Neil Ross of HIE, to whom the Crofters Commission's remit for crofting community development passed following the 2010 Act, summarised how diverse and pluralistic crofting is and how much it contributes to thriving and

to be put to use before new crofts are created was rejected. Regulating statutory conditions is an ongoing process that can continue, but the creation of new crofts is needed now. As Professor Jim Hunter pointed out, there is a huge demand for crofts, to the extent that the price of them has rocketed, so the obvious thing to do surely is to satisfy demand with the creation of new crofts.

SCF young crofters' representative Viv Montgomery echoed this as one of their main drives for the future of crofting, "there needs to be access to crofts".

Also speaking for the next generation, Calum MacSween, representing Crofting Connections, reminded us that we have come a long way from the Education Act of 1870, which resulted in a disconnect between what young people learned in school and what they learned from their own crofting communities. He also quoted one of the quality improvement officers in CnES education service who said recently that "the future of crofting starts in school."

Fiona Mandeville, chair of the SCF, said that the SCF has had the creation of new crofts as the prominent point in its call on the Scottish Government for an action plan for crofting. She gave the assurance that SCF will continue to look for more innovative ways to make this happen.

Overall there was a feeling of optimism. Crofting will survive despite the challenges it faces and this can be helped by attending to the unfinished business.



Professor Mark Shucksmith says there is much unfinished business.

*The destiny of crofting
is in the hands of crofters.*



Delegates pay close attention to the discussion

resilient communities. He demonstrated how crofting development is carried out by a number of Scottish Government agencies. He left the question open as to whether it should all come under the remit of one, funded, lead body.

There were enthusiastic contributions from the floor in discussion sessions:

There was widespread agreement that new crofts need to be created. The assertion by Scottish Government that existing crofts need

Main Points:

Crofting Development - needs the second leg of the Shucksmith report;

Housing - mortgage availability for croft houses (legislation prepared but not enacted); needs loan element for Croft Housing Scheme

Absenteeism vs neglect - key is to get land back into use, both are important, depends on circumstances;

Create new crofts and bring existing crofts back into use:

both important and should be pursued.

Demand is there;

SG estates, Forestry Commission; use 1919 Land Settlement Act;

in old crofting counties and in new areas;

Support – crofting is good at retaining population and biodiversity so merits support;

Areas of Natural Constraint (ANC) to do what it says and support areas of natural constraint;

Legislation – sort out, simplify;

Future of Scottish Agriculture to include crofting. Crofting is agric + culture;

Create favourable circumstances for young people/new entrants;

The destiny of crofting is in the hands of crofters.

The conference, which was an action to come out of the Scottish Parliament Cross-Party Group on Crofting, was organised by The Scottish Crofting Federation (SCF), hosted by the Highland Council and funded by Highlands and Islands Enterprise and the European Union.

The cross-party group on crofting

Jean Urquhart MSP, vice-convenor of the cross-party group on crofting, looks back

FIVE YEARS ago (almost) I was unexpectedly elected to the Scottish parliament – too long a story for this short article.

One of the most rewarding parts of the job has been my involvement with several cross-party groups.

Primarily, cross-party groups are attended mostly by people who know what they are talking about. Discussions about real issues are held in ordinary language and are usually devoid of bureaucracy. But crucially, they are made up of folk on the front line who can and do, talk from experience. They are, other than evidence sessions to committees, the second chamber where grass-roots organisations and individuals

can share their knowledge.

There have been many changes in these five years.

Changes to the Crofting Commission – now specifically a regulatory body – and changes in their board designed to bring more democracy to the organisation. Changes to the Highlands and Islands Enterprise development role, no longer in crofting per se, but crofting communities.

I don't doubt that crofters will survive all of these changes and we hope that things will get better as a result.

But I do think that we have a fight on our hands. The Scottish Government rarely mentions crofters or crofting in its strategic documents, nor for that matter does the National Farmers Union of Scotland. Crofting cannot be seen



Jean Urquhart and Patrick Krause at the crofting conference in Inverness

as the poor relation to farming.

If I have learned anything over the last few years it is this. There is a sound and economic case to be made for continuing with crofts and crofting in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland. It does, and must, continue to play the important role that exists in the nation's landscape, culture, community,

education, climate change – and most importantly, the food chain.

It sounds easy to say, but the current problems of payments, misinformation from some of the regional SGRPID offices and poor weather have all combined to show that the crofting cross party group has work still to do in the next parliament.

Completing Scotland's land register



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REGISTERS OF Scotland (RoS) maintain the crofting register and are also the public body responsible for maintaining the registers of land ownership in Scotland.

Scottish Ministers have asked RoS to complete the map-based land register by 2024. Currently 28 per cent of Scotland's land is on the land register, about 59 per cent of all land and property titles. Almost all the remaining land and property is on another RoS-maintained register, the sasine register, the world's oldest national property register.

These sasine properties will be brought over onto the land register through three routes; firstly through a trigger event, such as a sale.

Almost all of the 1.6 million titles on the land register have come through this route over the last 35 years.

From 1st April 2016, there is a new trigger that closes the sasine register to standard securities, usually a mortgage. This means that applicants on a sasine-registered property seeking to borrow with a new lender will need to prepare a free voluntary registration onto the land register, along with the new standard security where the same charge of £60 will apply.

The second route of voluntary registration has always been open to landowners and RoS is now promoting this more actively and offering a 25% discount on its registration fees

to encourage more applications. RoS has begun an engagement programme starting with larger rural landowners and will widen this out to include many more land and property owners over the coming years.

RoS has been encouraging crofters to register on the crofting register and some of the work required for that process can be reused when registering the same land onto the land register. This could be very useful for owner-occupied crofts, and also for tenant crofters, as there will be greater transparency and certainty on who was the legal owner of the land on a publicly accessible register. RoS accepts that there are two separate applications processes at the moment and is committed to reviewing where possible to make this less onerous in the future.

The final route to the land register is keeper-induced registration (KIR), a new power given to the keeper of RoS by the Scottish Parliament to move titles over from sasines onto the land register without an application or consent from the owner. A public consultation has taken place and later this year RoS will begin a large trial of these new powers in domestic properties, mostly within urban areas. KIR could eventually add up to 700,000 addresses onto the land register.

Once complete, the land register will provide a comprehensive and clear picture of who owns what and where across Scotland and all property owners will benefit from a state-backed warranty of title and future transactions on land and property will be easier, faster and cheaper.

If you are interested in registering your land or property, or if you would like to discuss this subject further, please email LRCompletion@ros.gov.uk. More information is also available at www.ros.gov.uk/lrc.

When is a grazings share deemed to be a croft?

MANY CROFTERS may be unaware that following the purchase of croft land, any associated common grazings shares which remain tenanted are deemed to be a separate and distinct croft in their own right for the purposes of the Crofters (Scotland) Act 1993.

This is to ensure that the right to graze is still subject to crofting controls and regulations, which is why many owner-occupier crofters will have received several Crofting Census forms to complete and return to the Commission for both their croft and for their grazings share.

As required by crofting legislation, the Crofting Commission has completed the separation of crofts and deemed crofts (grazings shares and, where appropriate, apportionments) in the Register of Crofts. 1,952 deemed crofts now have their own separate entries as crofts with their own unique register numbers. Where a croft has to be registered in Registers of Scotland's Crofting Register, the deemed croft will have to

be registered separately.

The practicalities of having a deemed croft has little implication for crofters, in that the grazings shares remain active. However, when it does become important is with the sale or transfer of a croft and croft succession on the death of a crofter.

Where an owner-occupier crofter sells or transfers a croft, only the owner-occupied croft will transfer to the new owner. The deemed croft (whether it is a right to graze or an apportionment) remains held in tenancy and it can only be transferred by making an assignation application to the Commission. Similarly, any let or short lease of the owner-occupied croft will not include the deemed croft. It is not uncommon for a deemed croft, comprising a right to graze in a common grazings, to be forgotten about in the sale of a croft.

The other situation where deemed crofts can cause problems is in connection with the transfer of crofting interests on death. Executors should

identify whether the crofting interests of the deceased crofter include a deemed croft. Where the deceased crofter purchased the croft, any right to graze, or apportionment, that was not included in the purchase will be a deemed croft and will be deemed to be held in tenancy.

Executors need to be aware that any deemed croft must be transferred in terms of the Succession (Scotland) Act 1964 and it is recommended that legal advice is sought. If the deemed croft is not transferred within 24 months of the crofter's death, or 24 months after the Commission was notified of the death (which must be within two months of the date of death), the executor may lose the ability to transfer the deemed croft and the landlord may terminate the tenancy of the deemed croft. The Commission may also then take steps to declare the deemed croft to be vacant.

For further information visit the Crofting Commission's website www.crofting.scotland.gov.uk.



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SCF YOUNG CROFTERS

The bad, the good and the seedy

IT HAS been a tumultuous time over the past few months, writes young crofter Cheryl MacIntyre, with the basic payments debacle and the resulting freeze on everything else: crofting agricultural grants scheme, agri-environmental climate scheme and the young farmers start up grant.

Hardly the most appealing state of affairs to attract young crofters. The SCF young crofters branch has been active in writing to MSPs and issuing a press release on the matter to highlight the issue.

Amidst all this doom and gloom a bit of good news has emerged, in that the croft house grant shall increase to £28,000, or £38,000 in islands and some mainland areas. This is one of the key areas that SCF

young crofters have been focussing on and we welcome the news. Long due for a review – let's keep hoping the loan element, which is still under discussion, will have a favourable outcome too.

Young crofters were present at the Seed and Tree festival, celebrating food for the common good in Glasgow in February. First Minister Nicola Sturgeon was present at the event, hosted by Common Good Food and Helping Britain Blossom. The day blended discussion and celebration, practical workshops, planning for national political action and was capped off with curry and a ceilidh.

From bad to good, to a delightfully seedy start – may the year get over this bumpy beginning and crofting go from strength to strength.



Tree and seed festival

© Craig Buchan Photography

CROFTING CONNECTIONS

Weaving wool, weaving words with Crofting Connections



Waulking the tweed

EVERYONE KNOWS about Harris Tweed and the geographical specifications of its wonderful products, but wool lost its market value for a while in Scotland. Now, the worldwide resurgence of interest in Harris Tweed and Shetland knitwear has prompted a renewed interest in wool in other crofting areas.

Processing wool around the hearth in the croft was part of the provision of basic needs for the family. Crofters traditionally produced their own food, shelter, clothing and energy from the local landscape. Telling stories and sharing news was also a part of that.

Crofting Connections held three events last year, in Grantown, Uist and Inverness, to highlight the activities involved in processing wool as well as the storytelling and singing which often accompanied the tasks. In each event, pupils had hands-on experience of all the activities involved

in weaving cloth from a fleece.

In Inverness, with the help of representatives from the Highland Guild of Weavers and Spinners, they carded and spun some washed fleece. They had a chance to begin weaving yarn on looms which Crofting Connections provide to the schools, which then went back to each school at the end of the day so pupils could continue their work.

Pupils also learned about the processes involved in making tweed from woven cloth, when it was soaked and thumped rhythmically by hand by a group of people. Crofters sang waulking songs to help maintain the rhythm. Children got the chance to learn some Gaelic words and waulking song extracts with Christina Stewart while recreating the activity of preparing the cloth. Bob Pegg, a traditional storyteller, told the children some stories with a crofting theme which may well have been told around the fireside



Weaving



Spinning the pieces of fleece carded by the pupils

as the women of the croft were spinning.

In Inverness we also worked with an education officer from the Sew Ewe project at the Glasgow Clyde Textiles unit. She helped create some of the pupils' own designs on calico fleeces placed over wooden sheep. Activities included finger knitting with yarn they measured out themselves and stitching a design or word onto a piece of material sewn onto the fleece.

These events were designed to use Crofting Connections as a context for delivering recent educational priorities such as learning for sustainability, developing the young workforce and raising attainment for all (especially in literacy and numeracy). They have all involved P 6/7 pupils as part of their transition to secondary school.

Brid McKibben, Crofting Connections project officer
www.croftingconnections.com

1886 Crofters Holding Act

Ian G. Macdonald looks back

IT IS 130 years since the 1886 Crofters Holding Act was passed by the Westminster parliament and first appeared on the statute book.

I wonder what the local protagonists at the Battle of the Braes (Blàr na Cùmhaing) would think of the state of crofting in 2016? Surely they would marvel at the many layers of amendments and complexities which now adorn crofting legislation; and the plethora of forms, inventories and bureaucracy which is required to keep an essentially simple system in place.

I'm sure they would be surprised that any of their progeny are still custodians of the 'small patches of poor thin ground' that yielded only sufficient to keep themselves from abject poverty, but they would understand the love of place and people that overcomes all obstacles put in the way of the diligent husbandman.

They would find it hard to appreciate why so much land in Skye remains unstocked and uncultivated. Instead of small, snug blackhouses, ostentatious white houses are surrounded by neglected crofts; and yet the demand for land by aspiring tenants, which they also experienced in their own time, remains unsatisfied.

Dependence on real, nutritional, home-grown food has been neglected and a global, high-energy, wasteful, supermarket mentality has taken over. Would their natural prudence and caution warn 21st-century Scots that we are unlikely to cope with sudden climatic or economic calamity? Would they continue to recognise the corrosive influence of money and power which inevitably leads to injustice?

James Nicolson (Seumas 'n Oig) of Ollach was my great-grand-uncle. At 30 years of age he was one of the men arrested by a body of Glasgow policemen on 17th April 1882 for the crime of deforcing a sheriff's officer. His wife Flora, of Balmeanach, "had her head badly laid open, but whether with a truncheon or stone is not known." These people, much against their peaceable natures, were catapulted into the limelight of the national press in what was called *The Crofting Troubles*.

Their contribution to resistance against

an unfeeling establishment led directly to widespread sympathy for their cause and positive action by William Gladstone's Liberal government. They, and crofters generally, were not particularly enamoured of this particular act of parliament, feeling that it should have gone much farther, but they came to appreciate the fair rents, security of tenure and the freedom to will their crofts to their descendants which it gave.

In 2016, many smallholders and tenant farmers across this country do not yet have the privileges that crofters enjoy.

Young James was dismissed by Lord MacDonald's factor with the words; "I cannot deal with you, you are only a crofter's son and not a tenant of his Lordship." James eventually inherited his father-in-law's croft while his own father's croft went to his sister, my great grandmother, the formidable Chirsty 'n Oig. They would all, doubtless, be pleased that that croft, five generations later, is now tenanted by my daughter.

James, Flora and Kirsty's great-great-grandchildren are among the present day crofters of Skye who bemoan the decline of communal working and community spirit which defined the



Chirsty 'n Oig

crofting of our forefathers, but we appreciate that the privileges won for us have also given us enormous responsibilities. We are determined to ensure that the virtues and values of crofting, which have had such a positive effect on population retention in the Scottish Highlands and Islands continue to be fought for. We must not wait for others to do it for us!

Sea eagle management scheme – a reminder

AS THE lambing season draws near, crofters will be keeping an anxious eye out for predators. The new sea eagle scheme started last year and has already made grants to crofters in affected areas to assist with measures to reduce predation.

Stakeholder groups to oversee the scheme have been established in Wester Ross and Skye and Lochalsh, with SCF representation.

It is very important that members losing lambs to sea eagles report losses promptly to the local office of Scottish Natural Heritage so that they can be investigated; and also inform SCF head office.

As reported in the last edition of *The Crofter* SCF remains resolutely opposed to any further introduction of predator species.



Simon Fraser – land reform champion



Left to right: John MacKenzie, Simon Fraser, Allan MacRae and Bill Ritchie at the Assynt victory announcement

Following the death in February of Simon Fraser, Jim Hunter reflects on this Lewis lawyer's huge contribution to the cause of community ownership.

SIMON FRASER was instrumental in the community buyouts of Eigg, Ghigha, North Harris – and first and foremost, North Lochinver in Assynt.

As was recognised across the Highlands and Islands, Simon Fraser's death deprived the cause of land reform, and the cause of community ownership in particular, of one of its greatest champions. To speak with people in any one of the widely separated localities affected by Simon's passing is to become aware that folk feel they have lost more than a valued adviser and confidant. They have lost a warmly regarded friend.

Recalling a man to whom he became very close, former Highland

Council leader Michael Foxley describes Simon as a family man who, with his wife Ann, raised four children, Alasdair, Simon, Cara and Anna of whom their father, Michael says, was immensely proud.

Like John Watt who, when heading HIE's Community Land Unit, worked closely with Simon Fraser, Michael Foxley insists on Simon's key contribution to making community ownership a reality. 'No matter how much support community ownership had on the ground,' Michael comments, 'no matter how much backing we got from politicians, the public, the media, we'd never have succeeded without someone who was always on top of the legalities and never less than two moves ahead of the other side in any negotiation. That someone was Simon Fraser.'

Simon's involvement with community ownership began in 1989 when the then Conservative

government offered to transfer ownership of its crofting estates in Skye and Raasay to crofting communities on those estates. Simon, already a well-established lawyer with Anderson Macarthur, Stornoway, was a member of the team commissioned by the Scottish Crofters Union (SCU) and the Highlands and Islands Development Board to look into possibilities arising from the government offer – his remit being to devise the means by which crofters might best manage the land they lived on.

The government's Raasay and Skye tenants rejected community ownership, and the documentation setting out how such ownership might take shape was filed away in Simon's office. But it was brought out again in June 1992 when Simon got a call from Achmelvich crofter Bill Ritchie. At a meeting called by the SCU's Assynt branch, Bill explained, it had been agreed that crofters on the North Lochinver Estate, just advertised for sale by its Swedish owners, should try to buy the property. Would Simon act for them? Yes, he would.

There followed a six-month saga during which the newly formed Assynt Crofters Trust confronted obstacle after obstacle while, amid nationwide publicity, doing something crofters had never done before – bidding in the open market for the sort of estate where faraway landlord had previously succeeded faraway landlord, without it occurring to anyone that affected residents should have any say in who owned

the land around them.

'Simon was critical to what we were about,' Bill Ritchie recalls. 'Day after day he got on quietly, confidently, reassuringly with what were immensely complex and difficult negotiations. What I remember most is the sheer presence of the man. Soft-spoken, gentle in his manner. But never wavering in his belief that the thing could be done or in his commitment to making it happen.'

From the eventual victory of the Assynt Crofters Trust, there followed the continuing series of other successes that have taken more than 500,000 acres into community ownership. Of these, perhaps, none meant more to Simon Fraser than Eigg, where the island's absentee proprietors had long been at loggerheads with islanders and where Simon – whose role in winning the community ownership secured in 1997 was every bit as crucial as in Assynt – will always be remembered with great fondness by Maggie Fyffe and her Isle of Eigg Heritage Trust colleagues.

'Simon had so much leadership ability,' says John Hutchison, the Eigg Trust's recently-retired chair. 'He made everyone involved with the Eigg buy-out feel we were engaged in something truly transformational. "The purchase of this island by the community," I remember him saying on the day Eigg's ownership passed to its people, "is one in the eye for everything mean-spirited or self-serving."'

Pairc Estate in community ownership at last

John Randall, vice chairman of the Pairc Trust, reports on this historic community achievement

THE PAIRC Trust finally took ownership of the Pairc Estate in Lewis on behalf of local crofters and residents on Friday 4th December 2015.

This was the culmination of some 13 years of determined effort in the face of many obstacles to achieve a community buyout in line with the wishes of the community, as confirmed in successive ballots.

The terms of the agreement with the previous owner for a voluntary transfer of essentially the whole estate were endorsed by the community in May 2014. But it took a further 18 months for the necessary legal documentation to be completed, including detailed mapping of the estate to meet the requirements of Registers of Scotland, confirmation from the Crown Estate that the estate includes ownership of the foreshore, clarification of the liability to pay VAT, updating to take account of SSE's decision to withdraw from a lease for a commercial wind-farm put in place by the former owner, and a determination regarding professional fees.



As agreed back in 2014, the purchase price for the land and interposed lease (excluding VAT) was £500,000. In addition Pairc Trust had to meet professional fees and related outlays totalling some £125,000, and to make provision for payment of VAT (which can be reclaimed from HMRC in due course) amounting to a further sum in excess of £100,000.

The funding to cover these capital costs came from Pairc Trust's own fund-raising campaign (nearly £300,000), the Scottish Land Fund (£200,000), Comhairle nan Eilean

Siar (over £200,000, including a short-term loan to cover VAT cash flow), and the local Muaitheabhal Community Wind Farm Trust (£27,500). In addition, Scottish Land Fund and HIE are providing revenue support for an initial period.

We are extremely grateful to everyone who has contributed to the total funding package, both our external funders and all those who made a donation to our successful fund-raising campaign.

Now the hard work begins! We are in the process of recruiting two new members of staff. At our next AGM we hope new trustees will be elected to take forward priority projects in line with the views of the community. There are undoubtedly challenges, not least the need to rekindle the enthusiasm of the community, which certainly existed a decade ago but which has inevitably been affected by the long-drawn-out process of purchasing the estate.

But the opportunities are huge: working in partnership and with close community consultation, we can create employment and improve the quality of life for all local crofters and residents.

CROFT HOUSING

Croft house grant scheme



© Martin Benson – Three

WE HAVE at last seen a review and a favourable uplift of the Croft House Grant Scheme (CHGS), after many years of campaigning by SCF.

In 2004 scheme was nearly scrapped but SCF pressure caused a reprieve. However, the loan element was dropped, much to the dismay of crofters, and it became a grant-only scheme. The Crofters Building Grant and Loan Scheme

(CBGLS) was shown by several studies to be the most cost effective use of public money to build rural homes.

The grant offered under CHGS had already fallen behind what the predecessor, CBGLS, offered as a package. Since then the scheme has never been reviewed and became seriously devalued. It is has also not been targeted to those who really need it – young crofters.

The long-overdue raise in grant rates (£28,000 and £38,000) is very welcome, but the review goes further and has made some important changes which we asked for such as: the introduction of a selection mechanism to ensure that support is targeted to those most in need; that owner-occupiers should be eligible on the same basis as tenant crofters; that support should be made available for houses with fewer than three bedrooms; and a host of other improvements.

Remarkably, having a selection process has been portrayed quite negatively by the BBC as the ogre 'means testing'. OK, call it that, but the fact is that the limited budget was getting spread too thinly by awarding grants to those who really didn't need assistance.

In principle we agree with targeting to favour those most in need of assistance. The age of applicants must figure strongly on the list of scoring criteria and income thresholds must be a factor, but need to be considered carefully. Key workers should receive favourable consideration, as should young families.

Crofters find it very difficult to obtain lending from the banks so it came to the point that only people with considerable capital behind them could use the grant. The reintroduction of the loan scheme is absolutely essential. This has been supported by the Committee of Inquiry on Crofting and the Parliamentary Rural Affairs Committee.

SCF put forward a strong argument for a loan and this is currently being considered by Scottish Government.

Mortgages on croft land

IMAGINE WHAT the property market would look like if mortgages did not exist.

For all the problems in the market (property values rising more quickly than wages and being in hock to a lender for most of your working life, to name but two), at least commercial mortgages level the playing field and allow people to purchase property who otherwise could not.

It would be unthinkable for mortgages to become unavailable. In the highly fanciful event of commercial lenders withdrawing every mortgage product, inescapable political pressure would be applied to the government of the day to put in place alternative methods of funding to allow people to continue to purchase property.

However, mortgages are simply not available for the purchase of a croft or for the building of a croft house unless an area of land is first decrofted.

The practical implication of this is that crofters who wish to build on their land require to decroft an area first, before they can obtain a mortgage to fund their build. This is not ideal because it perpetuates the need to develop croft land for housing, because each decrofted house then falls outwith the legislation and a further house is built by the next crofter.

The situation for those who do not already have a croft is even worse. For better or for

worse, there is a market in crofts (both owned and tenanted), and sellers are entitled to be compensated for the sale of their asset in the same way as the owner of a suburban house in Stornoway – or wherever. Accordingly, prospective purchasers of crofts must have enough cash in the bank, or another property which they can mortgage, to fund their purchase of the land.

The Draft Crofting Reform Act of 2009, produced in light of Professor Shucksmith's report, included provisions which would have enabled crofters to mortgage their tenancy in order to build a croft house. Although the provisions were dropped due to a largely negative response – and in any event would not, as drafted, have assisted in the initial purchase of a croft – there remains a demand for measures which assist young people to pursue a life in crofting. At the Future of Crofting conference late last year there was a fresh call for such measures.

If the government is serious about helping young people to become crofters, then consideration should be given to a crofting mortgage bill to offset the financial disadvantage young people bear by being at the start of their working lives. A property market skewed in favour of cash purchasers would not be tolerated elsewhere and it need not be tolerated in the world of crofting.



Eilidh Ross
Inksters Solicitors

CROFT HOUSING

A zero-carbon house

Architect Ian Brown explains

WITH THE rise in grant levels in the Croft House Grant Scheme, people's thoughts may be turning to building.

There are plenty of options as to how to go about it and I'm going to suggest that it may cost little more to go for a zero-carbon-ready house rather than just the normal kit house.

What is meant by a zero-carbon house? Initially (and this is the meaning I stick with) it means a house that on balance emits no carbon through heating and appliance use.

Politicians have been watering this definition down. New houses were meant to achieve it by 2016, but lobbying has led to this date being pushed to the future. The ambition has slipped, but new houses do have to be built with levels of insulation that result in a low-energy house.

It really depends how the house construction is detailed as to how effective the result is. By detailing in a modern way and replacing expensive heating systems with more insulation, you stand a good chance of getting to a very low-energy house. If money becomes available later, the addition of – for instance – photovoltaic panels can shift the house to a position where heating costs nothing; and with the right appliances the energy bill is a thing of the past.

Research has led to a fairly clear way of going about things. One version is based on a detailed method of calculation and building called passive house. There are extra costs involved in certifying

but the idea is the performance is pretty much guaranteed. There is also other advice which can be used.

In summary, the whole house is wrapped in insulation in a way that there are no gaps or thin spots anywhere.

The outer surfaces are insulated to a 'U value' of .11 or so which requires 50% or more insulation than the current minimum. The windows are at least 50% better than the base line requirement and there is quite an amount of heavy material used inside the house to store heat in the short-term. The building is well sealed but a heat exchange unit is used to introduce fresh air into the house all the time; and to warm the air with 90% of the heat that would otherwise be lost. In some houses, all the heating that is needed is a small electrical element in the air duct. Others choose to put in a very low-output wood stove or a small amount of electric heating that can be powered from the solar panels.

Other things also need considering, particularly reducing the area of windows facing north to a



Glenmore low energy passivhaus by John Gilbert Architects. The house cost £1278 per square metre and the energy demand was 194kWh/m²/yr.

minimum and considering the site well for shelter. A calculation that has to be done in any case to get a building warrant will give a reasonable prediction of how the building will perform.

There are quite a few architects and designers now who can provide drawings for this sort of building. It's important to get things right otherwise the result could be disappointing. With the care builders now have to take to get buildings airtight in any case, the extra performance is not a great hurdle.

I have a self build project at present to convert my shed to a house and it looks like this will be possible for much less than normal build costs. The calculation predicts no fuel cost at all.

Building a sustainable future

Neil Stephen of HebHomes and Dualchas Architects continues the theme

WHAT MAKES a house sustainable? For the government it is to do with energy performance. Ever-tighter standards demand improved insulation, better air-tightness and encourage the use of green technology. For crofting communities this should be welcomed.

Older housing stock is poorly insulated. Relentless wind causes further heat loss, making homes hard to heat with money wasted on energy dissipated through walls and roof. Energy-poverty is high in rural areas.

Every improvement building standards impose also has a cost. Simple timber frame technology, standard in the Highlands for decades, is now more complex. Further layers of membrane and insulation have been added – renewable technology required. Buildings are now much better-performing, but higher costs can put them further out of reach for young people looking to build their first home.

To address this we must take a fabric-first approach – a reduction in expensive renewable technologies and simpler ways of building. Modular design, to minimise waste and have repeatable elements. Quick erection times – so delays from bad weather are minimised and wind and watertight stage reached quickly – important also for mortgage finance.

This is why HebHomes is bringing in cross-laminated timber (CLT) technology. Walls and roofs are made of solid timber cross-laminated into large panels. Openings for windows and doors are cut out of the panels which themselves have high inherent insulation values and airtightness. This can be over-clad in insulation and there is no need for an internal moisture-barrier membrane.

It can reach passive house standards, has extremely simple detailing and can be erected in a fraction of the time of standard timber frames. At present seen as a more expensive product, as demand increases (as it has across the continent) it will become more and more competitive. There are already plans to build a CLT factory in Scotland, meaning that more Scottish timber can be used in production, reducing transport costs.

Sustainability isn't just about building performance and heating bills – even if this is

where governments focus attention. For our architects it is also about designing buildings that fit in to our beautiful landscapes – that enhance the views and have a response to the place – to the topography, climate and culture. It doesn't matter how energy-efficient or green a building is – if future generations do not cherish it, if they want to knock it down, then it is not sustainable architecture.

While design and culture are important parts of developing a modern and successful vision, there are still too many obstacles holding back rural Scotland. Poor transport links, poor internet connectivity and high food and fuel costs are all restraints on development. But still they are wonderful places where people want to live – where people feel a connection and want to bring up their children. But how do they do this if they can't get a house? Or if they do get a house, it is cold and damp?

We have to build in order to give people options – to let them make choices rather than force decisions. Communities are not sustainable if young people can't afford to build or buy homes, or can't access finance from lenders. They are not sustainable if the property available to rent is cold or expensive to heat. When we find a way to reduce land costs and sort out the banks, perhaps we can plan for a sustainable future for our crofting communities, where energy-efficient homes are just one small part of building a better community for all.



Inside a HebHomes house

ON THE CROFT

Support opportunities for crofters in 2016

Useful advice from Janette Sutherland of SAC, Portree

IF YOU are facing tough decisions or hardship due to delayed payments, make sure you speak to SAC advisors or SGRPID staff.

The government's interest-free loan scheme can provide up to £20,000 or 60% of subsidy if you cannot access a bank loan, and RSABI are always available to lend a listening ear and offer practical support in some situations – www.rsabi.org.uk.

Beef Efficiency Scheme (BES)

This brand new scheme for calves born on/ after 1/1/2016 will support crofters by approx £30 per calf.

What do you need to do to participate?

1. If you haven't already, join QMS.
2. Sign up on scoteid.com.
3. When each calf is born, fill in the BES diary supplied. On top of normal information, you rate:
 - how easily the calf was born
 - size of the calf at birth
 - how lively the calf was
 - bull tag number (no penalties if this is not exact)
 - calf weight some time before it is 460 days old.

The majority may not have weigh bars in crushes, so average sale weight will be accepted. For retained heifer calves you would need to hire/borrow weigh bars. A set of weigh scales can cost £1,662 (inc VAT) but after a CAGS grants, as an individual, you only pay £664.80. If you joined together as a common grazing it would cost the group £332.40.

Another benefit of knowing the weight of your cows is more efficient use of medicines, covered in a previous article in *The Crofter* – "The size of a cow".

Crofting Agriculture Grant Scheme (CAGS)

CAGS should soon be open to applications again. It is useful to draw up a five-year plan of improvements for the croft and see where CAGS grants can help you achieve your plan.

Scottish Beef Calf Scheme (SBCS)

SBCS is in addition to the Scottish Beef calf scheme, not a replacement. So ensure that you apply for all eligible calves: those born on a Scottish holding with more than 75% beef genetics that live for 30 days.

Sheep Upland Support Scheme (SUSS)

It is hoped that the majority of inspections for SUSS, often called the ewe hogg scheme, will be complete by the time of publication. If you qualify for this scheme, for next year you should:

- i. assess the maximum number of ewe hoggs you could claim
- ii. assess whether you have capacity to retain and claim more hoggs. If so, do you need to plan now for alternative wintering ground etc?
- iii. If you retain more, how will you make sure you select the best at the end of retention? Should we weigh ewe hoggs as standard practice to assess improvements in weight gain?

How can you increase lamb productivity?

- Scan, then ensure ewe diets are matched to ewe condition and how many lambs carried.
- Ensure you have a system for identifying barren sheep year on year.
- Consider feeding soya at a rate of an extra



This heifer calf will qualify for the Beef Efficiency Scheme

100g per lamb carried per day from three weeks before lambing, to improve ewe colostrum quality.

Less Favoured Areas Scheme (LFASS)

LFASS payments are normally made in March. Scottish Government has promised that payments won't be delayed as Scottish money will be used. This payment did not change this year so the amount is likely to be similar.

Whole Farm Review (WFR)

If all the changes in the subsidies have left you confused, you may wish to consider undertaking a business review. The government will support this as part of their WFR. www.gov.scot/Topics/farmingrural/Agriculture/grants/BDandM/WHOLEFARMREVIEWSCHEME2015

Agri-Environment and Climate Scheme (AECS)

This part of pillar II pays crofters to manage their ground for environment and wildlife benefit. It's a competitive scheme but can – in the right circumstances – provide a useful additional income. If you have queries, please contact your local SAC office. www.ruralpayments.org/publicsite/futures/topics/all-schemes/agri-environment-climate-scheme/

Environmental Co-operation Action Fund (ECAF)

Often crofting's contribution to biodiversity is the management of lots of different habitats that all play a role at a larger landscape scale. To capture this scale, ECAF could be useful as it could cover several townships and be an efficient way to both record and consider best management as a collaborative effort: www.ruralpayments.org/publicsite/futures/topics/all-schemes/environmental-co-operation-action-fund/

Forestry

See article on page 18.

Diversification

There is not such explicit support for croft diversification as in previous years. Business Gateway is always a useful first point of call: www.bgateway.com.

Finally, if you require bank lending, this government-backed support may be of interest: www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/243720/efg-backed-loan-application-process-and-list-of-lenders-aug-2013.pdf

I wish you all the best with all your crofting endeavours in 2016.

Janette.sutherland@sac.co.uk

Have you been paid?

THE PROBLEMS with getting basic payments out to crofters and farmers are well known and the reasons for the delay are well rehearsed.

SCF has been trying to gauge progress by surveying members in January and again at the end of February by email. This gives us valuable ammunition in our discussions with Scottish Government as it is based on actual data from our members.

Progress has been slow even compared to the modest targets set out by cabinet secretary Richard Lochhead. As the surveys were small in scale it is difficult to be definitive, but at the end of February, less than 10% of those members who responded had received part payment. Nearly half had still not been notified about their entitlement. And some who did know their entitlements had not received a letter but had only seen the information on www.ruralpayments.org, which shows the basic payment but not the greening payment.

This is particularly concerning as only 58% of the January survey had accessed the website themselves – for which you need a computer, broadband, a little expertise and a

lot of patience. About half of the respondents didn't feel able to say whether their entitlements were correct or not due the lack of information on how the figures were arrived at: "Ridiculously complicated" was one comment.

Equally worrying, you appear to be 10 times more likely to have been paid if you have NOT claimed for common grazings – as most of our members do. This suggests that crofters are at the back of the queue because of a problem that has been known about from the beginning.

Other issues were about the lack of progress on CAGS grants, the knock-on effect on other schemes of errors in allocating fields to regions, lack of feedback on appeals and the difficulty in getting bank loans if you don't know your entitlement.

"Very disappointed and broke" from one member about sums it up!

Thank you to all those who took part in the surveys – email surveys are a quick and low-cost way for us to get feedback from members and we are grateful to you for taking part. If you want to be involved in the future, please make sure that HQ has your current email address.

ON THE CROFT

Saving the seedcorn



Pete Sherwen collecting semen



Collecting semen 1987

IT WAS a breezy day back in 1987 at Bertie and Toma Moar's croft at Murrister, Bridge of Walls, Shetland, when semen was collected by Bertie's brother, vet Edwin Moar, from two Shetland bulls, Waterloo Charlie and Trondra Thorgeir.

A cow in heat was transported to Murrister, the vet was summoned and a handful of local Shetland cattle breeders gathered to help.

At that point in history the Shetland breed, which has lived in the islands alongside humans for at least 4,000 years, was in danger of disappearing completely, another victim of the drive towards the production of bigger livestock whatever the circumstances. However, since the dark days of the 1980s when Shetland had fewer than thirty registered cows, numbers have grown to two hundred plus in the islands and another four or five hundred on the mainland.

The new foundation herd book was established in 1981 and has been maintained by the Shetland Cattle Herd Book Society ever since. Sometimes walking a rocky road and with slim resources, Shetland crofters have endeavoured to keep promoting the classic traits of the cattle – easy calving, good mothering, thriftiness, hardiness, longevity, docility and superior meat and milk.

Aware of the shortage of Shetland semen, this year the Shetland Cattle Herd Book Society set out to create a new semen bank and semen store to safeguard the breed and to provide a service to breeders. Pete Sherwen of Scawfell Genetics in Cumbria was invited to Shetland to jump bulls for the first time since Edwin Moar climbed under Charlie and Thorgeir at Murrister back in 1987.

Collecting semen in the isles these days is a tricky feat logistically. The semen has to be collected in the morning and processed and

packaged in time to be at the post office by 1.30pm, to arrive on the mainland (in this case Devon) first thing the following morning. If the mail plane does not leave due to poor weather, the semen is wasted and has to be collected again.

Repeating the success of that day back in 1987, Pete Sherwen collected semen from two bulls in February this year. This is now in the Shetland Cattle Herd Book Society's semen store. It is supplemented by semen collected by Paddy Zakaria for her Shetland gene conservation herd in Australia and four more bulls are at Scawfell Genetics just now to provide further semen for the new bank.

Enquiries for purchase of straws can be made to the SCHBS at shetlandschbs@aol.com.

*Eleanor Arthur
President, Shetland Cattle Herd Book Society*

Wild geese

THE POPULATION of resident greylag geese on Uist is between 5,000 in spring and 8,000 in autumn, depending on whether it has been a good breeding season for them. It has been as high as 10,000.

They cause damage to arable crops, silage, hayfields and other important grass crops in the spring.

Various goose schemes in Uist over the past decade have mostly concentrated on crop protection for the valuable arable crops on the Uist machair. The most recent, the Uist Adaptive Management Pilot (AMP), aims to reduce the greylag population to an agreed target of 4,500. To that end, SNH contracts estates and individual marksmen to shoot geese over two main periods. Spring shooting targets breeding pairs and autumn shooting provides some limited crop protection. The crop protection element is being

funded on a reducing scale – £40k in 2014, £30k in 2015 and £20k available this coming autumn.

The AMP is coming to an end in March 2017 and there is concern locally as to what happens after that.

The barnacle goose population on North Uist has increased from 1,500 when the North Uist Machair and Islands SPA was first designated to over 6,000 now. At designation, most of the barnacle geese were using the offshore islands but over the last decade they have moved onto the mainland of North Uist. Crofters and farmers are now experiencing significant damage but SNH are not able to offer them a management agreement.

To receive a licence they have to agree to keep at least 60% of their land as a refuge but without any payment. Those with larger areas are experiencing damage in the region of £40k per year with smaller



© Martin Benson – Isle of Skye

crofts perhaps a few thousand. This winter, the counts have recorded barnacle geese in South Uist as well, and the local keeper and ornithologists have confirmed that they have started using this area regularly, so it looks as though they are continuing to expand into new areas.

North Uist crofters are not asking to be paid for scaring areas or for

paid marksmen to be provided, as on Islay; they are only asking to be paid for the refuge areas and to receive a sufficient bag limit to scare the geese off the better agricultural ground.

SCF will keep the petition, which it lodged in the Scottish Parliament, alive in the next session of the Scottish Government.



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- Diversification opportunities
- Marketing advice
- Renewable energy feasibility studies including wood fuel heating systems

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ON THE CROFT

Donald's horti-blog

WHEN WE moved the short distance across the Minch from Lewis to Skye a few years ago, the biggest surprise was the total contrast in the soil types on each side of that narrow stretch of water.

We were used to working peaty feannags amongst the hard rock, but over here we found a self-draining, reddish, mineral soil.

The reason of course is the underlying geology. The Outer Hebrides consist of some of the planet's oldest and hardest rocks, whereas the north of Skye is formed of some of the youngest. The common view of croft soils is that they are poor, wet and acidic. Certainly there are places where that is so, but I have seen very few crofts that lack an area of workable arable land, often created out of bog and rock by the labour of crofters over hundreds of years.



Reclaimed blackland, Grimsay

These old, and usually abandoned, cultivations can still be very fertile and we, the successors of those that created them, should still be reaping the benefits of their backbreaking efforts. Mary Norton's inspiring Blackland project in Grimsay has produced a wealth of material on how these soils can be restored to productivity.

There are plenty of crofting areas where soil is not the main challenge. The Hebridean machair can be highly fertile when worked in the traditional manner of cropping and fallowing.

I mentioned the north Skye soils, which result from volcanic activity in the Tertiary geological period. Similar soils are found in Mull and the west of Ardnamurchan, and with the addition of plenty of organic matter they will, given shelter, grow almost anything. I should also mention the fertile crofting soils of Easter Ross, Caithness and the south end of Shetland; not forgetting the limestone outcrops such as Lismore, Strathaird (Skye) and Dumess.

This is the time of year for the crofting horticulturist, and those considering going in that direction, to be thinking about soil. If you haven't done so, get an analysis done to see what your soil needs. At the most basic, a pH testing kit costing a few pounds will give an indication of lime requirements. Bulky organic materials, such as seaweed, manure and compost are within easy reach for most crofters or can be produced on the croft. Lime in the form of shell sand is available in many areas and can be purchased from the limestone quarries such as Torrin and



Ullapool.

Horticulture: a Handbook for Crofters published by SCF, goes into detail on soils in Chapter 4. Another good reference book is *Soils of the Croft*, published by the John Hutton Institute for the Crofting Connections project. Intended for schools, it gives a wide-ranging insight into a fascinating and complex subject, and is available online at: www.hutton.ac.uk/sites/default/files/files/education/croftingbook/pageflip.html.

What we're doing just now: tomatoes and salad crops sown in the house; early potatoes planted, leeks and spinach sown in polytunnel soil; early peas sown in pots; asparagus bed mulched with seaweed.

It hasn't stopped raining yet (at the end of February), but now is the time to get started if you can. Surely this will be a better growing year?

donald@crofting.org

Achaidhean beò

BHON TAIGH, chì mi sreathan de chroinn-fhiona air leathad cas, craobhan almoìn, corra chraobh orains, agus craobhan mango air ùr chur.

Sealladh gu math eAadar-dhealaichte bhon dachaigh againn sna h-eileanan. 'S e th' ann gun do chuir sinn an crodh air falbh gu an taobh an ear airson a' gheamhraidh agus gun do thog sinn oirn gu ceann a deas na Spàinn. Tha mi fortanach gun urrainn dhomh m' obair a dhèanamh air astar, fhad 's a tha co-cheangail eadar-lìn agam – agus gu ruige seo, tha sin air obrachadh gun trioblaid sam bith.

San sgìre seo, Axarquía, 's e na dearcanfionna am bàrr tradaiseanta, agus a' mhòr chuid dhiubh gan tiormachadh mar raisins. 'S e obair làimh as motha a th' ann, leis cho cas 's a tha na dromannan air a bheil na gàrraidhean fiona. Chì sinn daoine a-mach gach latha, a' glanadh na talmhainn mun cuairt air na croinn-fhiona agus gan sgudadh - geàrradh air ais fàs an uiridh gus am fàs iad as ùr am-bliadhna.

Air tàilleabh 's gur e obair làimh a th' ann chan eil fuaim einnsinn no sion na lùib, agus bidh daoine ag èigheach ri chèile eadar na h-iomairean agus a' bruidhinn ri daoine a bhios a' spaidsearachd air an rathad – cur-seachad a tha glè chumanta sa Spàinn. Mar sin, tha an

tir seo beò le daoine, mar a bhiodh na bailtean croitearachd beagan bhliadhnaichean air ais, nuair a bha bàrr air choireigin air gach croit.

Chan eil beathaichean ach gann san dùthaich seo ge-tà, tha muileid (leth-asal) aig mòran de na tuathanaich; tha na leathadan cho càs nach dèanadh carbad sam bith feum airson stuth a ghiùlan. 'S e gobhair na h-aon bheathaichean eile rim faicinn sa sgìre. Tha corra thuathanas baine ann far a bheil iad gam bleoghainn agus bidh tancair baine a' tighinn mun cuairt gach madainn a' togail a' bhainne.

Tha ceist aig cuid, am mair an suidheachadh seo. Chan eil a' phrìs air raisins ach 9 euros an cìlo don tuathanach, nach fàg buannachd ro mhòr nuair a ghabhas an saothair a-staigh gan tiormachadh 's gan sgioblachadh airson reic – obair anns a bhios teaghlaichean air fad an-sàs san fhoghar. An-diugh tha cothroman ann craobhan mango agus avocado a chur a bhios nas phrothaidiche. Feumaidh iad sin uchdanan a chruthachadh agus uisgeachadh ge-tà 's mar sin, barrachd cosgais sa chiad dol a-mach. An dèidh sin ge-tà chithear daoine fhathast a' cur chroinn-fhiona – feumaidh mi gu bheil earbsa aig cuid annata!

le Gabhan Mac a' Phearsain



Agriculture in Axarquía; a patchwork of vines, almond and olive trees with raisin drying racks in front of the houses

ON THE CROFT

Croft Woodlands Project – a view from the Western Isles

Croft Woodlands project officer Viv Halcrow explains how this new initiative is developing, and how it aims to help more crofters benefit from planting trees on croft land in the Western Isles.

I AM the second of the three project officers to be appointed to this far-sighted project, which aims to support crofting communities to create new woodlands and to manage existing woodlands.

Joining Willie Beattie, the project officer in Highland, I cover the Western Isles and am based in the Point and Sandwick Trust (PST) office just east of Stornoway. The third project officer will hopefully be in post by the end of April 2016, covering Argyll and Lochaber. This means that local support for tree-planting will be available to crofters throughout the crofting counties.



East Loch Tarbert

The project officers are employed by the Woodland Trust, which has teamed up with local partners PST in the Western Isles and Coigach-Assynt Living Landscape in northwest Highland, along with SCF and Forestry Commission

Scotland. The post in Argyll and Lochaber is generously supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund.

This local basis to the partnership will be really helpful in getting the project up and running. In the Western Isles, PST has established three large community wind turbines near Stornoway – for which they recently won a Scottish Green Energy Award – and all the proceeds are distributed to a wide range of local groups and charities which improve the welfare of local people. In their community consultation, establishing woodlands was high on local people's agenda, so PST is happy to generously support the Croft Woodland Project.

Trees and woodlands give multiple benefits when the right trees are planted in the right place – including shelter for livestock, crops and

...Continued on page 19

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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.



0343 770 5847



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Woodlandtrust.org.uk/plant-trees

ON THE CROFT

...Continued from page 18

buildings, sustainable sources of firewood, increased variety in the landscape, shelter and food for wild birds, local amenity and opportunities to involve schoolchildren in a range of educational projects.

As part of our support to crofters we offer a free site visit to discuss options, and follow this up with information including a site report, a map and an outline of budget and cash-flow, as well as help with funding and grant applications. The Scottish Rural Development Programme (SRDP) forestry grant scheme will be the main source of funding, but as an alternative Woodland Trust Scotland offers direct support for tree planting on a small scale through a programme called MOREwoods. This is very straightforward, is not competitive and doesn't involve land registration or a lengthy wait. There has been much interest on the mainland, keeping Willie very busy with site visits. Already in the Western Isles there have been a number of enquiries, from Barra to Lewis. I am expecting, and of course hoping for, a surge of interest in



Young woodland, Loch na Ciste

the Western Isles following the press launch in early March.

Some people may be sceptical about growing trees in such a windy climate, and it is true that there are many areas where the degree of exposure, or the depth of peat, makes tree-planting a waste of money and effort. But there are many examples of shelterbelts and larger schemes where carefully selected and planted trees are making a positive difference to the landscape and providing much-needed shelter

for livestock and for people.

The difference between success and failure often lies in thoughtful design of the planting and choosing appropriate species for the location, then good ground preparation, careful planting and follow-up management...and of course protection from browsing and fire. To help ensure success, we are working with SCF and others to develop and offer training days and workshops for anyone interested in practical aspects of woodland establishment, including ground preparation, planting, fertilising, fencing, etc, and long-term woodland management.

I hope you might be interested in finding out more about the Croft Woodland Project. I would be very pleased to hear from you and chat through any ideas you have.

For more information about creating or managing woodland on your croft, please email crofting@woodlandtrust.org.uk or call 0343 770 5847 (mainland enquiries) 0343 770 5856 (Western Isles enquiries).

Manage the wind

OF ALL the environmental factors that can impact on animal health, and therefore financial returns, wind cuts the deepest – more so than moisture, and more than temperature.

An elevated air speed, from a draught to a gale, will suck energy from an animal in proportion to that air speed. Outcomes range from a simple decrease in feed efficiency because some of the food energy is lost to the wind, through reduction in feed digestibility because food passes faster through the gut of an animal that is physiologically cold, to depressed immune function and subsequent losses to disease pathogens.

The losses in growth are known but never discussed, because we are accepting of the weather without thought of risk management. We complain about low prices at the mart, or the high cost of feed, or delayed payments from the department, but do not quantify the losses in our own backyard. In a classic experiment from SAC Aberdeen in the 1980s, three adjacent groups of suckler cows were exposed to a full winter housing period. Food intake and growth were measured, and the only difference between the three groups was the degree of protection from the climate.



One group had the paucity of a wire fence, the second a solid wall but no roof, and the third the extravagance of walls and a roof. At the end of six months, the difference between groups one and three, the extremes, was 42kg liveweight per cow. The impact of the wall-only group was almost halfway, with liveweight difference from the exposed group of +20kg liveweight. The wind had taken energy equivalent to 20kgs LW.

Losses to climate, or climatic energy demand, are miniscule on a daily basis and something we are used to (it's aye been) and never measure. But if protection from the wind can be worth 20kg liveweight per winter, 10 cows can lose 200kg per winter, which at a simple £2/kg is worth £400 per annum or £4,000 over 10 years.

Protection of our stock and our

businesses from the climate is well founded in the crofting community and has a good start in the widespread use of suitable genetics, of the thick-skinned, shaggy, long-haired varieties. Not the prime beasts of Thainstone Mart maybe, but those do not have to survive on common grazings for the winter.

There are predictable losses to the weather, however, and they can be managed better.

Smart cows and sheep on the hill will find shelter, but if they could be grazing/eating instead, feed intakes will fall. Animals feel the impact of the wind, rain and temperature more if their feed intakes drop. When the drive to feed becomes greater than the drive to stay away from the weather, feed efficiency cannot be good. Hence if an outdoor feed stance or building is not protected from the wind, the business will lose.

The impact on young stock is even greater because any immediate drop in growth rates and immune competence has a lifelong effect, with increased probability of health problems and, for heifer calves, prolonged period before first calving, reduced lactation yields and reduced longevity.

The solution is provision of shelter. Traditional methods use the lie of the land and shelter belts to protect stock, but as one of the least forested countries in Europe, the latter are not going to grow without planning ahead. Windbreaks are seldom used in livestock farming, but common in horticulture where they are specifically used, and have been for decades, to reduce the energy demand on plant growth.

Windbreaks for stock are best provided by a porous material such as Yorkshire board, and should extend past the area to be protected because of the predictable increase in wind speeds around the ends of any barrier. Modern plastics can be used as windbreak but need to be protected from cattle.

Manage the wind and save a different form of energy.

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

ON THE CROFT

Direct selling your beef

Joyce Wilkinson, chair of SCF's agriculture group, shares her experience of selling her own beef.

I **STARTED** having my own beasts butchered for selling in November 2011 and took possibly the last in November 2015.

After a long hard look at the costings, I realised this venture, far from being the ideal solution to low prices for native bullocks at the mart, was costing me money and would have to close. I would like to share the pros and cons here so that others embarking on or planning a local food project can decide for themselves where they could better my takings.

I killed a total of 32 Highland and Luining heifers and bullocks over the four years and the table below details a random sample, showing date, weight, age and cost/worth at start of the finishing period, cost and quantity of finishing feed, date and age killed and, most importantly, total kill-out weight, kill-out % and total amount grossed from the meat sold.

This shows that gross takings fluctuate and depend entirely on amount of product (sausages and burgers) as some animals will give more, which in turn costs more in processing. One animal, 23/05/14 highland heifer, was turned entirely into product, and this was profitable as she was cheap. The market and worth of the animals also varies considerably and abattoir costs have risen over the last few years.

I had a ready market for the beef at my caravan site shop and two local fairs. I always sold everything and had no postage or advertising costs. I sold the meat for an average of £17 per kg, quite dear compared to supermarkets, but the meat is a premium product.

Had I sold it for its true worth, my caravan site customers would have bought less of the cheaper cuts – mince, stew, sausages and burgers. Prime cuts are seen as being worth more due to their speciality food status; lesser cuts are fillers for hungry families – something to go on the barbeque or to take home. They would take roasts as a treat for Christmas or Easter.



I usually killed at 500 to 600kg live weight, as the slow growth of Highlanders meant I was in a hurry to get a return. At 500kg the steaks are small and there is less mince and stew. However people preferred this instead of big steaks and roasts, especially in the summer. Any killed at 800kg liveweight would give a good amount of meat weight-wise but steaks were much bigger and less popular.

I tried selling pies and people loved them. But no profit whatsoever, unless you sell a pie for over £12. Stew always sells, as the slow cuts on a highlander are so tasty, so no need to hide it in a pie to make a sale. You need £10 worth of stew to make a pie that you can sell for £12.

To sum up:

- The most profitable beast was a 700kg four-year-old highland bullock who had roamed wild and was hardly fed on the hill. He would have been worth £600 in the ring as he was a horned OTM and he was killed in November, fat from the summer and fully grown.
- Anything worth more than £1.50/kg in the ring costs money to turn into saleable beef, so unless there's a good reason you can't sell it, better to put it through the ring.
- Anything worth less than this can make a small profit between £200 and £400.
- If you had your own processing unit, making sausages and burgers, you could save over £200 a beast once set-up costs are taken off and you don't count your own time.
- If your turnover is high, one or more beast a week, then this is a living wage; but is one a month worth the hassle of catching, loading etc? If you sell more than two beasts

a month, you can make enough to put up with the hassle.

- To sell from the farm door you have to consider your time spent selling – could you be earning more elsewhere?
- If you can direct sell split carcasses to hotels looking to profit from the local label, this can yield a much healthier profit of £500+ a beast.
- You can't buy beautiful meat like this anywhere; in my house about 10% of each beast was for home use.
- You can't finish beasts without feeding, even off grass, it's false economy; and a trickle feed puts the best finish on.
- Slow-growing Highlanders can take forever to reach killing weight. If you have to buy in winter feed, it will eat away at any profit, so one winter only then they are off!
- If you have extensive winter foggage and can source cheap finishing feed, and your bullocks or heifers are worth less than £1.50/kg in the ring, you could make £300 to £400 extra selling them direct as beef.
- If you live a short distance from an abattoir and could make your own sausages/ burgers, then it would certainly pay.
- Skins and rugs could give extra profit – worth thinking about if you live near a tannery.

Why is it so hard to make a profit when everybody wants local sustainable food?

Supermarkets operate at tiny margins and farmers and crofters are not paid anything like what it really costs to produce a finished beast. If they were, fillet would be selling for £70/kg and mince for £20/kg. It is not realistic to expect people to pay twice what they see in the shops, though

if you were very clever and had amazing marketing skills you could develop a niche market such as Highland Wagyu.

Crofters working together could forge this kind of path, marketing and increasing turnover, sharing the costs and the spoils. Small country abattoirs are needed but they have to be able to make it pay, keeping people in a wage when it's quiet.

DATE ON HOLDING	WEIGHT & AGE	COST/ WORTH AT START	FEED COST	DATE & AGE KILLED	DW	KO %	GROSS TAKINGS	ABBATOIR COSTS	HAULAGE COSTS	PROFIT/LOSS
11/08/07	700kg/4yr HI BLK	£600	£130	2/11/11 4yr	340kg	48%	£2,450	£549	£150	£1,021
08/10/12	600kg/3yr HI HFR	£750	£150	05/08/13 3yr	296kg	50%	£1,800	£621	£150	£129
04/11/13	500kg/3yr HI BLK	£550	£150	05/05/14 3yr	242kg	48%	£1,275	£584	£150	-£159
30/11/13	650kg/4yr HI BLK	£1,300	£0	31/11/13 4yr	314kg	48%	£2,405	£605	£100	£400
03/06/13	520kg/4yr HI BLK	£900	£10	03/07/13 4yr	260kg	50%	£1,920	£538	£150	£322
23/05/14	500kg/5yr HI HFR	£500	£20	03/06/14 5yr	250kg	50%	£1,950	£686	£150	£594
07/07/14	500kg/2yr HI BLK	£800	£50	28/10/14 2yr	250kg	50%	£1,800	£621	£150	£179
07/07/14	500kg/2yr HI BLK	£800	£20	29/07/14	250kg	50%	£1,620	£549	£150	£101
12/11/15	570kg/20mths Luining BLK	£1,000	£0	15/11/15	300kg	53%	£1,860	£670	£150	£40

ON THE CROFT

New approach needed on designated areas



© Martin Benson – Trotternish Ridge

Gwyn Jones from EFNCP comments

RECENTLY I was fortunate enough to be invited to the final workshop of the Hutton Institute's TRANSGRASS project in Portree.

The work approached the complex inter-relationship of grazing and nature conservation on the Trotternish Ridge Special Area of Conservation (SAC) in north east Skye through an unusual mix of science and participative video-making.

Given that the site's habitats are still assessed as being largely in unfavourable condition, while crofting activity in the area is experiencing rapid change, I was, to be frank, rather sceptical before going. Could such a project reveal anything fresh and produce anything other than platitudes?

In the end, I was very glad I went. A striking aspect of the discussions and of some of the video material was the lack of diametrically opposite viewpoints between the various stakeholders. Far from being in a lamentable condition as a result of disastrous grazing management, the picture emerged of an SAC which has a lot of wonderful habitats, many areas of which are in good condition,

and that the habitats depend to a greater or lesser extent on grazing management by crofters. It was a picture which was far from negative; one of impotence rather than conflict – challenging, yes, but not without its opportunities.

But I also got a strong feeling that those opportunities would never be grasped if things carry on as they are, hampered by inadequate attention and inappropriate tools. The firm impression was that little communication happens between SNH and the crofters on anything other than casework. While this may reflect the pressure on SNH's time and resources and the need to give priority to attending to their statutory duties, it makes it difficult to see how things can change on the ground.

The main vehicle for delivering support for change is the RDP, but SNH feels unable to recommend or support specific changes without a better knowledge base – rather a serious stumbling block, giving the government's diminishing resources. Yet to do nothing is not to maintain a stable status quo, but to preside over certain but undirected change, some of which is likely to be irreversible in practice.

The tools available at present just make the job harder; poorly-communicated, top-down, prescriptive, fire-and-forget

approaches to making land management more sustainable have just not worked on the Trotternish Ridge SAC.

Activity and community participation are dropping; the site's habitats remain in unfavourable conservation status; and levels of mutual understanding are low. And no one seems to be willing to cut the Gordian knot and do something substantive about it.

The human potential of the area seems to be underplayed, despite the importance of crofting to the area's culture. 90% of the agriculturally-active inhabitants have a share in common grazings. In fact 34.5% of all households in Staffin parish contain crofters with a share in common grazings – the highest proportion anywhere in Scotland. But crofters' management, so central to the way the Trotternish Ridge habitats appear today, is undervalued in practice.

The almost 12,000 ha of common grazings in Staffin parish alone, with a total of 458 shareholdings, are divided into 24 individual common grazings units. But the opportunities for coordinated collaborative action offered by the uniquely-Scottish system of self-governance which is the grazing committee are ignored. And crofters have little capacity and no obvious route by which to take

control of their destinies.

A new approach is clearly needed – one that can feed into the next RDP. One which creates informed, motivated, crofters, which encourages them to use their experience and knowledge, which values what is good about common grazings in Trotternish and which encourages engagement so that crofters themselves can decide how to make it even better.

In Ireland, such ways of doing things have been developed. As Angus McHattie reported in the last *Crofter*, locally-developed, results-based approaches can empower local communities, engage land managers and deliver tangible benefits not only to the local economy and to habitats of European importance, but to the morale and pride of rural communities. It is a sad reflection on our policy traditions and expectations – SCF's included – that this sounds impossibly Utopian.

gwyn@efncp.org

Comment

Is it impossibly Utopian? The will is there but what holds SCF back is limited resources. This needs to be approached as a partnership to make it happen: EFNCP and SCF, plus: SNH? RSPB? SAC?

Some SCF contacts across our area

Alasdair MacMhaoirn, 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

ON THE CROFT

Mastitis in sheep

MASTITIS IS a significant ewe health problem for dairy and meat sheep farmers world-wide.

In UK lowland flocks, acute mastitis affects between 4-5% of ewes each year and in hill flocks it affects 1-2% of ewes. Chronic mastitis is estimated to affect between 1-15%. Inflammation of the udder, also known as mastitis, reduces milk production and threatens lamb and ewe survival.

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

In the case of bacterial mastitis, the worst offender is *Mannheimia haemolytica* (formerly known as *Pasteurella haemolytica*) which causes acute mastitis, resulting in blue and cold udders, often leading to the immediate death of the animal or to sloughing off of the udder, with secondary infection and delayed death as a consequence. For those animals, treatment usually comes too late and euthanasia may be the most humane way to deal with cases.

Staphylococcus aureus may occasionally

cause blue udder but more commonly is the cause of chronic mastitis, leading to localised abscesses or lumps in the udder, or shrinkage and hardening of an udder half. As both bacteria, and some others, are common in the mouths, noses and skin of healthy animals, including lambs, mastitis is often a result of teat damage.

Teat damage can occur in severe weather conditions or when there is a lack of milk production, resulting in excessive sucking by hungry lambs. Thus, the prevention of mastitis may need to happen not via the animals' udders, but via their stomachs. Adequate nutrition, particularly adequate protein supply in the last 10 weeks before lambing, helps to ensure adequate milk production, providing protection for lambs and ewes alike.

Diagnostics: The culture of bacteria from aseptically collected milk samples is still the preferred way to identify mastitis-causing organisms in sheep, eg for screening of purchased animals and to choose appropriate antibiotic treatment regimens.

Vaccines: A new product on the cattle market, a mastitis vaccine, has not been evaluated in sheep. Its effect in cattle is, in large part, due to prevention of damage from coliform mastitis, a type of mastitis that is relatively rare in sheep so it is not immediately obvious whether this product could be of benefit in sheep. Sadly, the vaccines that protect sheep against pneumonia due to *Mannheimia* do not provide protection against mastitis either.



Healthy udder



Lumps due to chronic mastitis

*Professor Ruth Zadoks,
Moredun Research Institute*

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.

MASTITIS PREVENTION STRATEGIES

1. Cull all ewes chronically affected by mastitis

Use records or ear tags to mark ewes affected by mastitis and cull.

Check all ewes' udders for mastitis at weaning and at pre-tupping check.

2. Ewe nutrition

Ensure good ewe nutrition and body condition score pre and post lambing to maintain good milk supplies.

If mastitis is a problem in your flock, review your nutrition plan with your vet or nutritionist well in advance of lambing.

3. Prevent teat damage

Do not expect ewes to rear triplets. Consider creep feeding lambs from three to four weeks of age.

If orf is present on your croft devise a control programme and consider vaccination for ewes and lambs.

Avoid chilling of the udder post lambing turnout by:

- Providing shelter
- Planning winter shearing so ewes are turned out with good fleece length
- Don't dock tails too short
- Avoid excessive crutching

4. Hygiene

Ensure housing and bedding conditions are clean and dry at lambing time.

5. Weaning policy

Remove both lambs from the ewe at same time. Keep ewes on a reduced diet.

Keep ewes on pastures as far away as possible from lambs. Ewes should always have access to water.

6. Biosecurity

As part of your flock biosecurity policy, consider the risk of buying in sheep affected by Maedi Visna or other mastitis-causing organisms.



Ian Blackford MP

**Member of Parliament for
Ross, Skye & Lochaber**

Future Surgery dates will be advertised in the local press

Tel: 01349 866397

Email: ian.blackford.mp@parliament.uk

Twitter: @BlackfordSNPMP

Facebook: facebook.com/IanBlackford.SNP

Web: <http://ianblackford.com>

29 High Street

Dingwall

IV15 9RU



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rooted in our communities

Membership benefits

If you are an SCF member, you get a discount off your croft insurance from NFU Mutual Insurance. Get in touch with your local agent for a quotation.

www.nfumutual.co.uk

SCF in Lithuania

FIONA MANDEVILLE and Yvonne White represented SCF at a local food policy event in the Lithuanian city of Panevėžio in December. The visit was a closing event of the EU-funded Hungry for Rights project in which SCF has been a partner.

The Baltic Environmental Forum, Lithuanian host and partner, organised a full two-day programme. The first day started with a workshop on the theme of young farmers and the challenges to keep young people in the countryside. SCF and the representatives of the Lithuanian Young Farmers Union contributed to the inventory of challenges with first-hand experience.

One young Lithuanian farmer had seen all his friends migrate to Sweden or the UK for work. Monthly young farmers' circles not only provided an agricultural knowledge exchange but also filled a social gap for him.

In comparison, Scotland seemed to have better integration of agricultural training into

school education, with Crofting Connections, rural skills courses and the crofting courses in secondary schools such as Plockton High School; plus, of course, SCF's popular crofter-led practical training programme.

The afternoon was spent visiting an organic fruit farm. The farming family showed the visitors how they dried and processed their produce – organic apple juice, apple cheese, dried berries and carrots, jams and preserves. Hot apple juice and buckthorn tea were a warming relief after a chilly walk around the fields to see where asparagus and herbs were also grown.

The group saw a clear track of wolf prints down the side of one long field, showing that the predator had no inhibition about walking through open ground in full view of a number of houses. Alongside were deer prints, presumably made on a different occasion.

The family organised a superb evening meal featuring local produce made by themselves and

local artisan bread and cheese-makers. Buckwheat porridge with duck was a traditional and popular favourite, as was the local rye bread. The Italian visitors brought Italian treats and the Scots brought whisky. After the Italians inevitably burst into song, Fiona obliged with the Skye boat song and a Gaelic carol. The Lithuanians followed with carols in their language.

Monday brought together official representatives from local authorities, the mayor of the region and an MEP from Lithuania. A senior staff member from Milan's local authority had come over to support the case for local food policy, speaking about the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact, been signed by 116 cities comprising 400 million citizens. Working on food waste is one of the issues in the pact.

The young farmer from the Lithuanian Young Farmers Union formally presented the results of the joint discussion of the previous day. Among these were lack of activities in rural areas; lack of support for new

farmers; lack of affordable housing; creating new ways to make land available; tax reforms and budget incentives to create a better balance between traditional agriculture and public goods. The resolution was presented to the Lithuanian MEP for further discussion with the agricultural committee at the European Parliament.

Fiona summarised the trip: "We found much common ground between Scotland, Italy and Lithuania. Each country's representatives identified the need to encourage and help young people remain in rural areas, to bring new life and to preserve our heritage. The event focused on the value of small-scale farming and empowering our young folk; and crofting was seen as a good example. This was also the theme of our Future of Crofting conference in Inverness. It was heartening to find this common bond across different European countries and shows how we can learn from each other for a better small-scale farming future."



Traditional loom



EU funds are welcome



Wolf prints



Meeting house - straw bale construction with thatched roof



Fiona and Yvonne



Strawberry fields forever, in the last of the winter sun



The hotel was a former flour mill

TRAINING

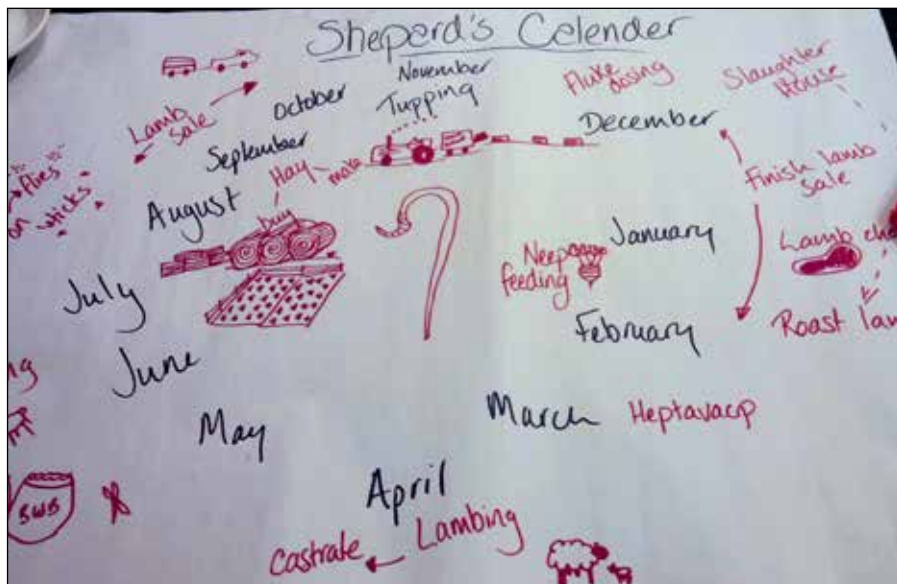
Crofting Skills Training

IT IS with heavy heart that Tina, Lucy and Donna say goodbye to their little office in the Mill Street Industrial Estate in Ullapool as the Crofting Skills Training Programme came to an end in February.

During this time 1873 people attended training in various locations from the Butt to Barra, Mull to Shetland and beyond. Training was also facilitated in one of the new crofting areas, Moray. Inspirational local course director Lynne Laing put on an entry level course, sheepdog days, polytunnel training and drystone walling to name a few. Lynne was the first to offer crofting training in Moray since it officially became a crofting area following the 2010 Act and we very much hope she will be able to deliver more if another training project comes on line.

Local course directors, many of whom were crofters and some SCF directors, were the backbone of delivery and we cannot thank them enough. Some even went beyond the call of duty. One, who shall not be named, struggled to get a dead lamb for a lambing course simulator back in 2015. In sheer desperation he created what is now known as "Frankenlamb" after he found one on his own croft that had, alas, succumbed to crows. With a spruce up and some work with veterinary sutures he managed to produce a perfect practice lamb for obstetric procedure on the course the next day.

One of the most rewarding outcomes of the project was to see folks who had progressed



Mind map at entry level crofting weekend



Learning the art of drystone walling

SCF training stats

1873 people trained

2124 training days

85 different subjects

150 tutors

24 local course directors

through various courses and been able to achieve their ambition to work a croft and improve profit margins through efficiency measures and increasing production. This was echoed by local course directors when we met in Inverness for the training programme evaluation day at the end of the programme.

SCF training team and HQ have been working together with the directors and training panel to develop a business plan for a new and different training project that focuses on vocational skills and innovation in a crofting context. As I write, the SCF Skills Boost (2016 – 2019) project has been finalised and funding applications to various agencies have been submitted, some of which have already been successful.

Watch this space for more training opportunities coming with the SCF Skills Boost in 2016.



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01470 532729.

MEMBERS PAGE

We help where we can

SCF IS always happy to offer guidance to members. Our panel of casework volunteers consists of fellow crofters with long and wide-ranging experience. Quite often an exchange of emails or a phone call can go a long way towards resolving a problem or at least suggesting a route to follow.

Members with legal issues will be referred to SCF's legal help line, which offers a short phone discussion with an accredited crofting lawyer free of charge. For down-to-earth, practical info for those new to crofting or starting a new enterprise, SCF's panel of mentors is there to help.

Here are two examples of the kind of casework we have undertaken recently.

Landlord claims share of income from purposeful use

A member had been engaged in a diversified purposeful use of part of his croft for a number of years. The purposeful use had the approval of the planning authority and the landlord. However, the landlord demanded a twenty percent share of the income from this part of the crofter's business.



Please note: This is not the business referred to!

Our member then notified the landlord of his intention to purchase the croft, whereupon the landlord said he would go to the Land Court for a rent review which would determine the purchase price for the croft.

Our suggestion to the member was that he could either (a) pursue the purchase of the croft in which case the Land Court would fix a rent based only on agricultural value which would determine the purchase price; (b) apply to the Crofting Commission under the 2010 Act for consent to the

purposeful use. If this consent was granted it would supersede any previous agreement with the landlord; or (c) negotiate terms with the landlord that would be acceptable to both parties.

The point here is that negotiation is almost always the preferable option where possible.

Change to terms and conditions of an agri-environment scheme

A member had taken up the land managers' option for rush pasture management. This was a five-year commitment.

Three years into the scheme our member had a land inspection and was informed that he had been over-claiming and would have to repay a substantial sum of money. On querying this he was told that the rules of the scheme had been redefined, with the effect of changing the areas eligible.

We drafted a letter of appeal for our member, on the grounds that the rules of the scheme had been changed and were being applied retrospectively; and that, whilst the area of rush cover at the time of the inspection could clearly be established, there was bound to have been a greater spread and density of rushes at the start of the scheme. It was, after all, an objective of the scheme to reduce the density of rushes in the managed areas. On both grounds our member had been treated unfairly.

SGRPID officers involved accepted our argument, and waived the demand for repayment.

To take advantage of SCF's casework or mentoring services, or the legal helpline, contact head office – details on the back page.

Representing crofters



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ACCORDING TO our survey of members, representation (lobbying, advocacy) is the top function of the SCF.

This is not surprising, as we were set up in 1985 as a collective voice specifically to represent the interests of crofters in government policies which affect crofters. The SCF is still the only organisation dedicated to the representation of crofters and the promotion of crofting in Holyrood, Westminster and Brussels.

We take various approaches:

- cross-party group on crofting – SCF is secretariat to this parliamentary group in which we raise matters to MSPs and to ministers;
- evidence to parliamentary committees on issues affecting crofting;
- petitioning – eg goose control petition to

Scottish Parliament;

- direct approach to individual MSPs, MPs, MEPs and ministers;
- media – taking the voice of crofters to papers, radio, TV, social media.
- We also have membership and contribute to other advocacy networks such as Nourish Scotland, the Scottish Food Coalition, UK Food Group, European Coordination for Via Campesina, and the European Forum for Nature Conservation and Pastoralism.
- Examples of issues on which SCF lobbying has made a difference:
- Croft House Grant Scheme – was to be closed in 2004 but SCF pressure kept it open. It has recently been reviewed and upgraded.
- Crofting Agriculture Grant Scheme – still a

crofting-only support scheme. It was nearly lost in the last CAP reforms under pressure of NFUS to open it up to farmers.

- The bull scheme – was to be closed in 2008 but SCF pressure caused a government U-turn.
- As a direct response to SCF lobbying, home kill is legal now and on-farm burial allowed in certain parishes.
- At the moment there are a large number of issues needing crofter representation; for example:
- CAP – Region 3 (common grazings) get £7/ha compared to R1 (arable) getting £270/ha.
- Areas of Natural Constraint (ANC) – successor to LFASS. It is VITAL to get money from the south and east to the north and west, but NFUS want the same again – ie the higher payment going to better land.
- Crofting law – deal with The sump and create new law.
- Support for young crofters: eg creation of new crofts as well as getting existing crofts back into use; plus a meaningful grant and loan scheme for croft housing.
- Mapping of crofts – simplify through community approach, reduce cost.
- Control of wild geese and compensation for sea eagle predation.

Crofters need a voice. In a current Scottish Government consultation on the Future of Scottish Agriculture, crofting is only mentioned in one of the nine outcomes! In order to strengthen our voice we need more members and we need to hear from YOU.

MEMBERS PAGE



NOTICE OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

NAME OF COMPANY: Scottish Crofting Federation
COMPANY No: SC 218658
REGISTERED OFFICE: Unit 26 Kyle Industrial Estate, Kyle of Lochalsh, IV40 8AX

NOTICE is hereby given that the **Annual General Meeting** of the Scottish Crofting Federation will be held Spectrum Centre, 1 Margaret Street, Inverness on Friday, **10th June 2016 at 2.00pm** to consider, and if thought fit, to pass the following resolutions:

1. To receive company's accounts and the report of the directors and auditors for the year ended 30th November 2015. A summary of the accounts will be available at the meeting and the full or summary accounts will be provided prior to the meeting or on request to the registered office.
2. To elect persons proposed as directors under Article 10 et seq; and ratify, or otherwise, the appointment of co-opted director, namely: Ms Sarah Jane MacLean
3. To re-elect, or otherwise, for a further term of three years SCF director Finlay Matheson, whose term as director ends as of this date.
4. To appoint accountants/auditors proposed by the directors, or, re-appoint Ritsons Chartered Accountants, of 27 Huntly Street, Inverness IV3 5PR, as accountants/auditors and to authorise the directors to fix their remuneration.
5. To receive and resolve other motions tabled for consideration at the meeting (see Annex 'A' enclosed).

By order of the board of directors

Date of notice:
26th February 2016

Company secretary: John Bannister

Local groups

THE SCOTTISH Crofters Union, and now the Scottish Crofting Federation, had a network of branches across the crofting areas. Each branch had a chair, a secretary and a treasurer.

These days branches, or local groups, often prefer a less formal structure. But it is important that local groups have a contact or representative. If you are not sure who the SCF contact is in your area, or better still, if you'd like to play a vital role in SCF by being a local contact, please contact us.

Being a local representative for SCF keeps you in touch with our activities and what is going on in crofting.

To be a democratic organisation, and to have the best political clout, we need local input from individual members and local groups. We would be very pleased to see more local folk taking on a role in our organisation. And if you are keen, you can progress to becoming an SCF council member or a board director. The council meets with the SCF board in an advisory capacity twice a year.

Local groups can meet as often as they like, depending on local issues and initiatives. There is nothing more fulfilling than representing your fellow crofters in this way, and contributing to the important work that we do. We'll be delighted to have your input.

If you'd like to know more, please get in touch with chief executive patrick@crofting.org, or chair fiona@crofting.org, or company secretary johnbannister@crofting.org.

Recent local meetings in the Uists and Barra were very well attended and lively. Issues discussed and noted for action included: late payments; proposed closure of the Stornoway abattoir; wild geese; impact of Lochboisdale ferry changes on livestock transport; proposed demolition of the Barra community shop; croft house grant and loan and community mapping.

Why your vote is so important

QUITE APART from the Scottish parliamentary elections in May and that EU referendum in June, we ask you, as a member, to attend and vote at the SCF's AGM. If this is not possible, please send in your proxy form to nominate someone to vote in your stead (proxy form with a FREE POST address enclosed).

This may sound trifling and dreary when other democratic issues take so much time. You may think "Other members will do this, why should I bother?" resulting in a relatively small number of proxies being received. A proxy vote is not simply a tiresome procedure, but important

and necessary to comply with the Federation's constitution, which requires a given number of members to be present in person; or a proxy for such a member.

SCF likes to engage with its members and our AGM is no exception. We try to hold meetings at different venues each year to make it easier for folk to attend. But time and distance may not be practical for you – so please nominate a proxy who you know will be attending. Your proxy can be anyone you name. It can be another member, or a board member, who will vote as you wish, on all or some resolutions, or none, or according to their own discretion.

I hope I have been able to persuade you to attend the AGM, or at least to send in your proxy nomination form. We all look forward to seeing you there, but if that's not possible please send a proxy.

Send your proxy nomination:
by email to: hq@crofting.org or
by FREEPOST to:
Scottish Crofting Federation
FREEPOST RRAG-HGBK-XERY
Kyle IV40 8AX

John Bannister, company secretary

Gift aid

GIFT AID allows charities to claim the basic rate tax on every pound donated. As a registered charity SCF is able to claim Gift Aid on your membership

subscription. This means for an individual membership we can claim an additional £15.75 from HMRC on your subscription, at no extra cost to you – an important revenue boost.

Am I eligible to sign up for Gift Aid?
If you are a UK tax payer, yes. Even if you are not employed, you are still eligible if you pay tax on any of the following:

personal or occupational pension
stocks and shares
bank and building society savings accounts
rental income

Just sign your name and post the form to Scottish Crofting Federation Freepost RRAG-HGBK-XERY, Kyle, IV40 8AX

Gift Aid Declaration

I agree to the SCF claiming tax under the Gift Aid scheme on all my donations and subscriptions until I advise otherwise. I confirm that I am paying an amount of UK income and/or capital gains tax that at least equals the amount that the charity will reclaim in each tax year (currently 25p for every £1 that I give).

Name:..... Membership No:..... Date:.....

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BEM honours prominent crofters

FORMER SCF chair Neil Macleod from Stornoway was recently awarded the British Empire Medal for services to crofting and the community of the Western Isles.

Neil has been a Crofting Commission assessor for the South Lochs area for almost 30 years, chair of Lochs agricultural show, a director of Lewis Crofters Ltd, a founder member and first chair of Lewis and Harris Sheep Producer's Association and a founder member of a steering group set up to redeem Lewis and Harris Auction Mart from the liquidators after the collapse of Heather Isle Meats. He was a member of three Quality Meat Scotland committees: the technical advisory council, the standards setting boards and the board of the Scottish sheep industry.

Neil was an engineer to trade and was a partner in Hebridean Engineering Ltd for 38 years. Since retiring in 2006, he trained as a Harris tweed weaver. He continues to weave and has served as chair of the Harris Tweed Weaver's Association. He was a member on the LEADER group which was instrumental in leveraging many thousands of pounds of European investment into the local economy.

In his early years, running was a favourite pastime of Neil's and he was a founder member and first chair of the Stornoway Running and Athletics Club and is a qualified sports coach.

Neil has been at the forefront of initiatives which encourages young crofters to enter the industry and was a founder member of the Lewis and Harris Rural Training Group.

Typical of Neil's attachment to his roots, he arranged for the BEM award ceremony to be held in the Ravenspoint Visitors Centre in Kershader, where many years ago he first went to primary school. When the school was shut a number of years ago, Neil was invited to chair Co Chomunn na Pairc, which developed the old school into the fine establishment it is today with a hostel, café, visitors centre and museum.

Of course, behind every great man there is a great woman, and tribute was paid to the contribution and support of Neil's wife, Anne-Chris.

Neil had a hard wrench earlier this year when he dispersed his beloved pedigree North Country Cheviot sheep flock. Typical of Neil, he sold to a new entrant. His flock, with the "Torravig" prefix, was well known on the island and beyond, and was recognised as one of the best, having won supreme slot at many shows locally, and even winning a first prize ticket at the Royal Highland Show with a home-bred ram in 2003, believed to be the only first prize ticket ever won by a Lewis flock.

His enthusiasm, effort and tenacity on behalf of crofters and the crofting communities is almost legendary.



SKYE CROFTER Calina Macdonald from Eynort on Skye was awarded the British Empire medal in the New Year's Honours list for services to business and horticulture.

Calina is well known in crofting circles for her hard work on horticulture and crofting. She and her husband Donald, a former SCF director, run a successful business selling vegetables grown on their croft.

Calina's Conserves, jams and preserves produced in her own

kitchen from their produce, are marketed widely across the island in shops and farmers' markets. She has been a key person in the development of local produce sales and in promoting the wide range of quality foodstuffs made on Skye and sold via a website. She was instrumental in the creation of the Skye horticulture group some years ago.

Calina became a "TV personality" during a series in Gaelic about horticulture in the Highlands and Islands.

Calina had an important role in the early years of the SCU's training programme, working for SCF with LANTRA to produce a competencies manual. She also worked on the advertising for *The Crofter* for some time.

Originally a crofting family in Kilmuir on Skye, Calina said she hoped the award would encourage people to consider small-scale agriculture as a viable and worthwhile way of life. "I don't feel I deserve it," she commented with typical modesty, "but I accept it on behalf of all the other people who have worked with me, and worked just as hard as I have, over the years."



Neil Macleod receiving his BEM from Alexander Matheson OBE, Her Majesty's Lord Lieutenant in the Western Isles


Scottish Crofting Federation
rooted in our communities


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

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

SCF legal helpline: 01599 230 300

visit www.crofting.org for full contact details

Company Number SC 218658 Charity Number SC 031919

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