

Crofting faces existential threats



© Martin Benson – Staffin Bay

IT IS NO exaggeration to say that there has never been a time when the future of crofting has been so vulnerable.

The number and gravity of threats make a volatile combination. The last year saw momentous and unexpected changes take place that shift the ground we stand on.

Let us focus on the two most important changes – Brexit and crofting law.

Post-Brexit agriculture

It is unknown what agricultural support system will be put in place to replace the CAP,

but one thing certain is that the budget will be reduced – by how much will depend on how the renationalised budget is divided and by whom.

It seems the UK Government is reneging on promises made in the EU referendum campaign of more powers from Brussels being devolved. Furthermore, Ruth Davidson, leader of the Scottish Tory party, has passed on the message that Westminster may deny Scotland power to decide on the financial support given to farmers and crofters, despite agriculture being currently

...Continued on page 3

STOP PRESS
Fergus Ewing, minister for crofting, having heard crofters' concerns at our annual gathering in Applecross, requests a further meeting with SCF members soon to discuss the Scottish referendum.

The SCF gathering in Applecross focuses on crofting's place in Europe.
See pages 14 to 17 for full coverage.

Crofting Commission governance

THE GOVERNANCE review of the Crofting Commission, instigated by Scottish Government at the request of the Scottish Crofting Federation, has exposed many weaknesses in basic operating procedures and in how the organisation copes with extraordinary individual behaviours.

The review has made it clear that a robust commissioner appraisal process is required, to help identify and deliver ongoing training and skills development. We are particularly keen to see a rationalisation of the roles of

commissioners, establishing when they should be delegating to the executive staff or referring to other bodies that have the required expertise.

Commissioners should have a strategic and advisory capacity only. It is clear that they got too involved with executive procedures that they did not have the competence or remit for.

The review team recognised the huge damage done to the reputation of the Commission by the in-fighting, and particularly that the vote of no confidence in the convener did not achieve

a tangible result – his removal. Frustratingly, the review did not suggest how this will be resolved, though the government's recent exoneration of any wrong-doing in the events that led up to the convener crisis opens up options.

The list of areas for improvement is long. Minister for crofting Fergus Ewing has instructed that an action plan to address them be put in place as a matter of urgency. This will, we hope, sort out some of the fundamental issues that allowed the near collapse of this significant organisation.

We are strongly of the opinion that the purpose and role of commissioners needs to be appraised and a clear boundary set between their overseeing strategy and the staff's executive function. This seems critical to the health of the Crofting Commission.

The reappointment of David Campbell and the appointment of James Scott and Malcolm Mathieson as commissioners of the Crofting Commission is welcomed. At the time of writing the elections of commissioners has not taken place but we welcome those who get the posts.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- Support for crofting agriculture
- SCF gathering, Applecross
- Croft House Grant Scheme

- Brexit
- common grazings
- on the croft

- crofting connections
- social crofting
- ...and lots more

Message from the chair...

Russell Smith



WELCOME TO the latest edition of *The Crofter* and my first message as your new chair.

I have to start by thanking Fiona for her excellent work as chair – and continuing excellent work as editor of this magazine. I will try to live up to the examples set by all my predecessors in leading our organisation.

Our new strapline – **SCF is the only organisation solely dedicated to campaigning for crofters and fighting for the future of crofting** – emphasises what we do and what we will continue to

do. And there are many issues to campaign on just now.

At the time of writing, the Crofting Commission elections are under way and we hope for a new board that will work together for the good of crofting. The Scott-Moncrieff report into the Commission has sound recommendations and we expect the Commission to have the time and resources to implement them.

In my view, Brexit is the main threat facing crofting just now. The fall in the value of the pound gave a boost to livestock prices last year but that hasn't been maintained.

We face the prospect of tariffs

cutting into our export market in the EU, whilst cheap lamb from New Zealand or beef from the US on the back of free trade deals eats into our home market.

Then we have the possibility (probability?) of a reduction in subsidies from a UK Government which has so far not shown any interest in upland farming in Scotland or indeed in Wales, Northern Ireland or the north of England. SCF is at one with NFUS on arguing against a hard Brexit.

Already we seem to be seeing a delay in the introduction of the new Areas of Natural Constraint system

which is designed to replace LFASS and which should be better for crofters by moving money “up the hill”. If LFASS is rolled on for another year then there will be an automatic cut of 20% for everybody – though the money could be recycled through other schemes.

There is the opportunity for bringing in a new support scheme designed in Scotland for the benefit of Scotland, but that will have to operate under international trade rules – so still no headage payments, we are told. The fight then will be to get a scheme which helps small producers in remote areas and does not see the limited pot of money swallowed up by big commercial farmers in the south and east.

At least we have open lines of communication to Scottish Government ministers and we welcomed both Fergus Ewing and Mike Russell to our gathering in Applecross.

Plenty to be campaigning for crofters and fighting for the future of crofting there, before we even start to think about the changes to crofting law which are under consideration at this time.

But if we don't get the economics right, then we don't get young people coming into crofting and no amount of regulation will keep people in the crofting counties.

So, with your help, we will keep on campaigning.

Support for crofting agriculture

2016 WAS taken up, to a larger extent than would have been hoped for, with the issues at the Crofting Commission.

Whilst this was justified by it being a matter of great concern to crofters, there are other important things going on that need crofters' attention. With Brexit looming it is unclear how support to agriculture will pan out, but we are assured that we will have the equivalent of the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) basic payments in place until 2020. To continue to trade with Europe, we assume that Scotland will need to be CAP compliant, so CAP is still very relevant and will continue to be.

There was a lot of struggling to get a good deal for crofters in the negotiations leading up to the current phase of the CAP. Much to SCF's chagrin, Scottish Government opted to go with a suggestion put forward by NFUS to have three payment regions.

Croft land, which is mostly Region 2 and Region 3 rough grazing, was awarded €51 per hectare and €14 per hectare respectively, against

€141 per hectare for the Region 1 better-quality agricultural land. The embarrassingly small amount for R3 was to be topped up with a sheep headage payment. However, the sheep scheme was not capped so big sheep farms did very well out of it and crofters, on the whole, did not.

The incomprehensible intention is that by 2019 R2 will have nearly halved to €27 and R3 will have dwindled to a mere €9 per hectare, whilst farmers on the R1 better-quality land will enjoy a payment rise to €161. Scottish Government claims that “the Basic Payment Scheme acts as a safety net for farmers and crofters”. So even though farmers on high-quality land would, one would suppose, have a better chance of earning a living, it is deemed that they need a bigger safety net paid for by the public purse.

A crucial element of CAP for much of Scotland, but especially for the crofting areas, is the Less Favoured Areas Support Scheme (LFASS). How it is misused in Scotland has been criticised by many, including the Committee of Inquiry on Crofting, the Royal Society of Edinburgh and the

European Commission. Essentially the scheme has been worked to pay farmers on better land a higher rate per hectare, again. This was not the intention of the scheme, according to European Commission officials.

In the CAP rules, LFASS is to be replaced by Areas of Natural Constraint (ANC) by 2019. This lays out, in a far more abuse-proof way, how public money can be used to prevent land abandonment in the areas of natural constraint. Already we have seen the industry lobby manage to get the voluntary introduction of ANC any time after 2015 moved to the latest compulsory introduction in 2019, and we are now hearing rumblings from Scottish Government that it may not be introduced even then.

SCF is lobbying on behalf of crofters to have ANC in place; or a firm assurance that the replacement to LFASS will be based on ANC.

With such low basic payments, ANC is the big hope for the survival of crofting agriculture. This is a crucial issue, something we must not be distracted from.

Does the Croft House Grant Scheme work?

THERE HAS BEEN a commotion in the media concerning the Croft House Grant Scheme (CHGS).

It is quite understandable that people are getting very concerned when they see applications from young folk being turned down. But there is also misinformation being bandied about and it is important that we have clear facts.

It is not for us to defend the way the scheme is administered, though there is no evidence that it is not run well and according to the rules of the scheme. But it is being claimed that the scheme itself does not work and, whilst this needs to be investigated, it is fair to say that the scheme is vastly improved.

To put it in context; SCF campaigned for years to have the scheme reviewed, since CHGS replaced the widely-praised Croft Building Grant and Loan Scheme in 2004. CHGS was roundly criticised for being inaccessible to those that needed it, for favouring large and expensive builds and for the rates dwindling to an ineffective level. And perhaps most damaging was the loan element of the scheme being abolished.

In response to the SCF lobby, Scottish Government consulted and a refurbished scheme, which took on many of SCF's recommendations, was introduced in April 2016. The maximum level of grant was increased from £22,000 to £38,000 and the scheme was redesigned to target support, to allow for increased interest and to make sure that those who really need assistance, especially young crofters, get it.

That is why an elaborate scoring system was introduced with a series of criteria upon which points can be gained or lost. You gain more points for being more active on the croft, or for not being adequately housed already, or for being on a low

income. You can lose points for having not worked the croft for years, for having other property to sell or for having a net income above £44,000 (about £64,000 gross). An application may therefore be refused as it drops below the points threshold, but it can be resubmitted.

There are also reasons for applications being refused as being ineligible. For example the

public assistance?

Ineligibles also include those applications that have been refused due to error – for example not providing sufficient information – but can be re-submitted when corrections have been made.

Since the revamped scheme's introduction in April 2016, 84 applications have been received and of those 42 have been approved:

35 new houses and 7 house improvements. Refusals consist of 27 ineligible applications and 15 applications scoring below the points threshold. On the surface it is indeed alarming that half of applications to the scheme are being refused, but is this because the scheme isn't working properly – or because it is working well?

If, however, the budget is not being spent and yet applications are being turned down, there is a need for a review of the scheme and the allocation of points. It is not clear at this stage whether the budget for the year will be used up, but we are assured that the scheme is under constant review.

The people who really need the help, the young and those on the typical low, irregular and seasonal incomes of the crofting areas cannot access decent housing and are usually unable to secure a commercial mortgage. The key to helping them would be reinstating the housing loan. We have been given positive signals by the Scottish Government that this will happen and SCF will continue to campaign to ensure that it does.

Finally, if there are specific cases that seem to have been refused unfairly, there is an appeals

process and SCF is happy to advocate on behalf of its members. We have on many occasions successfully intervened when members were unreasonably refused housing assistance under the old scheme and will do so where necessary under the current scheme.



"The people who really need the help... cannot access decent housing and are usually unable to secure a commercial mortgage."

applicant is not a crofter, s/he doesn't live on or near the croft, or the house plan is too big. The rules offer generous house sizes and it was felt that under the old scheme people who really didn't need them were benefitting from grants. Does someone financing a £200,000+ build need

Crofting faces existential threats

...Continued from page 1

devolved. Livestock, especially hill farming and Less Favoured Areas, are not very important to England, so what would crofting mean to Westminster?

Markets for our produce are unclear. A recent Quality Meat Scotland report shows how vulnerable our beef exports will be. Imports of lamb from countries such as New Zealand could take out our sheep production. The introduction of support to Areas of Natural Constraint, which could be very beneficial to crofting, is being put on hold, the uncertainties of Brexit being cited.

Crofting law

The inadequacy of the 2010 Crofting Act has led to further legislation reform being implemented. This could be positive if it were

simply about amending the law to make it fit for purpose, but the very basis of the law is being reviewed.

Some want crofting legislation abolished completely and some want to start again, a clean sheet approach. It may sound attractive on the face of it but clean sheet means just that – starting with nothing. The basis of crofting law is the protection of crofters and the land, so starting with nothing leaves crofting extremely vulnerable. Whether the same degree of protection was put into law again would be a matter of debate. We cannot risk that.

The last year has cast scrutiny on the ability of the Crofting Commission. Whether a centralised body is the best way is questioned and, if so, does it have the resources to

regulate crofting effectively? This is perhaps the most fundamental of questions – does the Scottish Government really support a regulated system or is it setting it up to fail?

What can we do?

The SCF is the only organisation solely dedicated to campaigning for crofters and fighting for the future of crofting. We are working tirelessly on these issues on behalf of crofters and crofting. Being a coherent, united voice is the only chance we have of influencing what happens to crofting. That is why we need all crofters to support SCF through membership of our organisation.



PROCAM
robertson crop services

GENERAL AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTS DIVISION

SCOTSBURN ROAD
KILDARY
ROSS-SHIRE
IV18 ONJ

TELEPHONE: 01862 842552

RICKY MICHALEK: 07967 028159

DAVID MACKENZIE: 07854 229945

FERTILISER

GRASS SEED

CEREAL SEED

ANIMAL HEALTH PRODUCTS

ANIMAL FEEDSTUFFS

FEED BLOCKS

FEED BUCKETS

MINERALS

LIME

DRAFF



**Trees for
the crofting
community**

**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 available.

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

New Crofting Commission chief executive

Bill Barron outlines his aims for the organisation.

I AM VERY grateful for the welcome that has been extended to me by crofters and crofting organisations since my recent appointment as chief executive of the Crofting Commission.

I appreciate that the Commission has undergone a turbulent time over the last year or two. But despite this, it is heartening to see the degree of support for the organisation from stakeholders across crofting. I am looking forward to providing stability to the organisation with a focus on delivering an effective service to crofters.

By the time you read this article, we will know the election results. I should like to thank all the candidates for putting their names forward and to congratulate those who were elected. Together with the three commissioners appointed/re-appointed by the Scottish Government earlier this year, we now have a full complement of nine. I would also like to put on record my thanks to those commissioners who stood down in March after serving during the first five years of the organisation.

Together with the staff of the



Commission, I am determined to give the new board the best possible support as they take on the responsibilities of leading a

Scottish public body. We will learn from the Scottish Government's recent governance review so that the board works together effectively

and can provide the leadership that crofting will need in challenging times.

Meantime we are continually looking to improve the services we provide; and there are more changes to be made to enhance our efficiency and effectiveness. This includes putting the Register of Crofts online so that it is available to all crofters to access. In the medium term we are looking at having regulatory application forms available to be submitted online, making the process quicker and simpler for crofters.

We have seen a significant increase in regulatory applications for assignments and sub-lets as a result of the crofting census. This is very encouraging as it shows a degree of self-regulation by crofters, to ensure they are complying with their duties.

As well as regulating crofting, the Commission has a role of keeping all crofting matters under review and advising the Scottish Government accordingly. The Scottish Government's current work on crofting law reform is a prime opportunity for the Commission to contribute, and I hope the legislation will provide greater clarity on a number of areas and help to ensure a sustainable future for crofting.

Crofting Commission appointments



New Appointments

Malcolm Mathieson

Malcolm Mathieson is by profession an accountant who has held senior finance and managing director positions within various global organisations.

He is senior partner in Moy Farm, an 1800 acre hill farm in Lochaber and a director of Lochaber Lodges, which he set up in 2009 as part of the diversification of Moy Farm.

Mr Mathieson has a specific interest in the financial viability of farming in less favoured areas. Malcolm's appointment is for three years and runs from 1 January 2017 until 31 December 2019.



James Scott

James Scott runs a business focussing on training and assessing skills in rural businesses. James has a strong agricultural and field sports background and has previously worked in deer and conservation in both the public and private sectors.

James has a particular interest in ensuring the future of crofting through making it attractive and accessible to new and young entrants and in growing the skills of these groups to allow them to be successful crofters.

James's appointment is for three years and runs from 1 February 2017 until 31 January 2020.



Reappointment

David Campbell

David Campbell's reappointment introduces a degree of continuity. He has a wide experience of crofting matters and how the benefits of crofting are underpinned by effective regulation.

Mr Campbell has a strong connection to crofting traditions and an appreciation of how the crofting system plays a significant role in population retention.

David's appointment is for three years from 1 April 2017 until 31 March 2020, and fulfils the requirement for there to be a Crofting Commissioner to represent the interest of landlords of crofts.

CROFTING CONNECTIONS

A new era for Crofting Connections

AT THE END of March, Crofting Connections leaves Soil Association Scotland, which has been responsible for its management and delivery since 2009.

Soil Association has brought a lot to the project – a deep connection with the soil, of course; a focus on horticulture and livestock, especially traditional seeds and breeds; vast experience of small-scale mixed family farming; all aspects which it has in common with SCF, along with links to a vast network of regional and national organisations working in food, farming, education and health.

It leaves a project which has touched the lives of many children and young people, their teachers and their families, and is ready to move forward in a world that is very different from that of 2009.

We are now in the process of raising funds to start a new chapter for Crofting Connections

under the management of SCF, subject to the success of our bids. It feels right to move to the heart of crofting. We see real benefits in moving to the SCF: crofting is the key focus for both SCF and Crofting Connections. We share common geography and common aims – the promotion of active crofting and thriving crofting communities.

No other organisation or project in Scotland has this exclusive focus. We will be able to join our voices in the Scottish Government's consultation on the National Development Plan for Crofting as part of a sustainable rural economy, which will inform a new crofting bill later in the parliament.

There is still lots to do. Over the next two years, two themes will bring together pupils, teachers, crofters, tradition-bearers and local communities at regional events across the project areas.

In 2017, Scotland's Year of Heritage, History and Archaeology, primary pupils will research, record and share the history and heritage of crofting, coming together in regional events to celebrate their work.

In 2018, Scotland's Year of Young People, secondary pupils will engage in dialogue with SCF young crofters in face-to-face gatherings and online seminars, to develop a vision for the economic, social and environmental future of crofting, including the study of land use and community land ownership.

And meanwhile, workshops with schools and professional learning sessions with teachers continue to engage and delight children and teachers, as shown in these images of recent events.

*Pam Rodway
Project Manager*



Learning about fleeces at the Wool and Lamb transition event in Glenurquhart High School



Learning some weaving techniques at the Wool and Lamb transition event in Glenurquhart High School



Pupils at Gergask Primary School enjoy a roast lamb dinner provided by the farmers whose lambs they have been following from birth to market



BREXIT

The future post-Brexit



© Martin Benson - Three

David Muir, SCF council member for Uist, looks at the figures.

CROFTERS ARE highly dependent on a vibrant mainstream farming industry that has confidence in the future of their businesses as, in the main, producers of store cattle and sheep.

The total gross amount generated by sales of livestock in any one year through auction marts is unknown, as is the value of private sales between crofters; but it is certainly considerable. The economic impact the agricultural industry makes on local economies includes equipment purchases and repairs, building and civil engineering works, agricultural supplies, veterinary services, abattoir services and haulage firms, to name a few.

As an example of the importance of current support payments, for the islands of Uist alone – with a population of around 5000, the total amount was £3.327m for 2014 and £4.201m for 2015.

Details of UK recipients of CAP subsidy

payments are published on a national database which shows individual payments in terms of rural development and direct aid, so you can easily find out how much crofters and farmers in your local area benefit from agricultural and environmental support.

Almost all support payments emanate from Brussels and are paid through the UK Government to the Scottish Government for distribution to farmers and crofters through the various funding mechanisms. While the UK Government said it will guarantee payments until 2019, there is great uncertainty about how the agricultural industry will be supported thereafter; and whether low-intensity systems such as crofting will continue to be supported if subsidies are substantially decreased because of Brexit.

The UK will receive around £27.6 billion from the EU for agriculture and rural support between 2014 and 2020. These payments cover both the CAP and Agricultural Fund for Regional Development.

Scotland, while having 8% of the UK population, will receive 18.5% of total agricultural funding. This implies that Scotland is much more dependent on EU agricultural support than England. Also, the added protection that EU tariffs provide on agricultural imports from elsewhere in the world will be lost when the UK leaves the EU customs union.

The UK's contribution to the EU in 2015, taking account of the rebate, was £10.35 billion. It received £4.327 billion in return, with almost £2.5 billion of this amount for agricultural support.

Questions which arise for a post Brexit future include:

- What will be the shape of financial support provided by the UK Government to agriculture?
- Will the UK Government continue to support Scottish agriculture along similar lines as at present?
- What levels of tariffs will the EU impose on UK (and Scottish) agricultural exports to the EU?

You may think, what can crofters and our representatives in the Federation do to influence such high-level negotiations?

The SCF annual gathering had the Brexit issue at its heart and it is encouraging that Fergus Ewing, cabinet secretary for the rural economy and connectivity, and Michael Russell, minister for UK negotiations on Scotland's place in Europe, both played such a pivotal role at the event and that the economic importance of crofting post-Brexit is recognised by the Scottish Government.

Full coverage of the SCF gathering, which focused on Brexit, on pages 14 to 17

Can crofters trust the Conservatives on Brexit?

Dear editor

In the EU referendum the Leave campaign said that the Conservative farming minister, George Eustice, told farmers at the launch of Farmers for Britain that "The UK Government will continue to give farmers and the environment as much support – or perhaps even more – as they get now."

Yet since he successfully got that Leave vote, the spirit of those words has not been matched by him or the Conservative government in Westminster.

Whilst they say support will continue to 2020 – the end of the current parliamentary term – what happens after that is as clear as slurry. At the Oxford Farming

Conference in January, the BBC's Rural Affairs and Environment editor reported that George Eustice had said there would be no more subsidies post 2020 for farmers.

The Conservative government's Brexit white paper doesn't meet the spirit of George Eustice's promise. It says that "with EU spend on CAP at around €58 bn in 2014 (nearly 40% of the EU's budget), leaving the EU offers the UK a significant opportunity to design new, better and more efficient policies for delivering sustainable and productive farming, land management and rural communities."

Following that the Scottish Conservative leader suggested that powers over regulation will

be retained by Westminster rather than devolved "automatically" from Europe as promised by the Leave campaign. Considering Theresa May is desperate for a trade deal with Trump which could open up the UK to American produce, this set alarm bells ringing for Scottish quality producers.

Such weasel words come nowhere near the clear promise that farmers and crofters will get "as much support – or perhaps even more – as they get now." With the Conservative government's habit of cuts to public spending, those words hide a myriad of possibilities.

That suggests that just as the UK Government sold out Scottish fishermen going into Europe, they

will use them as a bargaining chip to leave, perhaps to get other EU states' support to lobby for London banks to still have free access to the EU market.

Any votes the Conservatives get in May this year at the local election in Scotland's farming communities will be used by them to claim they have the endorsement of those communities to implement that paragraph. As with so many other issues, the Tories will take it as a sign that they can do what they like to Scotland and get away with it.

Yours etc

James MacDonald
Argyllshire

inksters



Call in the Crofting Law A-Team
Initial consultation free +
10% off fees for SCF members

01599 230 300
crofting@inksters.com

croftinglaw.com
inksters.com

- School buildings are in great shape
- Community healthcare is the best it's ever been
- Housing is plentiful
- Our roads are wonderful
- The future of Gaelic is secure

If you believe all that, then
there's no need for the **Free Press**



**The land, the language,
and the people**

**The only employee-owned
newspaper in the UK**

**Every
Thursday**



SAC Agricultural & Conservation
Consultants combine local
knowledge with extensive
experience and are supported by our
team of renowned specialists. We can
assist crofters with business advice
on a range of topics to improve
profitability including:



- Agricultural and rural business advice
- Enterprise planning
- Comprehensive assistance with IACS, LMO, RP, CHGS and CCAGS (agricultural buildings, hard standings, drainage, grassland improvement, handling equipment, fences and access tracks are examples of eligible expenditure under CCAGS)
- Completion of Assignations, Decrofting and Sublet applications
- GPS croft maps for Crofting Commission or SGRPID
- Operational Needs Assessment to support planning applications
- Livestock record keeping and pre-inspection checks
- Grassland and crop advice including soil analysis, fertiliser and reseeds
- Livestock feed analysis, rationing and animal health planning
- Horticultural advice
- Agri-environment advice
- Forestry scheme implementation and management
- Diversification opportunities
- Marketing advice
- Renewable energy feasibility studies including wood fuel heating systems

**Contact your local
SAC office:**

Balivanich 01870 602336
Campbeltown 01586 552502
Inverness 01463 233266
Kirkwall 01856 872698
Lerwick 01595 693520
Oban 01631 563093
Portree 01478 612993
Stornoway 01851 703103
Thurso 01847 892602

Leading the way in Agriculture and Rural Research, Education and Consulting

THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMON GRAZINGS

Current challenges facing common grazings

RECENT EVENTS have put common grazings under the spotlight, often in uncomfortable ways.

However, the relative neglect of common grazings in crofting circles and policy discussions is surprising considering:

- common grazings account for approximately 6% of Scotland's land mass;
- managing the ground for agri-environment can only be done at the common grazings level via a committee;
- the use of common ground is often a key attribute of crofting rarely shared with smallholdings.

A silver lining of recent controversy is that the focus on common grazings is increasing. Stakeholders have been working with the Crofting Commission to try and improve guidance and reinvigorate common grazings.

Some of the knotty subjects discussed include: allocation of grazing rights vs allocation of shares for subsidy purposes; crofting legislation vs subsidy claiming; agri-environment management and income; and managing common grazings with active and inactive shareholders.

Sadly, a high proportion of grazings committees are currently out of office. To help remedy this, committees out of office can get assistance through CAGS to get an advisor to help them set up a new grazings committee and be confident of their remit and that their regulations are fit for purpose.

The Skye New Entrants group, funded under the Scottish Farm Advisory Services (FAS), has been discussing opportunities for common grazings. A weakness identified in many situations is the lack of new blood and the increasing age of many graziers. Further details via www.fas.scot.

Also under FAS, we will be running groups on common grazings in Skye, Lewis and Uist. This will involve working with the Scottish Agricultural Organisation Society to help look at co-operative structures and many practical livestock and cropping issues.

Common grazings also appeared on the silver screen! You can watch online at www.sruc.ac.uk/info/120102/rural_business_management/1762/grazing_on_the_edge_-_managing_special_landscapes_in_crofting_areas. Issues raised by *Grazing on the Edge* will be discussed at the next Cross Party Group on Crofting.

Effective grazings committees are clearly essential. We will focus on the common attributes of successful committees in the next edition.

Janette Sutherland
SAC Portree

If all else fails, look at the instructions



© Martin Benson – Breakish, Skye

THAT'S WHAT I did recently, reading with fresh, post-bùrach eyes the provisions of the 1993 Act as they relate to common grazings.

It reminded me of vehicles on the Teuchter Wagons Facebook page – bits added here and there adapting to some present-day demands, but the original very different and limited design still visible underneath – probably roadworthy in most conditions, but you don't want to expose it to too many challenges.

The recent glaring spotlight has focussed on the actions of the Crofting Commission, its members and its staff, on what it's done and how it's done it and on the legalities and ethics of those things.

But the light also needs to shine on the statutory underpinning of those actions and whether the act is fit for purpose in the current social, economic and legal context and in the light of current approaches to support and development.

Someone somewhere needs to be setting out what an act needs to do and how it should do it. Not everything is best done by legal obligation.

What should be obligatory? What should be possible? What should be supported? What should be discouraged and what banned?

What is the scope for complementary non-statutory best-practice guidance, avoiding prescriptiveness, but giving a clear steer?

Templates, role models, advice?

How to encourage activity and innovation and investment? Avoid rewarding inactivity, without entrenching privilege and disenfranchising the newly-active, especially the younger generation and the new entrant.

Who should benefit and how, when considering non-agricultural opportunities?

How to make structures democratic and accountable and equitable, while still being responsive?

How to avoid a minority holding the majority to ransom, be they opposed to change or to lack of change?

How to ensure that the balance between self-governance and oversight remains appropriate and, where appropriate, enabling?

How to ensure that the transaction costs of common grazing regulation do not themselves weigh so heavily as to deter activity and innovation, but ensuring that proposals can at least be judged on their intrinsic merits?

We might well agree with the proverbial Irishman that our journey shouldn't start from here, but whether we like it or not, here is where we are. Time now to focus again on where we want to get to.

Gwyn Jones, EFNCP
dgl_jones@yahoo.co.uk

New crofts initiative



Elphin on a wintry morning

Lisa MacDonald reports on a vision to create new crofts in Assynt.

THE ASSYNT Foundation recently set out proposals to create new crofts.

A meeting to open out the dialogue was held in early December at Glencanisp Lodge, part of the foundation's portfolio since the community buy-out in 2005. The landscape between Achiltibuie and Lochinver is as stunning as it is empty; the ideas for discussion were imaginative and inspiring in attempting to address this problem.

It was fascinating to observe the politics of crofting played out across the assorted chairs. The range of vision is broad indeed – from the older gentleman in the chequered shirt who runs sheep and worries about adequate fencing, wincing visibly every time somebody said the old ways are a thing of the past and crofting needs to move on, to the young couple who are thinking about coppicing and charcoal burning, via the polytunnels, jam makers and holiday lets that are

the diversified backbone of realistic crofting today.

Some of the areas earmarked for new crofts already contain mixed native woodland and it is hoped that some others may be replanted, marking a departure from the monoculture of white sheep we have recently become accustomed to. Critics bemoan herbivore grazing management plans, with deer monitoring and the need for committed fencing being cited as overly precious; while conservationists and supporters of this type of land management applaud the benefits for biodiversity, soil quality and innovative business.

The foundation is keen to stress that planning permission is not guaranteed and there are all kinds of reasons why housing might be difficult, from access for emergency services to local development plans, but it seems that none of these obstacles would be insurmountable if the political will to see these fragile areas thrive was fully in existence.

The Assynt Foundation is talking of creating three new crofting townships: at Ledbeg, at

Crofting 2016

*Cheviot, binder twine
White house, washing line
Lamb sale, laying hens
Fank, dipping, calving pens*

*Ground crop, polytunnel
Soft fruit, jam funnel
Artisan bread, candles, soap
Goats cheese, sculptures from rope*

*Cottage for rent, changeovers, sheets
Floor cleaning, flagstones, peats
Bags from tweed, cushions, cards
Drystone dyking paid in yards*

*Hydro scheme, common grazing
Apportionment, heath fire blazing
Community turbine, court clerk, sheriff
Grid connection, feed-in tariff*

*Spoon carving, herb growing
Coppicing and cattle showing
Bee-keeping, weaving loom
Charcoal burning, office room.*

Lisa MacDonald

Drumrunie and at Cnoc nan Each near Lochinver. Although the detail is still very notional at this stage, one idea is that housing could potentially be situated together near the crofts rather than each house sitting alone within its own land. This seems socially sensible as well as being sympathetic to the landscape. Thinking ahead hypothetically to independence and new parties which might force a genuine effort to repopulate the Highlands, this model of creating new townships could be a viable template.

I recently asked a friend for pictures to go with another piece. "Would you like people or just landscapes?" he asked. I was reminded of a story Lesley Riddoch told me about the cover for one of her books. She was cycling through the Hebrides and fancied a picture of herself and her bike within the scenery. She was told it would sell better without; people like landscapes better if they're empty, it seems.

I looked at my friend and told him I'd like pictures of beautiful landscapes – with people in them.

Grazing shares and land registration

IF YOU purchase your croft then usually any grazing share that went with the croft will remain held in tenancy.

The grazing share will become a deemed croft. However, if your landlord is willing to sell the grazing share to you it can be purchased as a heritable right with the croft.

How is such a purchased grazing share dealt with on the cadastral map (that defines land ownership) when your croft enters the Land Register? Does the entire common grazings need to be mapped to reflect the fact that you have a share therein? The answer is, perhaps thankfully, no.

The keeper of the register's position in regard to common grazings is that it is not an ownership right and if expressed in such terms will not be

disclosed on a title sheet as a pertinent to the plot of land. However, if a right in common to land (that happens to be common grazing) is conveyed, then it will be dealt with in the same manner as any other shared-ownership plot.

Any right in pasture or grazing can be deemed to form part of the croft as an ancillary incorporeal right that is a pertinent. Unlike a registrable long lease, a crofting tenancy is not a leasehold interest that is (a) registrable or (b) entered into the title sheet of the ownership interest in the Schedule of Leases. Registers of Scotland therefore see it as an off-register right, and not one which would be shown in the title sheet.

The submission of a disposition for registration which included common grazings in addition to the plot being registered would not be an issue.

The title sheet, however, would remain silent on the ownership of a right in the common grazings. The registered deed would enter the archive record, and could be viewed as part of the register to offer reassurance that the common grazings had been transferred as part of the disposition. It should be noted that the archive record is a repository of documents supporting the accuracy of the Land Register, and as common grazings are an off-register right, it can offer no assurances as to anything that may happen to that right off register.

For those wishing to have transparency regarding the ownership of these rights, it would be beneficial to seek voluntary registration in the crofting register.

Brian Inkster, Inksters Solicitors

Cross Party Group on Crofting

THE CROSS Party Group on Crofting, to which SCF is secretariat, has enjoyed excellent attendance and relevant topics.

The group meets regularly in the Scottish parliament and is a very effective platform for presenting issues of crofting concern to our parliamentarians and government officials.

The group has been attended by the minister for crofting, Fergus Ewing, and we have had topics presented and discussed including the croft house grant scheme, common grazings, support to young crofters, control of wild geese and provision of rural broad-band.

Other crofting issues are always on the agenda: crofting law and administration; crofting development; crofting and the CAP; The Five Actions for Crofting.



© Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body



Lucy, Patrick, and Maria at the Oxford Real Farming Conference

Oxford Real Farming Conference sees first workshop on crofting

SCF project officer Maria Scholten reports

THE OXFORD Real Farming Conference (ORFC) has usually had one or two SCF people attending in its eight years of existence.

This year was the first year with an entire workshop dedicated to crofting and SCF's training programme. This year ORFC outgrew its mainstream big farmers' counterpart, the Oxford Farming Conference. With well over 800 attendees, it was a busy, buzzing event.

The SCF's workshop's theme was *Crofting's contributions to new generations of farmers* (read: crofters). Crofting has been seen as a model and solution to modern large-scale industrial agriculture in Europe at large. However, crofting's role in UK farming policy is seldom discussed. This session presented some of the work undertaken by SCF.

The session specifically addressed the interface of SCF's education and advocacy work and how its training programmes can support access to crofts for aspiring crofters and the creation of new crofts. Patrick Krause gave a brief introduction to crofting. Lucy Beattie gave a thorough overview of the SCF Skills Boost programme, with a video clip showing a training course on sheep shearing. Finally, the film about young crofters Crofting's New Voices was shown. SCF's workshop was attended by author

Colin Tudge, Julia Aglionby of the Foundation for Common Land and about 35 other participants. We received very positive feedback and we feel there should be a workshop on crofting in every ORFC from now on.

Crofting sits well with issues about small farms in the twentieth century. For example the Landworkers Alliance, but also with large-scale livestock farmers – Pasture-fed Livestock Association – and we share issues with organic farming, another big group represented in Oxford. All of these groups are potential allies to advocate a less-intensive, more sustainable, high animal-welfare agriculture post-Brexit. Some of this seemed palpable at the conference.

Philip Lymbery of Compassion in World Farming, author of the book *Farmageddon*, a nightmarish true story of the cost of cheap meat, spoke about the power of story-telling and how our stories will win hearts, minds and the countryside. This reminded me of Frank Rennie's talk at the Future of Crofting conference about how much crofting has to tell.

And the crofting story had not gone unnoticed. In the closing session it was moving to hear the word crofting in the Oxford city hall's large main hall and Patrick's words: "Crofting is still here, despite" was quoted as an exemplary encouragement.

Recording of the sessions at ORFC can be heard at <http://orfc.org.uk/archives/1717-2/>

Looking for Land

Young couple with practical skills seeking crofting tenancy or land for sale

4 acres minimum, intended for organic agriculture

May suit retiring crofters or landowners with unused land

All possibilities gratefully considered

Darragh and Lizzie Keenaghan
darraghkeenaghan@hotmail.com
07712132529



Dunlop Tractor Spares



A WIDE RANGE OF PARTS STOCKED FOR FERGUSON, MASSEY FERGUSON, FORDSON DEXTA AND MAJOR, FORD, FORD FERGUSON, DAVID BROWN AND INTERNATIONAL.

Send stamped addressed envelope, 47p, for price list.

67a Crankill Road, Ballymena, Co. Antrim, N. Ireland BT43 5NN

T: 028 2565 2560 F: 028 2565 2563 M: 07834 455 082 or 07834 455 083

amanda@dunloptractorspares.co.uk

www.dunloptractorspares.co.uk



Tried, Tested and Approved



keder
greenhouses

Superior growing environment for the serious gardener

Resistant against extreme weather conditions



4m x 10m

'10 YEAR GUARANTEE AGAINST UV DEGRADATION'

Keder Greenhouses Limited
Newtown, Offenham, Evesham,
Worcestershire WR11 8RZ
t: +44 (0) 1386 49094
sales@kedergreenhouse.co.uk

www.kedergreenhouse.co.uk

A range of sizes available to suit any croft

@KederGreenhouse



Harbro
QUALITY LIVESTOCK NUTRITION

Harbro Country Layers Pellets

- ✓ Health and performance
- ✓ Strong egg shells
- ✓ Rich yolk colour
- ✓ Selenium and vitamin E
- ✓ Vitamins and minerals

Available from your local Harbro Country Store

Staneyhill, Lerwick Tel: 01595 693744

Harbour Road, Inverness Tel: 01463 701999

Annat, Corpach Tel: 01397 772434

Struan Road, Portree Tel: 01478 612212

Kilmory Ind. Est., Lochgilphead Tel: 01546 603804

Harbro Stockists

J & W Tait, Kirkwall Tel: 01856 873003

Lewis Crofters, Stornoway Tel: 01851 702350

www.harbrocountrystores.co.uk



Angus B MacNeil MP

Available for surgeries
All enquiries welcome

Constituency Office

31 Bayhead Street, Stornoway
Isle of Lewis HS1 2DU

Telephone

01851 702272

E-Mail

angus.macneil.mp@parliament.uk

strath print

Quality print and professional design
tailored to your specific needs.

Ask us for a quote!

Broadford, Isle of Skye, IV49 9AP

Tel: 01471 822 555

www.strathprint.co.uk

TRAINING

Training opportunities with SCF's Crofters Skills Boost



Animal husbandry tutor Gwen Jensen at the access to crofting course in Argyll

An update from SCF training manager Lucy Beattie

AS OUR attention turns to lambing, we are looking forward to hosting lambing courses at Ullapool and Contin in April with Alasdair MacNab.

Those of you who know him may remember him from times when he was a vet at GC McIntyre in Dingwall, and then as a ministry vet with AHVLA. Over the last 36 years he has worked as a veterinary surgeon in private practice and

government service. Outside of this he and his wife have built up a farm near Dingwall, with a herd of pedigree Limousin cattle which has had considerable success in both the show circuit and sale ring. Alasdair is a stalwart for local charity and is involved in fundraising for the Royal Highland Education Trust (RHET) and RSABI. He has been involved with education in farming for young people with RHET and we are very lucky to have him tutoring on both these courses.

In February we ran two Access

to Crofting Toolkit courses which were attended by a total of 40 new and aspiring crofters in Skye and Argyll. We met people who came from as far afield as Tiree, Uist and Glasgow and a variety of crofting businesses from pre-start-up to new entrant livestock and horticultural operations.

We run a virtual space on Facebook for all who sign up for the toolkit, "The Communal Fank", where people who train with us can continue to access information and ask questions throughout

the three years of the Crofters Skills Boost project.

In the first year of the project we have run five access courses with 100 attendees. The next scheduled access course is to be held at Dingwall Mart on Friday 18th and Saturday 19th August 2017. To register, please contact Donna on training@crofting.org.

Practical skills courses are running in a variety of primary production methods: goat-keeping, sheepdog handling,

animal husbandry, permaculture, horticulture, drystone walling and lambing. The Woodland Trust has kindly supported a number of practical skills courses for croft woodland and there will be further courses in Skye this year with croft woodlands project officer Donnie Chisholm. Please note their advert in this edition of *The Crofter*. Help is on hand from their project team for any crofter who wishes to create woodland areas on the croft or to find out more about woodland management for crofting.

We start the new training year in July and are planning to run access courses in Gairloch, Caithness, Assynt, Skye and Dingwall – plus a number of practical skills courses. There are added value for crofting courses supported by the Princes' Countryside Fund in secondary production methods such as butchery, wool processing and sausage making running throughout the year.

Our courses are demand-led by crofters. So please, if you have a wish to learn about something new and it's not on our course list, get in touch.

As of 1st March 2017, if you join SCF at a training course or special event and subscribe by Direct Debit, you will get a 30% discount on your first year of membership.

Ullapool pupils win at crofting skills

ULLAPOOL High School was recently joint winner of the Rural Schools Award at Lantra Scotland's land-based and aquaculture learner of the year awards, along with Breadalbane Academy in Perthshire.

Ullapool won the award of £250 and a trophy due to its extensive work to help pupils develop rural qualifications and gain employability skills.

Some pupils have undertaken training through SCF's training programme. SCF's Lucy Beattie and Ullapool High teacher Jemma Middleton jointly run the Rural Skills National 4 course at the school.

Lucy has been a farm partner since the project began in 2007; and since 2011 has been employed as a farmer teacher with West Highland College UHI. This year ten students joined the course, many from crofting backgrounds and aiming to get a formal qualification whilst at school.

"The best bits for most of the pupils," Lucy comments, "are working on the farm and at a neighbouring croft which belongs to Duncan MacColl in Strathkaniard."

Well done to all involved.



Jemma Middleton of Ullapool High School accepts the award from Adam Henson



Pupils at work

SCF ANNUAL GATHERING, APPLECROSS

Crofting's place in Europe

SCF'S annual gathering took place in Applecross, Wester Ross, on Friday 10th and Saturday 11th March.

The event will inform SCF policy on crofting's status post-Brexit and the measures needed to ensure that our unique form of land tenure is sustained and can thrive when the UK leaves the EU. Speakers from Europe and the UK addressed the issues from a variety of perspectives, led by minister for crofting Fergus Ewing on day one, and Brexit minister Michael Russell on day two.

Close to 100 people attended, with a range of backgrounds – SCF members, young crofters, Crofting Commission and Scottish Government staff, representatives from RSPB, Scottish Land and Estates, the European Commission office in Scotland, Crofting Connections, RSABI, local residents, Smallholding Scotland, the Swedish Fabod Farmers Association, Scottish Land Commission and numerous other individuals.

Many had not been to Applecross before and their first crossing over the *Bealach na Ba* was a significant experience. This narrow single-track road is the third highest in Scotland, boasting the greatest ascent of any road climb in the UK – from sea level to 2,054 feet, a 20% rise. The Gaelic name means pass of the cattle – it is an old drove road.

Applecross as a venue was chosen as it exemplifies an Area of Natural Constraint (ANC). The event's theme was originally to be the proposed new support scheme, ANC. But Brexit was subsequently thrust upon us, so the topic was changed to reflect on this monstrous threat to Scotland and in particular to crofting.

Applecross typifies a small remote crofting community. It is challenging to get to; lacks infrastructure; crofts are small and hard to work. But as local resident Valerie Hodgkinson points out, it is a thriving community with a community development company which has established a community filling station, community-run toilets, has crowd-funded a community hydro scheme and is developing three housing units for the elderly on a small bit of land they hope to buy from NHS. In the past crofters themselves have released land for the village hall, fire station and council housing.

Val says there are signs of green shoots in crofting, as folk are diversifying from solely sheep. Fruit and vegetables are grown for use in the famous Applecross Inn. Award-winning Applecross Ices are also supplied to the inn, made locally from local produce. The inn's head chef is also a crofter and his own produce is on the menu. Other crofters card, spin and weave their Gotland wool and grow willow, which an Applecross basket-maker uses to make beautiful baskets. A local crofter/fisherman supplies freshly-caught prawns to the hotel on his electric bike.

However, more land and investment is needed in the locality for affordable housing, an issue common to many crofting communities. Unless this need is addressed, young local folk find it almost impossible to remain in their communities,



Arriving at Hartfield House

as more and more unaffordable properties are snapped up for holiday homes.

Minister for crofting **Fergus Ewing**, the first keynote speaker, commended the choice of venue. He reiterated his personal and Scottish Government's continued support for crofting. Everyone's passion and commitment for crofting comes through strongly in crofting stakeholder meetings and others such as the Cross Party Group on Crofting. Mr Ewing emphasised crofting's contribution to maintaining populations and regretted the lack of opportunities for those who had to leave their communities but would prefer to come back.

The Scottish Government's Plan for Scotland 2016-17 promised a National Development Plan for Crofting (NDPC), which they must begin to draft as part of a sustainable rural economy. This will focus on what is wanted for crofting in the future. SCF is participating in the formulation of the NDPC.



Fergus Ewing

The minister referred to existing sources of support for crofting: the Croft House Grant Scheme (CHGS); the Crofting Agricultural Grant Scheme (CAGS); support for new entrants; the agri-environmental scheme in the Scottish Rural Development Programme (SRDP); subsidised veterinary support; the Cattle Improvement Scheme. All these will be part of the Crofting Development Plan. Since 2010 over 3,550 CAGS applications have been approved, with a value of £10 million.

Crofting grants are an efficient and effective use of taxpayers' money. However demand outstrips available funding in every round.

Over £15 million in croft house grants have been approved since 2007. Since 2010, £14 million has been spent on CHGS, helping to provide 800 homes on crofts.

Mr Ewing announced an additional £600,000 for CHGS, bringing the total allocation in this scheme to £2 million, furthering its remit of retaining people in rural areas who might not otherwise be able to do so. He acknowledged that the new eligibility criteria in CHGS may need to be reconsidered, so he has asked his officials to carry out a review of the scheme and its guidance. This will involve key stakeholders, including SCF. The Federation is already making good input to the government on crofting matters, which is welcomed.

He also referred to the work on housing ongoing in the Crofting Stakeholder Forum towards a paper on housing which will acknowledge the various barriers faced by crofters in building a home; the main ones being reluctance by lending bodies to provide loans; and the planning system, although the planning issues are shared by people in rural areas who are not crofters.

The minister has been meeting with banks and other lending agencies, with a view to identifying how borrowing by crofters to fully finance a house build can be facilitated. The government is looking at reintroducing a loan scheme for crofter housing, long campaigned for by SCF.

Where crofters are experiencing planning difficulties, he extended an invitation to bring these to his attention, with a view to finding solutions in the planning system to make construction of homes in the countryside less constricted. Inviting complaints about planning, he said "Inundate me with your complaints!". Planning should be an enabler, not a barrier. There is talk of re-wilding; we should be focussing on "re-peopleing" the Highlands and Islands.

In 2016 a £25 million rural fund was launched with the aim of increasing the supply of housing in rural areas. Additionally the £5 million Islands Housing Fund is specific to island projects. £4 million was also committed to run the Highland Self-Build Loan Fund, which allows families to borrow up to £175,000 in agreed staged payments.

Strengthening communities is a priority for the Scottish Government and people must work together and share best practice – qualities that have always been strong in crofting communities. Common grazings management is an example of how this can work well, but the minister acknowledged the recent grazings issues.

Getting young people into crofting is vital and the government is committed to introducing a New Entrants Scheme. Help is already available to crofters through the SRDP new entrant start-up schemes and capital grants.

In CAP Pillar 1, payment entitlements can be allocated to new entrants and young crofters and farmers through the National Reserve. In Pillar 2, SRDP start-up schemes have attracted most interest. £8 million of SRDP money was dedicated to kick-starting new farming and crofting businesses. The minister suggested that there is the mechanism to transfer money from

SCF ANNUAL GATHERING, APPLECROSS

Pillar 1 (Basic Payments) to Pillar 2 (SRDP). This could be done to support new entrants.

Turning to crofting law, the minister emphasised the government's commitment to modernising crofting law. Different approaches to reform suggest either starting afresh with a clean slate approach, or using the recommendations of the Crofting Law Sump to refine, clarify and simplify current legislation. Before making a decision the government will consult with stakeholders. The intention is to have updated legislation in place before the end of this government term in four years' time. It cannot be rushed and it must be achieved in an open and inclusive way.

Mr Ewing referred to the recent common grazings challenges at the Crofting Commission. The elections for new commissioners offer a new opportunity and lessons will be learned.

The minister then took questions from the floor. Topics ranged from the high price of tenancies on the open market to how crofters and townships can make land available for affordable housing. On the recent treatment of some grazings committees, he assured listeners that the governance review of the Crofting Commission is designed to ensure that this does not happen again. He stated that the recent secondment of NFUS policy staff to government would not influence decision-makers in favour of big farmers.

Various issues were identified and answered, such as IT failures and their impact; the need for small croft business support; the need for ANC to reflect crofting support requirements fairly; the willingness of landowners to work constructively with crofting communities.



Jan Douwe van der Ploeg

The next speaker was **Jan Douwe van der Ploeg** from the Netherlands, an academic involved in the design of rural development policies. Jan described the many small family farms in his country and how they benefited from environmental schemes. Many were self-provisioning for fodder.

Some were dependant on the market and there are diverse of ways of operating. Some are multifunctional, some are pluriactive. He contrasted how high-tech farms and low-cost peasant farms operate and develop and illustrated how the smaller farms can grow in size through economies while large farms are decreasing.

Life is not easy in small farms, but by taking advantage of Pillar 2 landscape and biodiversity support many have been encouraged to diversify and survive. Fine-tuning measures such as using their own manure, home-grown feed, combined with development of new markets, has led to additional income flow. Farm merchandise is sold at local shops. Social capital, multifunctional

agriculture and valuing renewed small-holder agriculture have led to synergy and new markets.



Gwyn Jones

Gwyn Jones is a director of the European Forum on Nature Conservation and Pastoralism, but previously worked in crofting areas as an SAC adviser. Focusing on Pillar 2 environmental schemes, Gwyn outlined why such schemes are needed. Crofting agriculture has strengths, eg our healthy, robust stock. Weakness are variable returns; higher costs due to peripherality; greater ease for others to enter or leave the market.

Changing the system risks losing its distinctiveness. Most of the other services are public goods, and alternative narratives are often expressed in black and white terms, such as the rewilding debate. Current policy is very complicated and not all aspects worked well for crofting. Marginality is a context for environmental schemes and requires an enduring solution.

A good test for any rural policy is whether it works on common grazings. By far the highest take-up of agri-environment funding was in non-crofting areas, raising the question why? Fresh thinking is required and lessons to be learned from other countries. Future policy needs to allow for variation and to balance targeting, with opportunity for better feedback and adjustment. The whole system needs to be considered, not just selected fields.

In high nature value areas all policy should in some respects be environmental policy. There needs to be mutually compatible social, economic and environmental objectives and value for money, with equitable and coherent decisions and a move away from the current prescription-based approach to common grazings, to payment by results and public goods.

Objectives must be comprehensible, relevant to the crofter and simply assessed. A higher score could be achieved by adjusting the crofter's management, leading to a higher payment. Successful schemes in other countries offer ideas to import, although local tailoring would be required.

Steven Thompson is a senior agricultural economist at SRUC. He outlined the need for continued support for agriculture going into Brexit – a Pillar 2 type approach, getting rid of basic payments. For crofting, the real issue is the cost of getting into Pillar 2 schemes. That is what the government needs to consider.

Steven used a series of slides and statistics to illustrate that 60% of Scotland is rough grazing and how more nuanced support is needed. If we want land management with grazing, we need crofters. Support mechanisms must get more

sheep back on the hills. Basic payment rates are not properly thought through. Support for crofters needs to be rethought and it is vital to gather accurate joined-up data on crofts.

Decoupling of CAP support in 2005 led to a large-scale reduction in sheep numbers, reduction in the number of shepherds and abandonment of sheep on some holdings, downsizing in others. In the transition to the full Basic Payments Scheme in 2019, there will still be an element of Single Farm Payment in the payments, with regionalised payments and voluntary coupled support for beef calves and (some) ewe hogs, although data is not yet available for analysis. It is difficult to assess



Steven Thomson

the impact of new Pillar I support, and predictions illustrate a variety of possible outcomes.

An economic impact study showed that 60% of surveyed crofters had invested in their crofts in 2011-14, with an average of £13,000 and a median of £3,000. 30% of those investing received SG support averaging £4,900. But many did not invest due to lack of payback and uncertainty. Steven emphasised that better data availability would enhance the argument for crofting's contribution to the economy.



Samuel Féret

Samuel Féret from Brittany is the executive coordinator of ARC2020 (Agricultural and Rural Convention), a French NGO focused on analysing and promoting better food and farming policies in the EU. Samuel posed the question: Is the CAP reformable towards 2020?

He referred to the critical stage of uncertainty in Europe and believes a one-size policy cannot possibly fit all EU member states. Pillar 1 is funded from the EU, not national budgets. In the EU there are now 32 different ways to introduce direct payments, outlining different priorities in different areas. Agriculture is not a top priority of the current EC – the mandate is to simplify

...Continued on page 16

SCF ANNUAL GATHERING, APPLECROSS

...Continued from page 15

and modernise but not reform. More than half of decisions are made at member state level.

Reform is very uncertain because of the state of the EU itself. A lesson from 2013 is how to legitimise the spending of €40 billion on direct payments for farmers. Member states have negotiated many options to implement their own priorities for farmers, sectors, LFAs etc.

The future of the EU depends on elections in the Netherlands, France and Germany this year, then member states will have to negotiate the multi-national framework. Implementation of the current CAP can continue until 2021 or 2022. Within and outside the CAP framework, our collective task is to improve functioning food systems towards sustainability.

In the current period of uncertainty and populism, defending EU values is most important: cooperation, cohesion, solidarity, sustainability. Without CAP the situation of EU farmers would be much worse. CAP is desperately needed for a huge majority of farmers living in LFAs or getting low farm-gate prices, as income support remains a key objective of the EU Treaty.

We need to lobby for a better distribution of EU support towards small-scale farming and agro-ecological practices at national level. The rural development programme is a framework to ensure community and regional resilience and prosperity. Fairer trade and better food chain functionality is required, combined with civil society engagement for better food and farming policies, along with strengthened alliance in the EU, including policy-makers.



Hanny van Geel

Hanny van Geel has lived and worked on a farm, growing organic vegetables, for most of her life. She is a member of the coordinating committee of European Coordination Via Campesina (ECVC), the European part of the global movement of La Via Campesina (LVC). ECVC was founded because smallholders wanted to have a voice and face at decision-making level. All ECVC organisations feel overshadowed by bigger farm organisations.

LVC is a global social movement comprising 200 million peasants (small farmers) in 164 organisations in 73 countries. ECVC represents 26 organisations in 18 European countries, a democratic organisation with elected representatives – five women and five men.

At its heart is food sovereignty – the right of peoples to healthy and culturally-appropriate food produced through sustainable methods; the right to define their own food and agriculture systems; a model of small-scale sustainable

production benefiting communities and their environment. ECVC puts the aspirations, needs and livelihoods of those who produce, distribute and consume food at the heart of food systems and policies, rather than the demands of markets and corporations – the most powerful response to current food, poverty and climate crises.

We need a different CAP based on these issues. Peasant agro-ecology, in the framework of food sovereignty, puts the control of seeds, biodiversity, land and territories, waters, knowledge, culture and the commons in the hands of the peoples who feed the world, challenging and transforming the structures of power in society, working towards a UN declaration on the rights of peasants and workers in rural areas.

LVC's international planning committee for food sovereignty is the world's largest alliance, representing small-scale food producers who provide 70% of the food consumed by the world's population. Food and agricultural policies cannot be negotiated at a global or regional level without this grouping.



Robin Calvert

Robin Calvert runs a 44 hectare croft at Reidchalm, Rogart with his wife Penny. They have a fold of Highland cattle and buy in lambs to sell on as gimmers, having stopped lambing due to health problems. They grow free-range pigs and poultry, hay and some roots, aiming to be as self-supporting as possible whilst maintaining high standards of animal welfare. Most home-bred animals are used as the basis for their birth-to-plate business – the Well Hung Lamb Co, operating since 2001 using their croft butchering unit.

Giving a crofting perspective on Brexit, Robin emphasised that he can only offer his own opinions. Subsidy now is on land category rather than productivity. The value of crofting produce is directly affected by the volume of subsidy. Crofters work under lots of restrictions and croft land is harder to work. Crofting is environmentally friendly while agribusinesses are destroying the environment. Our herbage gives the best kind of meat, compared to sugar-grown meat.

Why do we therefore receive less help? There is a massive inequality in the industry. Good, easy units elsewhere get lots more. We have a niche product but we have to try to fit into the overall umbrella. When we leave EU, will the emphasis change? Will there still be a place for small producers?

Of Robin's 44 ha of amalgamated crofts, 8 ha are region 1; 31.6 ha are region 3; and 4.5 ha are ineligible due to roads and rivers. The disparity between each classification is approx £77/ha to £7/ha.

Poorer ground is not being punished in Europe,

but it is in the UK – and the situation can only get worse. Region 3 is defined as land naturally kept in a state for grazing, with a presumption of no meaningful activity. But region 3 ground still needs maintenance, eg bracken control, drainage, deer and rabbit control etc. Grassland improvement can be an option but is not always possible.

He would like to go back to a production-based scheme, which is simple to put into place.

The speakers' powerpoint presentations can be viewed on www.crofting.org.

The first day's events ended with an excellent dinner of Highland lamb, followed by a showing of the film *Grazing on the Edge*.



Dr Michael Russell

The next morning Minister for UK Negotiations on Scotland's Place in Europe, **Dr Michael Russell** was keynote speaker. He is part of the joint ministerial committee established for EU negotiations. Previously all consideration was totally controlled from London. Scotland has done well out of the EU, which is committed to ensuring that need is addressed in infrastructure and in agriculture. The single market is very important to Scotland and how we operate in Europe.

In the negotiations, Scotland and Wales have one place each, Northern Ireland has two places, while England has ten – a considerable democratic deficit. The document *Scotland's Place in Europe* sets out options. Scotland's is the most detailed discussion paper. England's position is still in discussion. Negotiation is didactic and difficult. The prime minister has ruled out any devolution.

An option for Scotland to remain in the single market is a possibility which could work. The UK Government will trigger Article 50 this month. The minister is a member of the committee meant to agree it, but doesn't yet know what will be in it. The Scottish Government is being excluded but remains committed to making it work.

There are three possible outcomes. 1 – We leave the EU on terms set by rest of UK, cut off from the single market. 2 – The proposals in *Scotland's Place in Europe* could succeed, and it is vital that Article 50 refers to this document. 3 – An independence referendum. This is not a preference, but if our suggested compromise doesn't work it will have to take place.

Currently Scotland gets 16% of the UK's agricultural support from EU. If the UK decided to use the Barnett formula to distribute agricultural support, Scotland would get only 8% – a dramatic change. There are also unknowns on the legislative side. Crofting is Scottish legislation, but wider agriculture is regulated by the EU. It is

SCF ANNUAL GATHERING, APPLECROSS

no longer promised that all these powers would transfer to the Scottish Government. There is a new concept of a UK single market, which would mean that agricultural support would stay with London. We do not know how SRDP, rural and socio-economic support would transfer in UK.

Migration dominates discussions but is economically beneficial throughout UK. Scotland is a small European nation and needs to be flexible. We are on a concerning trajectory for Scottish democracy, civil life and rural people. We can't be dragged back to sovereignty.

Questions on a variety of topics came from delegates, touching on falling market prices for stock, greater difficulties to come in exporting, with more regulations, rules of origin, paperwork, etc. Whether Scotland will be a net beneficiary or contributor depends on financial flows and whether equitable investment is spread across all UK. The Highlands and Islands could continue to be a beneficiary, but this is unlikely if England dominates.

Fisheries may be traded away.

The Scottish Government has demonstrated its commitment over the past 10 years to rural areas and that will continue, but it's impossible to say at this stage what that level can be.

We don't know the implications of Brexit on land reform.

Can Scotland rejoin EU and the single market? The minister believes that is quite possible. Accession is about meeting all the qualities and we are already fully compliant.

Dr Russell concluded by saying he looked forward to learning the outcomes of the workshops later that morning.

Participants then divided into discussion groups to discuss the question "What is important for crofting in a post-Brexit agricultural policy?"

The final speaker was **Bill Barron**, new chief executive of the Crofting Commission (CC). A civil servant for 35 years, he has been a statistician and generalist policy advisor in the fields of education, poverty, health, policing, criminal courts and housing. He is enjoying the challenge of leading the Commission, and its problems are for him to solve.

The CC has two functions – to regulate crofting and to advise government on matters relating to

crofting. Most time is spent regulating. The body is constrained by the Act and has less power and clout than one might think. It is expected to exercise a strong leadership role and he wants our input on that role. In the past six months he has listened to many people and learnt from the difficulties faced by the CC.

From this Bill identified six issues:

1. The new Crofting Act. Four years is not a long time to simplify, improve, modernise and reform crofting law. What changes do we want to see, and how are they to be implemented?
2. What is the contract between the state and the crofter today? Originally it was a protected tenancy, fair rent and a requirement to work the land. What now? What about how crofts change hands? What about support for communities?
3. Localism. We are all aware how different crofting is. We need to test different approaches for crofting, to reflect differences between areas.
4. How do people transfer in and out of crofting tenure? The current situation reflects how it used to be. Many crofts are not worked properly, while many people want crofts and can't get one. It is really hard to rigorously enforce active croft use.
5. Registration and mapping. Maps of all crofts and grazings would simplify their work, but is a monumental job to achieve.
6. CC efficiency. He'd like to understand why the CC works so slowly. He and deputy chief executive Donna Smith will look at this and hope to create a first-class service.

Bill concluded that he looks forward to working with SCF.

Questions from the floor covered the CC role as an official consultee on planning applications and the fact that they do not have sight of all applications if the siting on croft land is not stated. Mapping of common grazings will continue if resources can be found. The crofting census should be adjusted to get more data on the state of crofting, so more detail is available. Bill sees a role for a crofting development body, whether part of the CC or not. The panel of assessors should be valued and made use of more, as a source of expertise. The reverse has been the case in recent years.

Russell Smith closed the gathering, thanking everyone including funders the Scottish Rural Network.

What is important for crofting in a post-Brexit agricultural policy? Summary answers

- Post-Brexit – no common agriculture policy for Scotland.
- SRDP to include food production, social cohesion, education, tourism, telecoms, crofting representative in government.
- Within SRDP a crofting development programme (CDP), informed by the NDPC.
- Policy makers to have an understanding of crofting.

The CDP will include:

- provisions for common-grazings-led development;
- horticulture and other non-livestock uses;
- support for local produce, abattoirs, marketing, model schemes etc;
- policies on housing (croft housing grant and loan tied to land use);
- support for ancillary employment in the community.
- There will be an effective Crofting New Entrant Policy.
- The CDP will be incentive-based with realistic bureaucracy.
- All SRDP schemes accessible to small units.
- No regions.
- LFAs supported with ANC-type scheme recognising peripherality.
- The worse off must get more.
- SRDP will pay for provision of public good.
- SRDP will encourage active land use, mix of headage and environmental incentives.
- Minimum basic income payment if criteria are met.
- All headage / area-based payments degressive, no minimum holding size.
- Maximum payment set at Scottish average income.



Bill Barron



Discussions over dinner



Brendan O'Hanrahan outlines his group's ideas

ON THE CROFT

Donald's hortiblog



© Martin Benson - Ness, Lewis

AS I write on the first day of March, we have eaten our first asparagus of the season.

This is about a month early and is indicative of the very mild winter we have had here in the north west. The asparagus is, of course, a polytunnel crop and has thus been protected from the weeks of rain that came along with these high temperatures. Our overwintering crops of onions

and garlic are also well advanced, and are ready for their first feed of liquid seaweed. Exceptionally, there was a dry period in mid-February that provoked a frenzied spell of outdoor work. It is easy to peak too early in these conditions when there will probably still be some harsh weather to come. If the soil sticks to your boots it's too soon to consider any cultivation, as it will almost certainly damage the soil structure. Here in the north west of Skye we are fortunate to have a very free-draining soil, very unusual for the crofting counties, and it can be worked at almost any time of the year. This is in complete contrast to the peat-based soil we had in Lewis, which usually could not be touched until May. Even so, our outdoor cropping ground remains under a mulch of seaweed, because turning it too early risks having the nutrients washed out by rain.

The materials for enriching and conditioning the soil are abundant in most crofting areas. Crofters with livestock housed in winter will often have a surplus of manure available which can be traded for vegetables later in the year. The same applies to keepers of horses and ponies. However, animal manures need to be used with care, and certainly not applied fresh on crops that may be eaten raw. Preferably, they should be kept for at least six months and turned, in order to break down properly.

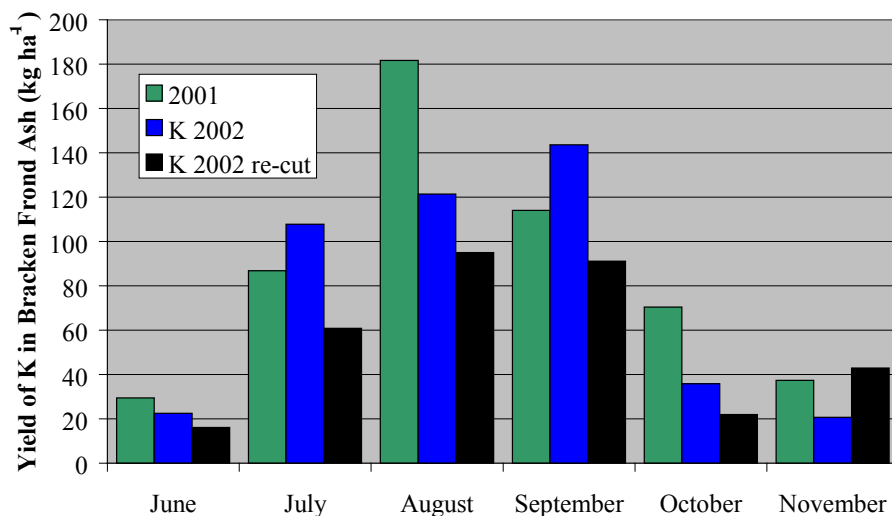
I have previously written at length about seaweed. It is available to most crofters and is hugely beneficial to any soil. It goes without saying that all growers should be making as much compost as they can, using whatever suitable material arises from the croft, the garden and the kitchen. A very good composting mixture consists of waste wool from shearing, sawdust and green bracken.

With spring cultivation in mind, it's a very good idea to get soils tested at this time of year. When submitting samples it is important to state the current and next use of the piece of ground. Lime status can be assessed using a simple test kit that can be had for a few pounds; and those lucky enough to have access to shell sand can apply a slow-release source of lime at minimum cost.

All the best for the growing season.

donald@crofting.org

Weed or crop?



Yield of total K in bracken ash from monthly harvests, 2001, 2002 and 2002 re-cut series, Muir of Dinnet NNR (Donnelly, 2003)

STUNNINGLY successful; one million hectares and increasing across the UK; tremendously resilient under difficult weather and soil conditions; no fertilisers required; brings a range of beautiful colours that are part of the natural signature of our wilder countryside and uplands.

Sounds like a dream crop? It is *Pteridium aquilina* – bracken. The absence of cattle on the hills and open country has allowed bracken to creep stealthily across the hectares, consuming

valuable land and productivity. Control is costly and for some the use of chemicals is not sustainable.

At the University of Aberdeen we looked at alternative strategies for controlling or utilising bracken. Many people will know the basic control strategy of repeated cutting of fronds, but we were interested in adding value to this. A basic understanding of the success of bracken is that it is annually recycling nutrients, so the benefits of summer growth are either fed back into the

rhizome or leached from the dead fronds over the winter period, feeding the soil in which it lives.

From this we learn two basic facts: bracken contains a lot of nutrients; and if the fronds are left in place, the plant feeds itself. Many previous studies have shown bracken to be a soil improver, with bracken invasion increasing the levels of ammonium nitrogen, nitrate/nitrite nitrogen, exchangeable potassium and phosphorus in the soil.

Bracken is also the earliest reported feedstock for the emergent chemical industry in the early 18th century, utilising the high potash content of bracken ash. Ash from incineration was also used in glass manufacture, bleaching, soap production, dyeing, wool scouring and as a fertiliser.

In one of our series of trials, bracken fronds were collected at different times of the year from different locations to investigate yields of potash, with fronds cut in August/September yielding over 50% potash in the bracken ash, and K_2O solubility at 95%. Bracken ash was subsequently used in replicated trials and demonstrated significant increases in yield of clover and 25% in saleable yield of potatoes, compared with no treatment controls.

This gives payback for the investment of labour in harvesting the bracken in the first place. Further trials demonstrate the benefits of using bracken as a soil amendment, as a biofuel and as a weed suppressant.

But we should proceed with care. The next article will address the range of concerns associated with bracken, and add facts to the fire.

With acknowledgements to Dr Eric Donnelly and The Kintail Land Research Foundation.

Jamie Robertson
Livestock Management Systems Ltd
Aberdeen

ON THE CROFT

Livestock health and reduction of greenhouse gas emissions: livestock farmers encouraged to tackle specific diseases

A report by Dr Philip Skuce of the Moredun Research Institute

GRAZING ruminants are responsible for approximately 50% of the greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions associated with agriculture in Scotland.

Reducing the emissions intensity of ruminants (ie the amount of GHG emitted per unit of meat or milk produced) is central to reducing agricultural emissions in Scotland, a key requirement for Scottish Government to meet internationally-agreed GHG reduction targets.

Endemic, production-limiting diseases are a significant constraint on efficient and sustainable livestock production in Scotland and around the world. Dealing effectively with endemic livestock diseases represents an opportunity to reduce emissions from the livestock sector, often without compromising productivity or farm economics.

Earlier in the year, researchers at Moredun, in collaboration with Scotland's Rural College, were tasked by Scottish Government to



© Moredun

deliver a rapid evidence assessment of the potential contribution that could be made towards reducing the intensity of GHG emissions from Scottish animal agriculture by eradicating or controlling livestock diseases, focusing on the main livestock species: cattle and sheep.

The assessment provided a comparative analysis of available evidence for the control or eradication of twelve of the major livestock diseases in Scotland. Overall, the evidence suggests

that reductions in GHG emissions intensity could be achieved through the implementation of cost-effective control measures that impact on the parameters that emissions intensity is particularly sensitive to – (a) milk yield and cow fertility rates in dairy systems; (b) cow/ewe fertility and abortion rates, calf/lamb mortality and growth rates in beef and sheep systems; and feed conversion ratios (FCR) for all systems.

GHG emissions savings were identified for all diseases evaluated. However, in subsequent

discussions with key livestock industry stakeholders, it was felt that selecting one major disease to attempt to eradicate would be difficult. Rather, it was felt that more could be achieved at a national level by encouraging farmers to investigate the specific livestock health issues on their farms and to implement best practice towards their control, eg improved diagnosis, monitoring and biosecurity.

This could be incentivised by Scottish Government, for example through a national health planning scheme, involving improved engagement with veterinary services. Discussions are ongoing with industry stakeholders and Scottish Government policy teams on how best to progress; and some of the knowledge gaps identified in the GHG report are being addressed in the new Scottish Government Strategic Research Programme 2016-2021.

The summary GHG report is available at: http://www.climateexchange.org.uk/files/7414/6054/5380/Livestock_Health_and_GHG.pdf.

Sea eagles – can a balance be found?

Fiona Mandeville reports

RECENTLY attended a meeting of the Skye and Lochalsh sea eagle stakeholder group, standing in for SCF's Donald Murdie.

The group comprises crofters from affected local areas, representatives from SNH, RSPB and contractors who investigate and report on cases of predation which crofters and farmers have reported to SNH. Applications for assistance are discussed and approved where considered appropriate.

The intention is to mitigate the losses suffered by stock-holders due to sea eagle predation. Funds up to a limit of £1,500 can be provided for additional stock management costs such as more fencing or shepherding, or treatment to improve stock health.

Studies suggest that predation occurs in the main on weaker lambs, for example those with tick infestation. Detailed investigations and post-mortems analyse remains to ascertain whether the animals were already dead or taken live. However, in some cases the remains are too minimal, or too decomposed, for certainty.

Statistics gathered over the past 20 years seem to show that, while sea eagles do take live lambs, and more recently – and of even more concern – attack full-grown ewes, their preference is for carrion and smaller animals such as rabbit or hare. And of course, fish.

An action plan is being developed, but SNH funding generally is under threat from Brexit;

and the monies for this scheme have to be bid for by SNH. It is agreed that a clear burden of proof must be established and an accessible data source be set up so that all information is accessible and can be analysed.

Management was discussed, such as moving nests, but this just shifts the problem elsewhere. Protecting young lambs by lambing indoors or inbye lambing parks is an option for some, but there are additional management costs involved in this, plus more risk of infection.

Additionally, if stock are removed from the hills

for a length of time and bred inside or inbye, they are no longer hefted to the hills and hill grazings deteriorate significantly. Loss of hill grazing is already a serious issue in the crofting areas, one that must be addressed.

The introduction of sea eagles has been a real boon to tourism, with numerous new businesses profiting from people's fascination with these huge, dramatic birds. But none of that financial benefit returns to the land managers who are suffering financially as a result of this species re-introduction. That is the conundrum.



How can we balance the vision of those (mostly urban-based) who wish to see species like eagles and lynx roam freely in the countryside with the viability of crofters and farmers whose land management over generations has preserved the habitats of many rare species? For city dwellers our countryside is a leisure destination, but crofters' and farmers' livelihoods depend on being able to continue this husbandry without losing out to reintroduced predators for the entertainment of tourists.

What you can do

If you are suffering losses which you think are due to sea eagles, report them as soon as possible to SNH.

Get involved – we need more people to attend these meetings.

Free advice line and
discounted advisory
service for smallholders
and crofters in Scotland



**Farm
Advisory
Service**



National Advice Hub
T: 0300 323 0161
E: advice@fas.scot
W: www.fas.scot

Click our website for helpful articles, information on
grants and a full programme of events across
Scotland delivered by SAC Consulting.

Call the Advice line for help and advice on crofting and smallholding.
Subscribe to take advantage of bespoke advice at a discounted rate.

Follow FASScotland on Twitter and Facebook.



The European Agricultural Fund
for Rural Development
Europe investing in rural areas



Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba
gov.scot



@FASScot

ON THE CROFT

Where have all the oats gone?

SCF member Adam Veitch considers the importance of growing grain on crofts.

AS I look out of our croft house window, drinking a mug of kvass (a home brew ferment made with waste rye bread), my eyes are drawn to the bare inbye fields, and I wonder – where have all the oats gone?

Crofters in our township have memories of their fathers growing grain – or corn as it is commonly described here – and there are old photographs of fields covered in oat stooks and rusting grain drills lying under oaks to prove it. But in our township at least, it is an activity of the past; a pursuit of toil and graft no longer entertained.

Small-scale grain production is as much entwined with crofting heritage as the more frequented endeavours of potatoes, sheep and peat cutting. If it stops for too long we are in danger of losing it, as the skills of our predecessors slowly fade away. Grain production should not only yield a product, but also have useful synergies with other crofting activities, such as providing a useful bite to animals following the winter and bedding following the harvest.

Historically crofters would typically have planted small stands of a mixed landrace, including small oats, black rye and bere barley, primarily for subsistence. Last year on our croft we had a go at growing two small separate stands



Author re-learning how to harvest grain with a hand sickle, on stand of heritage wheat in the Scottish Borders

of oat and barley. It was a lesson in what not to do as much as what to do. The barley failed, probably due to the amateur cultivators, but despite our horticultural abuse and the dreich weather, the oats thrived and we managed a harvest. This

coming season we are keen to also plant a stand of rye. It too should enjoy our cold, inclement Highland weather.

So is the toil worth it? Yes.

On the one hand we are keeping these skills alive, lest the hard practicalities of doing small stands of grain in the highlands be forgotten. But more holistically, we are starting to piece together how small-scale grain production fits into a bigger local food tapestry. We run a small micro-bakery called Doughies from the croft house, baking slow-fermented sourdoughs weekly, supplying a local deli and food hub. We also run a small fold of Dexter cattle. Growing grain is symbiotic with both. Small-scale grain on crofts has a part to play if we want to re-imagine our food system; and perhaps get a bit closer to the government's ambition of Scotland as a Good Food Nation.

Adam co-runs a small croft in Muirsherrlich, near Fort William, and would love to get in contact with any old crofters still doing small scale grain production, with landrace seeds tucked in the byre. Find him at www.doughies.wordpress.com.

If you would like to write a short article about your crofting activities, please get in touch with the editor – fiona@crofting.org

Eat your greens – and your dockens

Rachel Butterworth, an aspiring young crofter from Loch Tay, offers an innovative way to deal with a pervasive weed.

LAST YEAR, while living on the north coast of Ardnamurchan, I was given the opportunity to start a large vegetable garden from scratch on an unofficial croft.

I wanted to feed my small community with as much as I could grow from half an acre of extremely poor land. I put up polytunnels and dug over the ground, adding manure, compost, seaweed and topsoil. I planted potatoes, root veg, brassicas, tomatoes, beans, nasturtiums, courgettes and chillies. I then had the inevitable hungry gap whilst all my seedlings started to grow.

However, weeds quickly took hold of my small plot. I was managing the land by hand, so keeping on top of the weeds was hard.

Luckily, as well as being a vegetable grower, I am a novice forager; so I was determined to use these weeds to contribute to my community's kitchen whilst I waited for my more conventional veg. Armed with Miles Irving's 'Forager Handbook', I identified several edible weeds and discovered the delicious recipes I could make from them.

I made tasty pineapple weed syrup (full of vitamin C), yummy nettle and wild garlic soup (full of iron) and salads from fat hen, wild cabbage and sorrel, coloured with tormentil and viola flowers.

But the most amazing weed-eating discovery I made was that dockens are actually edible. Not only that, they are tasty! Although some foraging

books say the leaves are edible, I have always found them too bitter. But if you eat the stems raw they have a zingy, sharp taste similar to green apples. Dockens are actually in the same family as rhubarb, and act in exactly the same way when cooked.

Dockens are also very good for you; loaded with vitamins C and A. However, don't eat too many in one sitting – apparently if you eat over a kilo in one day, this can contribute to kidney stones, due to a high level of calcium oxalate. That is a lot of dockens though. You should also avoid them if you have urinary problems, as they are diuretic in large amounts.

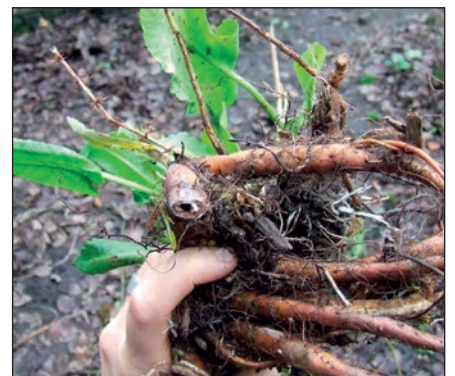
Here is my simple recipe for docken stem chutney:

500g docken stems
– thicker ones are better
1 onion, finely chopped
1 piece ginger, finely chopped
100ml apple cider vinegar
300g sugar
½ tsp salt

Boil up the onion, ginger, vinegar and sugar in a pan to a rolling boil. Then add the docken stems and simmer for 15 minutes. Put into sterilised jars and you are done.

It's as easy as that to turn something that is a nuisance into something tasty.

Rachel is soon to take on a directorship of The Shielling Project; an educational smallholding in Struy, Inverness-shire.



ON THE CROFT

Dè an t-ainm air a' bhò?

BLÀRAG? A' chiad bhò a bh' againn 's e "bulrush" a bh' oirre mar ainm nuair a fhuair sinn i, 's mar sin leis cho mi-fhreagarrach 's a bha an t-ainm sin cha robh riamh oirre ach "am màrt".

Chum sinn dà laogh boireann buaiepe, far tarbh Aberdeen Angus, a bha dubh, agus mar sin 's e "Mòine" agus "Dorcha" a bh' orrasan. Rugadh laogh boireann far tarbh Simmental sa bhàthach oidhche a bha gaoh mhòr ann. Dh'ainmich fear de na balaich ise "Gael". Bha beatha annasach aicese. Na agh, bha i ruith le tarbh air monadh an ath bhaile, còmhla ri màirt eile. Nuair a thugadh an crodh eile a-staigh cha robh i còmhla riutha. An dèidh lathaichean ga lorg, chaidh a faicinn àrd air taobh cnuic, ach cha tigeadh i a-nuas 'S



© Martin Benson - Mull

fheudar gun deachaidh i an taobh sin nuair a bha an talamh tioram, agus a-nis le uisge trom an fhoghair bha boglaichean mun cuairt oirre anns nach cuireadh i a cas. Dh'fheuch sinn taod, bucaid ceic, grunnan dhaoine agus ròp ach gu beag feum, cha ghluaisheadh i.

Le geamhradh a' teannachadh oirnn bha sinn a' gabhail gum feumamaid biadhach a ghiulan suas don bheathach bhochd gach latha.

Rinn sinn sin gus an cuala sinn gum biodh heileacoptair sa bhaile a' cur a-mach stuth airson feans. Bha am pileat deònach Gael a thogail agus a thoirt dhachaidh nam b'urrainn dhuinn a cur ann an lion-carago. Le beagan strì is spàirn, thogadh i agus an dèidh sia mionaidean a' sgeith tron adhar bha i air ais ri taobh an taighe. Nuair a rugadh a laogh aice dè eile ach "Biggles" a fhuair e mar ainm. 'S math a rinn

e cuideachd, fhuair e a' phris a b' fheàrr ann an Thainstone an latha reiceadh e.

Cheannaich sinn dà mhàrt Jersey caigeann bhliadhnachan air ais a chaidh ainmeachadh air cailleachan a' bhaile às an tàinig iad, agus an dèidh sin cha robh feum air ainmean a lorg gu o chionn goirid nuair a nochd laogh beag boireann a bha cho beag 's gun robh e cur "handbag dog" nur cuimhne. Dè chuireadh tu air beothach màirt mar sin – uill 's e "sporan" a thagh sinne. Agus mu dheireadh rug màrt crois-Ghaidhealach laogh ruadh an uiridh a bha cho luath 's cho sgeunach 's gun tug sinn "Usain Bolt" air. Tha e fhathast gun chiall, agus ainm air dol a-nis gu "Insane Bolt". Saoil dè na laogh a bheirear am-bliadhna?

le Gabhan Mac a' Phearsain

Deer management, ticks and Lyme disease

A NEW plan to manage deer on the islands of North and South Uist is out to public consultation.

Development of the plan has highlighted the extremely high number of diagnosed cases of Lyme disease in the area, a likelihood of some 300 times more than suffered by people living in the remainder of Scotland.

Lyme disease is transmitted to humans following the bite of an infected tick. Only some ticks carry the infection and risk is greater the longer the tick remains attached. Symptoms are sometimes a circular red rash that spreads out from the centre of the bite. Later, the sufferer might experience headaches, tiredness, fevers or sweats, pains in muscles or joints, or numbness or tingling. Lyme disease will not go away on its own and must always be treated, so it is important to seek medical advice as early as possible.

Deer are an important host for the sheep

tick, which in this country is the primary route for disease-causing zoonotic pathogens such as the Lyme disease agent *Borrelia burgdorferi*; louping ill virus and tickborne fever. Recognised methods of deer management are generally culling and/or exclusion by fencing. Research elsewhere in Scotland has demonstrated that areas with fewer deer have fewer ticks; and excluding deer by fencing results in dramatically fewer ticks.

However, it is not possible or desirable to fence off all areas of human habitation.

The life cycle of the tick is usually three to four years and it develops from the egg through two immature stages to the adult stage. To reach maturity the tick requires three blood meals throughout its development from suitable hosts, such as mice, voles, birds, hedgehogs, sheep, cattle or deer, before laying 2,000 to 3,000 eggs after dropping from the final host. Tick abundance

is positively associated with abundance of large mammals.

Recommendation actions in the plan include:

- exclusion of deer by whatever means from villages, gardens and public areas;
- an awareness and prevention campaign by health authorities; and
- research into environmental factors that influence tick abundance and infection.

The plan can be found on the Association of Deer Management Groups (DMG) website www.deer-management.co.uk, by clicking DMGs, finding the map, then by clicking on North or South Uist. Responses to the consultation should be sent to the Uist DMG secretary whose details are on the website.

Further information about Lyme disease can be found at www.lymediseaseaction.org.uk.

David Muir, SCF council member for Uist



© Moredun



ON THE CROFT

Social crofting – boosting mind, body, spirit



SCF training manager Lucy Beattie reports

SOcial CROFTING is an important social and agricultural model for the Highlands and Islands.

It offers genuine opportunities for people to learn skills and experience success in a supported environment within their own community, without having to travel far away from home. The movement needs social crofting to grow – and be noticed by policy makers – to become established within the Highlands and Islands.

Pioneer Bob Bull offers placements on his 13-acre croft on the Black Isle for adults and children with additional support needs to learn crofting skills in the context of

authentic work activity.

He runs a small fold of Shetland cattle and a flock of NC Cheviot and Zwartble sheep on Glachbeg Croft. Activity also focuses on free-range egg production, soft fruits and vegetables.

Bob's background is 25 years of rural studies teaching, latterly managing a local authority education centre combined with a city farm, coming to the Highlands to set up Glachbeg in 2001. He is passionate about his work and can see this kind of activity as a real alternative to institutional regimes or prescribed drugs for people in need of a supportive environment. "The hands-on practical crofting context encourages people to do things that make them feel good about themselves," he commented.



SCF recently attended a social crofting meeting at the Centre for Health Science in Inverness. We met Anne and John Boyd-Mackay, who are setting up a social crofting venture on their family croft at Ardgour, near Fort William. In September 2015 they became involved with the AHA (Active Healthy Achieving) Futures Group, a transition project supporting young people, in association with Nimble Fingers and the Lochaber Rural Education Trust. Supported through funding from the Autism Innovation and Development Fund, they worked with young people with autism between the ages of fifteen and twenty five.

A former nurse, Anne can see the positive benefits of this type of crofting diversification. "Social

crofting is important. Many studies have demonstrated the positive health benefits of nature and working with animals," she said. "At Ardgour we provide first-hand experience of life on a family croft. We focus on what the young person can do, not on what they can't. Each person is given a role which enables them to discover their inner qualities, and in turn boosts their self-confidence.

We work as a team with a sense of equality, in an honest and open environment. Young people are instructed in the care and supervision of their chosen animal, which involves active listening and ultimately taking responsibility for the animal. This promotes physical well-being, personal competence and independence."

Setting up as a social crofter...things to consider

Will you set up as an individual or will you work with your local council or a charity to offer your croft as a venue? It can be easier to work in partnership with established social services or charities as they have policy in place and can guide you on your duties and responsibilities. The choices are: 1) Set up as an individual; 2) set up as a community project; 3) provide a service to support existing projects.

Health and safety – will work be largely outdoors, or with livestock/machinery? Risk assessments should be activity-based and consider each individual person involved in that activity. For example a person in a wheelchair may only be able to access raised beds in a polytunnel; or someone with restricted mobility may only be able to handle sheep using a turning crate or combi-clamp.

People who attend should have suitable clothing, steel-toe-capped boots and waterproofs.

You and any others who work with you on the croft must hold a current Disclosure Scotland PVG (Protection of Vulnerable Groups) which costs £59 – www.mygov.scot/apply-for-pvg.

Your croft insurer must be notified of your intention to provide a service of this kind and public liability must be at a level suitable to the number of people who come and the frequency of the visits. You may need to give supplementary details about what work you intend to do and details of risk assessments, child protection policy, protection of vulnerable adults policy.



Where to find out more

The Highlands and Islands Social Farming and Crofting Network is a voluntary organisation providing a place for interested parties to come together and share experiences. Join the public group page on Facebook.

Social Farming Across Borders is based in Ireland and started out in Co Leitrim, an area with similar challenges to the Highlands and Islands in terms of topography, weather and population decline – www.socialfarmingacrossborders.org

The Shirle Project is a supported employment agency in the Highlands and Islands looking for placements for clients wishing to improve agricultural and crofting skills. Contact Neilan Rodger – www.shirle.co.uk.

Trellis is an organisation focussing on therapeutic gardening in Scotland – www.trellisscotland.org.uk.

Care Farming Scotland – www.carefarmingscotland.org.uk.



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](https://www.facebook.com/IanBlackford.SNP)

Web: www.ianblackford.scot

29 High Street
Dingwall
IV15 9RU

HORNER SHEARING

Longhorn® 12V Complete Shearing Kit

Includes machine, flexible drive, handpiece,
3 combs and 6 cutters - **£529***



Farmers Packs

4 Combs and 8 Cutters,
Standard - **£58***, Wide - **£62***



Grant Quotations Available.

*Plus Delivery and VAT

Visit our website at www.hornershearing.com
or call us on 01200 427 419

ALLANS OF GILLOCK LTD



GILLOCK MAINS, GILLOCK, WICK, CAITHNESS, KW1 5UR
TEL: 01955 661211

YOUR LOCAL BUILDERS & AGRICULTURAL MERCHANTS



Stockists of

FENCING MATERIALS & GATES SHEEP & CATTLE HANDLING & FEEDING EQUIPMENT

CAITHNESS

Tel: 01955 661211
Fax: 01955 661244
info@allans.co.uk

ORKNEY

Tel: 01856 761594
Fax: 01856 761709
orkney@allans.co.uk

SHETLAND

Tel: 01950 460417
Fax: 01950 460013
shetland@allans.co.uk

INVERNESS

Tel: 01463 713270
Fax: 01463 713393
inverness@allans.co.uk



KATE FORBES MSP

FOR SKYE, LOCHABER AND BADENOCH
(INCLUDING DINGWALL, THE BLACK ISLE AND THE GREAT GLEN)

Raise any issue with your MSP Kate Forbes at one of the
following constituent surgeries

Lochaber

7th & 8th April
26th & 27th May

Dingwall & the Black Isle

28th April
9th June

Skye

21st & 22nd April
19th & 20th May

Loch Ness

4th April
12th May

Badenoch

5th April & 2nd June

Follow my social media pages for
the most up-to-date surgery news



[facebook.com/kate4slb/](https://www.facebook.com/kate4slb/)



[@KateForbesMSP](https://twitter.com/KateForbesMSP)

www.kateforbes.scot

Please phone 01349 863888 or email
Kate.Forbes.MSP@parliament.scot to make an appointment.

MEMBERS PAGES

Crofting newsletter

ARE YOU feeling out of touch? Does it seem like a long time between editions of *The Crofter*? Would you like a copy of the Crofting e-newsletter every month? Just send your email address to hq@crofting.org and we will send you a copy of *Crofting News*.

Company secretary

The SCF company secretary will be vacating his position at the AGM in 2018. Any person, whether member or not, can apply for this voluntary post. There will be a hand-over period in the lead-up to the change. Applications should be made to the chief executive at HQ. As yet, no closing date has been fixed but the position will become available not later than June 2018. Details of the role can be obtained from the present company secretary, John Bannister, through SCF HQ, or by email to johnbannister@crofting.org. He will be pleased to discuss this with you.



January Crofting News



SCF New Year's Resolutions 2017

There are two 'legs' to SCF's work: representation and development. Representation: The Scottish Crofting Federation is the only organisation dedicated to the representation of crofters and crofting. We

Facebook, Twitter, and Email icons.

OXFORD REAL FARMING CONFERENCE

Scottish Crofting Federation at ORFC

Representatives from SCF delivered a paper and Q & A session at the [OREC](#) early in January. Crofting's New Voices, a short film by Bafta Award winner, Robin Haig was also shown. For more information on the film click [here....](#)

WEDNESDAY 31ST MAY 2017

Kinnahaird Farm, Contin Strathpeffer, Ross-shire, IV14 9EB

By Kind Permission of JP Clark Ltd

Further Info, Competition & Trade Stand Forms from Euan Emslie, NSA Highlandsheep Organiser
T: 01430 441870 M: 07718 908523
E: euan@nsascotland.org
www.nsascotland.org

NSA

Major Sponsor

Harbro
QUALITY LIVESTOCK NUTRITION

highland sheep
NSA SCOTLAND 2017

FEATURES

FARM TOUR • TRADE STANDS • SHEEP BREED STANDS • SHOW & SALE EWE HOGGS SEMINARS/SOUNBITES • DEMONSTRATIONS • COMPETITIONS

SHOW & SALE OF PAIRS OF EWE HOGGS

Entries from breeders of the following breeds are now being accepted for this unique show and sale to be held at the event.

- Class 1 – Mules
- Class 2 – North Country Cheviot (Hill)
- Class 3 – North Country Cheviot (Park)
- Class 4 – Scottish Blackface
- Class 5 – Suffolk
- Class 6 – Texel
- Class 7 – Any Other Native Breed
- Class 8 – Any Other Continental Breed
- Class 9 – Any Cross Bred

NEXT GENERATION SHEPHERD OF THE YEAR

Do you work with sheep? Are you motivated by working with sheep? Do you enjoy working with sheep? If so and you have left school and are the age of 26 or under on Wednesday 18th July 2018, why not enter the Next Generation Shepherd of the Year competition. The competition is designed to test your practical skills and practical knowledge used in your every-day work with sheep, as well as your broader knowledge of the sheep industry throughout the UK and Europe, including the various sheep breeds. The competition offers the NSA Highlandsheep rose bowl and a cash prize of £300 to the winner, with £200 going to the runner-up and £100 for third place. The highest placed competitor under the age of 21 will also receive a prize of £100.

Supported By

QMS

Mainline Sponsors

CRYSTALYX

Shearwell Data

MEMBERS PAGES



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, 16th June 2017 at 2.00 pm to consider, and if thought fit, to pass the following resolutions:

- 1. To receive the company’s accounts and report of the directors and auditors for the year ended 30th November 2016. A summary of the accounts will be available at the meeting and the full or summary accounts will be provided on request to the registered office.
- 2. To elect persons proposed as directors (Article 10 et seq) and/or ratify the appointment of co-opted directors, namely Iain Keith and Donald MacKinnon.
- 3. To re-elect director Fiona Mandeville under Article 10.10, whose term as director ends as of the date of this meeting, to serve until October 2017, being the anniversary of her appointment and the maximum period permitted under Article 10.11.
- 4. To re-elect SCF director Yvonne White for a further term under Article 10.10.
- 5. To appoint accountants/auditors proposed by the directors, or re-appoint Ritsons, Chartered Accountants, of 27 Huntly Street, Inverness IV3 5PR as independent examiners of the company accounts and to authorise the directors to pay for their remuneration.
- 6. To receive and resolve other motions tabled for consideration at the meeting.

By order of the board of directors.

Company Secretary: John Bannister
Date of notice: 31st March 2017



© Martin Benson – North Uist

Why should I pay my SCF annual subscription by Direct Debit?

- ✓ You won't have to remember when it's due.
- ✓ It will cut down on SCF administrative costs.
- ✓ You will save money – **15% discount** in your first year.
- ✓ It makes sense.



CROFTERS INSURANCE HELPING YOU WEATHER THE ELEMENTS SINCE 1910



Find out more by contacting
your local NFU Mutual branch
at nfumutual.co.uk



NFU Mutual
INSURANCE | PENSIONS | INVESTMENTS

It's about time®

The National Farmers Union Mutual Insurance Society Limited (No. 111982). Registered in England. Registered Office: Tiddington Road, Stratford upon Avon, Warwickshire CV37 7BJ. Authorised by the Prudential Regulation Authority and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority and the Prudential Regulation Authority. A member of the Association of British Insurers. For security and training purposes, telephone calls may be recorded and monitored.

Young Crofter Donald MacKinnon joins the SCF board



FIRST got involved in SCF at the Crofting 2020 event in Glencanisp in 2015, joining shortly afterwards.

I'm currently studying geography and politics at the University of Glasgow and hope to return home to Lewis when I graduate later this year.

Crofting has always been a big part of my life. Looking after the sheep on the family croft in Lewis is something I've done for as long as I can remember. At the event in Glencanisp I realised how important it is that crofters and crofting have a political voice. SCF provides this.

Over the past few months I have regularly

attended the Cross Party Group on Crofting in the Scottish Parliament on behalf of SCF Young Crofters. This has been a fantastic experience and has allowed me to engage with politicians, civil servants and other bodies on issues affecting young crofters.

I'm delighted to have been appointed to the SCF board and hope that over the next few years I can make a valuable contribution. With the challenges of Brexit and reform of crofting legislation ahead it is more important than ever that our voice is heard. I hope that I can help to be a part of this.

Crofting Law Group conference in Stornoway

The Crofting Law Group will be holding its annual conference this year at Lews Castle in Stornoway.

It is likely that it will be in May but details have yet to be finalised. If you are interested in attending, contact the group's secretary Brian Inkster at Inksters Solicitors, 142 St Vincent Street, Glasgow, G2 5LA (tel: 0141 229 0880; e-mail: brian@inksters.com) to register your interest and obtain further details.



How to contact us

Postal address and registered office

Scottish Crofting Federation Headquarters
Kyle of Lochalsh IV40 8AX

General enquiries and membership:

hq@crofting.org
 Tel: 01599 530 005

Training: training@crofting.org

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

Advertising: lucy@crofting.org
 Lucy Beattie
 Tel: 01854 612 220

SCF legal helpline:
01599 230 300

visit www.crofting.org
 for full contact details

Company Number SC 218658
 Charity Number SC 031919

Although every effort is made to ensure the accuracy of the information printed in this publication, SCF cannot accept liability for errors or omissions. The views expressed in this publication are not necessarily those of the SCF.



Scottish Crofting Produce
Highlands and Islands Croft Origin
Tòrradh Croftarachd na h-Alba
 As a choit ann a' Ghàidhealtachd 's na h-Eileanan

SCF legal helpline

PAID-UP SCF members can obtain free initial legal advice from crofting law experts Inksters Solicitors.

Just phone **01599 230300** and have your membership number to hand. If you need more than this first free advice session, you are eligible for a 10% discount on Inksters' normal charges. If you're unsure of your membership

status, just get in touch with SCF HQ before contacting the legal helpline.

This is one of the many benefits of being a member of the only organisation solely dedicated to campaigning for crofters and fighting for the future of crofting. It could save you more than the cost of your annual subscription.



SCF board and council at their meeting in December. Outgoing chair Fiona Mandeville was presented with a cromag, as is the SCF tradition.