Crofting Commission tackles issues of crofting lifeblood

It is very heartening to see that the Crofting Commission has recently appointed a consultant – Gwyn Jones, who is known to many in crofting and who has a record of first-rate research in essential crofting matters such as common grazings and the use of SRDP – to study how subsidy support systems currently support crofting, and to put forward proposals on how it might do so in future after Brexit.

Gwyn will report in the summer. See the Commission article on this on page 4.

The Commission has also offered to help SCF in a pilot project to bring together those with unused croft land and young people looking for a croft. The intention is to trial this in the Outer Hebrides. An application has been submitted by SCF to Leader for funding.

This is an essential area that SCF and the Crofting Commission can collaborate in – getting crofts back into use and bringing young folk into crofting.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- Crofting law consultation update
- New crofting support research
- Lack of abattoir provision
- Livestock worrying
- Donald’s hortiblog
- Practical advice
- Training
...and much more

Post-Brexit agricultural support: the tide is turning

Many spent the first few days of this working year in Oxford at the Oxford Real Farming Conference.

It started nine years ago with the aim of helping create a more enlightened agriculture, bringing together producers with scientists, economists, activists and lawyers – and everyone else with a serious interest in food and agriculture. It is now considerably better attended than the industry’s older Oxford Farming Conference, which takes place at the same time down the road. Videos of presentations and papers can be found on the Oxford Real Farming Conference website.

This year, secretary of state for environment Michael Gove spoke on farming for the next generation, outlining a vision for a Post-Brexit agricultural support: the tide is turning

The Scottish Government’s consultation on crofting law closed 20th November and the results are being analysed still.

The results are clearly causing some bafflement. Surrounded by peripheral questions, the thing that most respondents will have deliberated upon, and will want to know, is which route Scottish Government intends to take to reform crofting law. Options offered ranged from doing nothing to starting again with a clean sheet – rewriting crofting law.

Looking at the responses to the consultation, it is significant not so much how different options were chosen as expected, but how the lines between options were blurred. The difference between option 2, amendment and consolidation, and option 3, restatement of law, was never very clear anyway; but option 4, a clean sheet, would at first seem to stand out from the others as something new and different, until you read the responses.

The main organisations that opted for the clean sheet, including Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, Shetland Isles Council and NFUS, all say that they want a clean sheet with caveats; a new bill pre-populated with all that is useful in current legislation. Not quite a clean sheet, but it is heartening that they don’t simply want to start again, nigh on an impossibility wrought with difficulty and risk.

Option 4 with caveats is actually not that far from options 2 and 3, the options chosen by such organisations as SCF, the Crofting Commission, Scottish Land and Estates, Law Society Scotland and SAC Consultants, as well as legal experts Derek Flynn and Brian Inkster – wanting all that isn’t useful in current legislation to be taken out, retaining good law for a new bill.

It is quite difficult to see the difference, as both approaches can achieve the same end – a crofting bill that leads to law that helps rather than hinders crofters and crofting.

The Scottish Government’s consultation on crofting law closed 20th November and the results are being analysed still.

The Scottish Government recently
Message from the chair...

Russell Smith

I n this edition of The Crofter we have included a survey which I hope you will take the time to complete and return.

It is designed to gather your views on what we are doing for you, our members, to make sure we are actually doing the things that are important. Without feedback from all our members we can’t be sure that we are tackling the right issues – all ideas are welcome and we will feed back the results in the next issues of The Crofter.

The board gathers views regularly through the advisory council, local meetings and direct from individual members; but a regular survey does help us to know we are on the right track. There is also an online version (go to www.crofting.org and follow the link) and I would urge you to fill in the form online as this saves us money in postage and time in typing in your answers.

In the last survey we recorded an overall satisfaction rating of 3.9 out of 5 and we hope to do better this time. The board did look at what members told us was important to them and we have tried to develop those areas.

The survey asks for your email address (if you have one) as more and more goes online – witness this year’s AGM forms – which is tough if you don’t have a decent broadband connection. And this is an issue we have raised at every opportunity on your behalf.

The reason for wanting to know your email is so we can keep in touch with you, both to let you know what is going on and to seek your views on items of immediate interest. I would especially urge you to sign up for the monthly e-newsletter as it contains useful info on dosing dates for schemes, dates of upcoming meetings and reports on what SCF has been doing.

Also look out for future online or email surveys and please answer them. It strengthens our case when talking to the government if we can say “75% of our members” agree rather than just saying “we think that most of our members agree.”

Electronic communications have become more important in the last few years, but will never completely take over from local meetings – if you want to hold a meeting in your area, HQ can help you organise it and arrange for some of the board to get there to meet you and listen to your concerns first-hand.

In the board’s governing body and the council which is the advisory body to the board, we work hard at maintaining a balance of young and old, male and female, drawn from all crofting areas along with a mix of skills to give us a truly representative outlook. But this is not always easy and we welcome input from anybody who would like to be involved. We need a mix of viewpoints; and with more people we can spread the volunteer workload more evenly.

The most recent board meeting endorsed our paper on Brexit (which you can find on our website) but thought that we needed to do more to push our key demand for no tariffs on lamb and beef to the EU, continuing support for agriculture – especially for the hills and remote areas – and a replacement for the CAP that has crofting designed in from the beginning, not just added on as an afterthought.

So I met a couple of Highland MPs to push the SCF arguments and they agreed to pass on the paper to Michael Gove, UK secretary of state for the environment. We continue to lobby on behalf of our members and for all crofters.

Here’s to a good lambing.

Russell Smith meets Ian Blackford MP

A letter from the chief executive

Dear member

Last year’s wet weather and this winter’s snow has increased feed costs for crofters and that, along with the uncertainty of Brexit, means you will be particularly concerned with what you spend your hard-earned money on; and possibly your SCF membership comes under scrutiny.

You will see from the articles in this issue that we achieve a huge amount on your behalf as the only organisation solely dedicated to campaigning for crofters and fighting for the interests of crofting and rural businesses which help keep communities coherent and ensure the culture in agriculture is kept healthy. Whether it’s upland farmers in Wales or Cumbria, crofters in Scotland or small livestock farmers in Northern Ireland, we need to ensure support is there for those who keep rural life vital.

Advocates of crofting have said this for decades and it is heartening to hear it coming from Westminster.

SCF of course hopes to see it borne out in Scottish policy, with the continuation of crofting support and an equitable less favoured areas scheme that compensates for hardship, replacing the current income support that, to restate Mr Gove, “gives the most from the public purse to those who have the most private wealth”, a situation that clearly has to end.

The Scottish Government Agriculture Champions, in their interim paper, seem to agree: “We have producers whose options are severely limited by their location and physical assets, but who in many cases produce food while also generating other benefits that society values – supporting the local community and economy, promoting land abandonment and depopulation and farming in ways which protect our globally important wildlife and landscapes.

That sums up crofting very well.

They continue, “Those who are active and proactive in this role as stewards of the land should be financially rewarded.” The champions conclude that, “Public-funded farm support is not an automatic right; it is an asset offered to promote self-betterment and it should be used as such.”

Mr Gove has also declared his support for a theme close to our hearts, that of rural resilience: “There are any number of smaller farm and rural businesses which help keep communities coherent and ensure the culture in agriculture is kept healthy... Whether it’s upland farmers in Wales or Cumbria, crofters in Scotland or small livestock farmers in Northern Ireland, we need to ensure support is there for those who keep rural life vital.”

This could quickly and easily get rid of the major injustices of the current system and has been voiced by SCF in our proposals for a future Scottish scheme.

Continued from page 1

SCF GREETING CARDS

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Heavy snow in parts of the country has made getting feed to livestock costly, difficult and dangerous, with only four weeks to lambing

THE CROFTER, APRIL 2018

THE CROFTER, APRIL 2018
Support for crofting

The Crofting Commission has commissioned a piece of research work on crofting communities. However, the current agricultural support from a crofting perspective, examining any perceived disadvantages or advantages to crofting. Additionally, the Commission wishes to examine the feasibility of some form of separate support structure that would be more specific to crofting. In this context, the Commission is specifically considering support for legal, environmental, regulatory functions and procedures – were included in the consultation on the review of crofting legislation last autumn, the Scottish Government stated that it was considering some form of separate support structure for crofting. In addition, there will be a vital part of its legislative function to promote the interest of crofting. It also has relevance to its general duty to keep under general review all matters relating to crofts and crofting conditions and to advise Scottish Ministers in that connection. While primarily a regulatory body, the Commission recognises that the overall crofting system cannot simply operate by enforcement of regulations. There is awareness that support mechanisms are important to the future of the crofting system and it is vital that these deliver to best effect. In doing so, it makes it more feasible for the Commission to deliver its regulatory responsibilities. With its consultation on the review of crofting legislation last autumn, the Scottish Government stated that it was considering some form of separate support structure for crofting. In addition, there will be a vital part of its legislative function to promote the interest of crofting. It also has relevance to its general duty to keep under general review all matters relating to crofts and crofting conditions and to advise Scottish Ministers in that connection. 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Unsupervised dogs and sheep do not mix

SCF vice-chair Yvonne White considers this emotive issue.

DOGS SEE sheep as prey, or an amusing fast-moving plaything, and will chase, maim and/or kill them.

Domesticated descendants of wolves, dogs are especially dangerous round livestock when there is nothing to stop them, so predatory instincts come to the fore and they hunt in a pack.

Although overall the number of dogs has shown no large increase, there does appear to be an increase of non-working dogs in the crofting counties. It is vital that all dogs, particularly young excitable ones, are supervised at all times.

As personal experience has shown, it is not good practice to let even a young labrador, the most predictable of family pets, alone in a garden where it can jump a fence and have fun bounding about after white balls of fluff, resulting in a highly-stressful death for sheep and lambs.

Incidences of sheep worrying are on the increase. 2017 statistics show that insurance claims for attacks on farm animals are at a record high.

In Scotland the amount claimed for farm animals are at a record high.

Sheep worrying is highly stressful, cruel for the sheep and upsetting for crofters.

Dogs can be trained not to chase sheep, and should be kept on leads at all times. People do not allow dogs to wander lead-free along a main road city with all its associated dangers, so why let pet dogs wander the lead on open hill or inbye land with livestock?

Crofters and farmers have the legal right to shoot dogs chasing sheep; but if you do own a gun you do not necessarily have time to rush back to the locked cabinet, load it and get back to the scene of carnage in time to shoot the offending dog.

Taking pictures and reporting any incidents to the police is important. Even when the police take no apparent action against dogs identified as killing lambs (other than a verbal warning to the owner), multiple crofter statements are taken and pictures of the offending dogs provided.

To protect livestock, the farmer has the right to kill the offending dog. Although the owner and the person in charge of a dog can be charged with an offence, fixed to £1000 and made to pay a compensation order. The local authority can also apply for an order to have the dog destroyed.

The devastating effects of livestock worrying

Many reported incidents of livestock worrying are by dogs local to the area, where dogs may be allowed to roam or are known to escape from escape gardens. If you know of any dogs not under control, contact the local authority dog warden who can assess the situation and consider issuing a dog control notice. These written notices can be served on owners who do not keep their dogs under proper control, and place control measures such as keeping the dog on a lead or being muzzled in a public place.

Unfortunately there are still reported incidents where livestock keepers were left with no choice but to injure or destroy dogs they caught worrying their stock. This is never a situation any keeper wants to find themselves in, and it can be done only in self-defence, for the protection of any other person, or for the protection of livestock.

Police Scotland urges livestock keepers, and anyone who witnesses livestock worrying, to contact the police on 101 or 999 in an emergency. All reported cases will be thoroughly investigated and those responsible will be reported to the procurator fiscal.

If a dog worries livestock on any agricultural land then the owner and, if different, the person in charge is guilty of a criminal offence. The legislation relating to this is contained in the Dogs (Protection of Livestock) Act 1953 and “worrying” is defined as:

• attacking livestock;
• chasing livestock in such a way as to cause injury or suffering or abortion or diminution in produce;
• being at large, not otherwise under close control or on a lead, in a field or enclosure where there are sheep.

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**TRAINING**

Sheepdog handling skills in Inverness and Skye

THE START of the year is never an easy time to feel motivated to stand out in the cold for six hours solid, but that is exactly what twelve folk chose to do with their Saturday at the end of January.

SCF Training is working with Iain MacKay of Leanach, Culloden, and organised two fantastic training days for twenty people in January and February. The first was at his own place near Inverness and the second at the croft of Gemma Nicholson at South Kilbride, Skye.

Sharon MacLean, originally from Lochbroom and now working near Forres, came to the course and commended Iain to SCF training: "The training day has helped me enormously. Iain gave me a bigger understanding of my dog and how to get the best out of her. This enables me to do my job much more efficiently and with no added stress. With plenty of things to work on at home and maybe another lesson in the future, I feel much more confident and would like to aim for a novice trial this autumn. Thank you to Iain, Lucy and SCF for an excellent day."

This season there are plenty of courses besides sheepdog training to help those with sheep. In March, Gairloch sees a pre-lamb and ewe health workshop, with two lambing courses in Muir of Ord in April and animal husbandry in June in Argyll. Looking to July we are hoping to run clipping courses as usual and have been in touch with the British Wool Marketing Board to work with them to develop a few other events aimed at crofters.

**Fencing course for women**

WHO WOULD have expected two dry sunny days at the end of February, and indeed the sight of twelve women constructing a strained-wire fence along the banks of the River Kanaird in Wester Ross?

The course was offered following demand from women trainees for all-female fencing and clipping courses. A crofter from Torridon wanted to do the course "because I wouldn't be one woman edged to the side as a hobbyist. This strongly appeals to me as it is specifically for women and I need to fence an area. If I had to engage a contractor I couldn't afford to fence the whole area, which would set back my plans significantly."

Tutors Brian and Carrie are both crofters themselves and have been involved in fencing contracts and training young people in a local social enterprise. The day was the first of its kind and we welcomed a visit from well-known sheep producer Joyce Campbell from Armadale, chair of the Women in Agriculture Taskforce; crofting commissioner Mairi MacKenzie; and BBC Alba broadcast journalist Maggie MacKinnon.

Attendees were delighted with the course and were able to complete a 50m stretch of stock fencing.

“I now feel confident to tackle a line of fencing – before I wouldn’t have done so”

“IT’s great to learn with a group of women” Patrick Krause, who leads the Women in Agriculture Taskforce training sub-group, said “The course is inspired by the Women in Agriculture Taskforce that was set up following research commissioned by Scottish Government, which identified a pressing need for more support to training for women in agriculture, including all-female training courses and courses being made ‘women-friendly.’

“The research also identified other far-reaching objectives such as including women in positions of leadership. SCF has a good history of equality in its governance, having a mixed-gender board and women in the position of chair of the organisation over the years – a lesson to other larger agricultural organisations, which are specifically mentioned in the report as failing in this regard.

“The taskforce will prepare guidance on making training more accessible for women and SCF will be managing further training courses in skills areas of interest to women. All credit to Lucy Beattie and Tina Hartley, SCF training managers, for arranging the training.”

All photos courtesy of Joyce Campbell. The event was held at the croft of member Duncan MacColl.
Bella Crowe of the Scottish Food Coalition explains what bothers you about how our food system works? And what do you think we should do about it? Scotland is on the cusp of potentially transformative changes to our food system. Later this year the government will consult on a ‘Good Food Nation Bill’ – a new law to put our food on a different footing. We have heard for many years about how individuals should make better food choices, but the scale of the issues demands structural interventions. We didn’t reduce smoking by education alone. What are the changes we could make to our food system so that it is better for people’s health, for livelihoods, and for our environment too?

There is a long way to go, but we must have the ambition that Scottish agriculture will move steadily towards gender equality.

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- Croft status investigations

Women in agriculture

IT WILL NOT have escaped your notice that this February marked 100 years since some women were given the vote – or at least some women were. The Representation of the People Act 1918 was an important law because it allowed some women to vote for the very first time; and it also allowed all men over the age of 21 to vote too. So we, quite smugly, like to think that we have equality in this country.

A fascinating piece of research was carried out on behalf of the Scottish Government on Women in Farming and the Agriculture Sector. This shows that, sadly, we in agriculture do not have anything to be smug about. Numerous cases were exposed of gender inequity in the family, on the holding, in the mart, in organisations, in training; in fact in every aspect of the agricultural sector. It makes uncomfortable, though familiar, reading. The report can be found online.

Interestingly, crofting – whilst not faultless by any means – came out considerably better than the industrial farming sector. It may be that in the nature of smaller holdings, with multiple enterprises and income streams, men often need to work away, and women actually run the croft. If you have other ideas please do let us know.

Following on from the research, cabinet secretary for the rural economy Fergus Ewing set up a Women in Agriculture taskforce, chaired by himself and Sutherland hill farmer Joyce Campbell. SCF sits on the taskforce. Our remit is to look at how best to implement recommendations from the report.

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Take part in a kitchen table talk

WHAT BOthers you about how our food system works? And what do you think we should do about it? Scotland is on the cusp of potentially transformative changes to our food system. Later this year the government will consult on a ‘Good Food Nation Bill’ – a new law to put our food on a different footing. We have heard for many years about how individuals should make better food choices, but the scale of the issues demands structural interventions.

We didn’t reduce smoking by education alone. What are the changes we could make to our food system so that it is better for people’s health, for livelihoods, and for our environment too?

At the moment, it’s all to play for and the Scottish Food Coalition is inviting everyone in Scotland to take part in a kitchen table talk to share your concerns for the food system and priorities for action.

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Local slaughter for high-provenance meat

Scotland extensively reared meat is justifiably highly regarded and it is widely agreed that the niche, high-provenance meat market is the way forward for Scottish localities and for Scotland, whatever happens regarding Europe. Yet high-quality meat producers efforts are stymied by having a scarcity of local abattoirs and thus compromised traceability and provenance. Animal welfare suffers, with vast transport distances, and the added cost of traveling to and from the abattoir can make food selling unprofitable for small producers.

A crofter in the north of Skye will have to take stock for slaughter over 120 miles to Dingwall, then go home, then go back for the meat. So the animals have a three to four-hour trailer ride on the crofter drives a total of a 12-16 hours. After seven years of campaigning for a micro-abattoir on Skye, and a huge input of voluntary time and effort, the community group now has fully-costed, detailed plans and a site with planning permission. There is public money available for just such a food processing, marketing and cooperation initiative, but funding is restricted by the Scottish Government’s interpretation of EU state aid rules.

Under EU rules a case can be argued for there being market failure and that the abattoir would operate as a not-for-profit service to the crofting community. There is public money available for the cooperation initiative, but funding is restricted by the Scottish Government’s interpretation of EU state aid rules.

Romasdal Highlander

The Humane Slaughter Association’s position on the transport of food animals continues to be that they should be slaughtered as close as possible to the point where they are raised. This is the only way that any risk to their welfare can be kept to a minimum. As long as animal welfare standards are in place, the Humane Slaughter Association sees value in maintaining local abattoirs, as this may help to minimise transport times.

Small-scale production of beef and lamb in western Scotland

Animals have a three to four-hour trailer ride and then go home, then go back for the meat. So the animals have an added cost of travel to and from the abattoir, which can make food selling unprofitable for small producers.

The overall problem for northern producers with small numbers of cattle and sheep is that the producer is paying those transport costs, typically into markets where their livestock are seen as less attractive to buyers than finished cattle from further south. The irony is that the quality of the meat from the more extensively reared livestock can be very good, and demand for product in the north from locals and the tourist trade has great potential to grow.

The facts are that extensively-grazed livestock, consuming a wide variety of plants, produce meat that is relatively rich in omega-3 fatty acids compared with intensive grass and cereal-based ruminants. These are positive attributes for meat for human nutrition. The cutting system also has a low input of fossil fuels compared with many systems, at least until the livestock are put into a wagon for a long trip south. The land management aspects of Highland production can also be positive. But current thinking for many would be that Highland production is not efficient. How do we define efficiency?

We know that many people, and much time and money, have been spent on the debates and the sometimne provision of processing facilities in the Highlands and Islands. The present situation does not support commercial livestock. Is there need to push the debate harder from a strategic point of view? Centralised facilities in the hands of major companies may produce low unit costs, but, as the Scottish pig and poultry sectors know, as the risks from external sources are high.

Sweden also pays a lot of attention to the distance live animals have to be transported to and from the welfare of their farming communities – see the article on page 17. If other countries can make the decision to protect animals and local economies, why not Scotland?

If Scotland’s quality meat industry, the backbone of Scottish agriculture, is to thrive post-Brexit, producers serving local, niche, and high-quality markets must be enabled to do so. In the crofting areas that means having access to local abattoir services, derogations for local production and support from the Scottish Government. Without them, some of the country’s iconic-designated food products will be at risk, as well as the culture, landscape and environment of extensive livestock production.

In this issue we feature a number of members whose quality meat businesses have been hindered by lack of local abattoir provision.

Jamie Robertson
Livestock Management Systems Ltd
Aberdeen AB11 5OE

The meeting took place within the scope of the EU project SALSA – Small farms, small food businesses, sustainable food and nutrition security. Visit the project website and sign up for updates:

Local slaughter for high-provenance meat

Global situation

N light of a rising population and an increasingly resource-constrained world, it is important to understand how small farms can contribute towards supplying the demand for food and nutrition security. Researchers from the James Hutton Institute invited small farmers and other interested parties in Oban to discuss how food is distributed from crofts, the challenges farmers face and possible measures to address them.

Many crofters in Argyll produce cattle and sheep, the majority of which are sent to the east coast and further south. This is a problem for farms where the grazing season is longer and grazing is managed more sustainably. Participants, even though they felt that there were opportunities for increasing production levels, voiced concerns including a lack of demand in the local market, high costs of overwintering animals, and the lack of local support for the project and as leverage for the other funders, as well as enabling the delivery of key milestones in the capital build plan.

It is anticipated that the funding secured from the community share issue will be allocated to purchase the site and to carry out preliminary works. If the total project funding requirement is not reached, the community will have to replace the share issue and the project will be stopped.

Skye and Lochalsh Micro Abattoir Ltd is now seeking to log notes of interest and pledges from groups, individuals and businesses by registering an interest through the Skye and Lochalsh Micro Abattoir website http://skyleochabattoir.com/sign-up/.

For more information, please contact
Irina Vlachopoulou
The James Hutton Institute
Craigiebuckler, Aberdeen AB15 8QH
Email irina.vlachopoulou@hutton.ac.uk

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DIVERSIFICATION HAS been the watchword of crofters for more than half a century and still exemplifies that perfectly. In addition to a busy accountancy practice and a sports consultancy business, Brian Cameron and his wife Julie run one of the UK’s largest goat meat enterprises.

“In total we farm around thirty-seven acres in croft-sized small fields. We started from a belief that great meat is all about ‘on-the-plate’ quality and that supermarket meat often falls short in wholesomeness and palatability. We wanted to market something better. Being traditionalists, we started with sheep and found our hogget and mutton sold particularly well.

We celebrate integrating our habitats under one whole farm unit – we see all of this as adding value. Our cows will be only grass fed and we’re transitioning to organic pig and hen feed. We’re working towards a model where we butcher one whole farm unit – we see all of this too as adding value.

We started our crofting journey two years ago after purchasing a semi-derelict croft on the edge of a windy hill in the Cairngorms National Park, writes Lynn Cassells.

We have years ahead of us before we can see a real profit margin, all the time investing any spare money we have into building our business. At Lynbreck, we are lucky to live a 10-minute drive from our nearest abattoir. We know our money we have into building our business.

For all of us who really care about the life and death of our animals, long journeys as a result of closed abattoirs to larger commercial set-ups is far from ideal. It takes away value and that is unfair.

All of these challenges aside, we feel positive about the future and proud to be a part of the crofting movement. We want to work with others like us to make the little people the ones with the loudest voice for the naturally-added-value produce crofting can provide.

Can we really keep it local?

Like every crofter in Scotland, writes Brian Cameron from Elchies, Crathie, there’s always another job to do – then there’s the jobs on the farm.

Great meat is all about on-the-plate quality – and a nearby abattoir

Great meat is all about on-the-plate quality – and a nearby abattoir.

Lynbreck exemplifies that perfectly. In ten years our knowledge of Boer goats – the Aberdeen Angus of meat goats – has grown immeasurably and we have developed practices that ensure absolute on-the-plate quality. For example goats are stressed by travel, and stress at slaughter time causes a rise in pH levels which in turn damages meat quality.

It is important to ensure that abattoir trips are short in distance – published research suggests less than one hour – and relatively stress-free. Another problem is cold-shortening due to the lack of subcutaneous fat on goats. Caused by rapid cooling post-slaughter this makes the meat tough and stringy. Over the years we have worked with Scotbeef of Inverurie to optimise the whole slaughter process to avoid these problems. Without an abattoir within an hour’s travel and the ability to respond to these specific needs our business would fail.

We spend hours of our lives promoting Lynbreck on social media. We have our own logo, business cards, bespoke produce labels and a website. We deliver direct to customers, adding value all the way. We celebrate integrating our habitats under one whole farm unit – we see all of this as adding value. Our cows will be only grass fed and we’re transitioning to organic pig and hen feed. We’re working towards a model where we butcher one whole farm unit – we see all of this too as adding value.

Our plans for Lynbreck are ambitious and extensive – we may be little but we’re aiming high. We’re surfing the wave of nature-friendly farming with a goal to provide the highest-quality produce. But in a consumerist world where cost and ease of purchase rules the roost, we need to shout out loud about that added value we can offer.

Added value for us comes from what we can harness directly from nature. It comes from the healthy, untended soils that grow the nutritious plants which our livestock graze on. Added value also comes from a life where our animals can live without fear or stress and can express their natural instincts, which we use to manage, restore and maintain the health of our land.

Great meat is the most-eaten red meat in the world and, as well as its great taste and texture, it is a very healthy alternative, being lower in fat, cholesterol and calories, weight for weight, than chicken, yet with higher levels of iron, potassium, proteins and Vitamin B and B12 – in short, a truly wholesome meat.

“Although we still supply this to a nearby abattoir to these specific needs our business would fail.”

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We want as well.

Organic feed and food processing equipment is expensive. Working two jobs to make life pay outside of crofting is tiring and time-consuming. For all of us who really care about the life and death of our animals, long journeys as a result of closed abattoirs to larger commercial set-ups is far from ideal. It takes away value and that is unfair.

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Direct selling challenges

Cara Cameron outlines her experience.

Highland Croft Produce, based near Loch Shin, Lairg was established in 2006. We made the decision to produce lamb and sell direct to the consumer, with the aim of a true field-to-plate idealism. Lamb prices were at an all-time low and we had to find a way of ensuring our enterprise would be sustainable, but would also add value to our croft and our community.

It was always our aim to provide consumers with lamb all year round, by installing a walk-in chiller/freezer room. When we considered the cost implications, it was not a viable option until we could produce enough lamb to sustain the costs. We had a dilemma on our hands. Our business was thinning, but our hands were tied because we could not afford to install the facilities we needed to grow the business. Without the facility our business was being held back in terms of growth. Funding, no matter how we tried, was never available; agencies could not see the value in such a project and will approach me with the support we need.

I looked into a mobile abattoir and butchery facility. Moving livestock from its holding, with some crofters travelling up to two hours to use the only abattoir we have north of Inverness, was surely not great for animal welfare – let alone the crofter’s purse.

Many discussions, and persuading a local councillor to join me in my efforts to establish a mobile system, we started a Facebook Highlands and Islands mobile slaughter house project page, to gauge the interest from crofters Highland-wide. To my surprise it did not take long before we had interest coming from Moray and other areas south of the Highlands.

I seemed to have found the answer to everyone’s problems. But how do you progress such a big project, with a lot of time and effort, but no funding? The project has not progressed in a number of years, but I am still hopeful that someone will see the value in such a project and will approach me with the support we need.

To my surprise it did not take long before we had some crofters travelling up to two hours to use our nearest slaughter-house and butcher facility, slaughtered then butchered and delivered, using never available; agencies could not see the value coming from Moray and other areas south of the Highlands.

We scaled back to seasonal lamb, reared and slaughtered them butchered and delivered, using our nearest slaughter-house and butcher facility, which was 45 miles each way. This worked well for a number of years, but then we started to get customer feedback that the butchering was not up to previous quality. So started the next hurdle.

How could we continue to market our product as being of the best quality when the butchery was letting us down? In addition, livestock movement rules had changed. As we lived more than 45 miles from our local abattoir, we now had to sit a test to show we were competent to move our livestock safely. How many more barriers do we need to face?

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This project will. I’m sure, enhance so many croft businesses and address the issue of time and animal welfare.

Sweden triples numbers of abattoirs since entering the EU in 1995

Of Sweden’s 10 million citizens, 170,000 people are involved in agriculture on a full or part-time basis and agricultural businesses account for 1.2% of the labour force.

There are still 63,000 active farms, half the number in 1970. Horses are nowadays more numerous than the 300,000 dairy cows. On top of that 2,000,000 beef cattle make up a total number of all classes of cattle to 1,500,000. Pigs number 1,400,000 and sheep 600,000. All spread out in a vast and sparsely-populated country which has had one of the fastest urbanisation rates in the world.

In the late 80s and early 90s, when Sweden was adapting prior to membership, the EU slaughter industry was heavily subsidised and strictly controlled by quotas. The overall political goal since the 60s had been to try to integrate the family and providing an income equal to that of an industrial worker. Following entry to the EU in 1995, there were approximately 50 slaughter plants. The agriculture sector saw radical change, as the old system of farmer-owned co-ops faced hard and rapid restructuring with an attendant loss of farmer-owned capital investment. The proposals to slim down and centralise abattoir services raised fear and questions all over Sweden and ignited many private operations to try and establish local slaughter facilities.

The country stretches from beyond the Arctic circle to the grain-growing plains in the south, a distance of over 2,000 km, with huge variation in climate zones, the middle and north favouring grazing. In the 90s many abattoirs closed and government plans were for a handful of plants which were to be located close to the grain-growing areas, as at that time grain-fed meat was seen to be the way forward.

In many places farmers who saw great potential in what they were producing came together to form their own slaughter business, promoting local production and aiming for a quality market. Despite the fall in the number of farms, the slaughter industry is now well established with approximately 150 EU-standard abattoirs of all sizes for domestic stock, with a total of 283 listed facilities, the balance dealing with wild livestock such as reindeer, moose and other small game.

The location of the plants now being selected the best areas for natural-pasture-produced meat, with attendant rural development spin-offs, but it has been a long hard walk.

Pauline Palmcrantz is a shareholding company. The former agricultural co-op owns 39% and the balance is held by other local interests. 47% is farmer-owned, by the 120 individuals who gathered the €150,000 needed back in 1992 to save the local abattoir, contrary to what was provided. The nearest alternative was some 11 hours travel time away. Today this business has more than 100 employees including 35 skilled butchers, with a turnover of 20 million euros and a good reputation, selling the well-recognised meat brand “Love Locally” throughout the country.

Another example is a one-man business who fought for nine years to establish his own farm slaughterhouse. The main issue for him was where the toilet facilities were located. Food and safety regulations would not allow the use of the existing farmhouse facilities and wanted a separate fully-equipped staffroom. Pointing to the 5,000 working-farm-sized slaughterhouses in Austria, he finally won his case. From there many small-scale slaughterhouses have grown in strength and have not tripled in number since entry to the EU.

Angus McHattie, Breaskish, Skye
Pauline Palmcrantz, Siljanneys, Dalmarnock, Sweden
A hungry year

As we all know in these days of climate instability, every year is different for the crofting horticulturist.

At the time of writing at the end of February, a typical long, dark, wet winter here in the northwest has given way to stunning days of clear, dry weather with night frosts and low daytime temperatures despite the glorious sunshine. So the start to the growing season looks like being late. This is in total contrast to last year when we were picking asparagus at the start of March.

One of our main summer crops is tomatoes. At the time of writing at the end of February, a range of sizes available to suit any croft

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Donald’s hortiblog

It’s turning out to be a hungry year, as everyone will know from their hay and feed bills. The small rodents that inhabit one of our polytunnels are no exception. We made an optimistic early sowing of peas in pots on the propagating bench. The next day, every one of a hundred and seventy raspberries arrived, which was an impressive night’s work for a small creature. That wasn’t all. The animal also dug up our leek seeds. So, start again, but with sheets of glass placed over the pots.

Raspberry canes arrive

We have just taken delivery of a quantity of raspberry canes. The raspberries arrived on Friday, on the back of the main delivery truck from the nursery. We are excited to get started on the new season, as we always have a degree of shelter as well as bird protection.

Horticulture: a Handbook for Crofters

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

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

Please contact SCF HQ to order your copy.

KEDER POLYTUNNEL FOR SALE:

Due to bereavement nearly new 3m x 6m tunnel in immaculate condition with full assembly instructions and DVD.

Location Motherwell. Buyer to dismantle from ground anchors and collect. Price £950.

Tel 01698 852427 or email richardscotcher@hotmail.com
SNH outline action plan for control of geese in Outer Hebrides

A

f the SCF meeting in Benbecula last November, where crofters gave their views on wild geese to senior SNH staff, a list of essential actions required to stop the imminent catastrophe was composed and this was sent to the Scottish Government’s National Goose Management Review Group (NGMRG). It comprised:

- Reintroduce goose population control scheme immediately;
- Redistribute funds to protect this internationally-activated asset;
- Redeploy SNH staff at key times;
- Look at more effective methods than just shooting;
- Input Uist situation to SNH policy review;
- Update law – make it fit for purpose.

SNH was asked by the NGMRG chair to come up with an action plan. In January the proposals below were sent to the Uist goose management scheme (UGMS). The broad elements were:

- Greylag geese; Additional resources to support population reduction and study on future options
- SNH has increased support for population control to £30,000. We will also explore providing staff support for some additional control in spring, ahead of the breeding season. Support for practical control will continue over next winter, with additional funding for population monitoring. We have committed to fund the total cost of the study into future management options for local management of greylag geese. This will explore the opportunities and obstacles to self-funding this work in future.
- Revised population thresholds: We have proposed a reduced population target from 3,600 to 4,400 down to 1,800 to 2,200. We believe a population of this size could be maintained with reduced shooting effort and would substantially decrease the impact of geese on crofts.
- Work to explore expanded geese sale

We will be working on options for expanding sale of goose carcasses in 2018. This will initially look at how increased marketing online can be supported, but will investigate what controls would need to be in place to support long term extended sales.

- Barnacle geese; Independent assessment of damage

We will shortly be setting a contract to independently review the damage caused by barnacle geese, to allow a full assessment of the economic impact on crofting activity. We will seek input from the local groups in preparing the contract specification to ensure that it captures the full range of impacts.

- Additional counting and population monitoring

Monthly counts are being undertaken in Uist to coincide with international count dates. These, along with roost counts and bagging of barnacle geese, will enable us to understand the movements of barnacle geese between islands and ensure that any scaring activity can be assessed at a population level to comply with legal requirements.

- Further analysis of bag limits following on previous report

We have undertaken additional analysis of the bag limit, taking account of recent count data, and will be aiming to issue an additional licence to support scaring to address serious agricultural damage in Uist.

- Additional non-lethal scaring equipment/activity

Laser and audio scaring equipment is being tested on North Uist. Laser equipment has not proved wholly effective where currently deployed, but it will be tested further over the coming months. If either of these options proves effective we will seek funding for more equipment to be deployed in crofting areas.

- Join the Sea eagle management scheme

Ross Liley, Oban-based operations manager for SNH, who facilitates the sea eagle management scheme, gave us this update:

Currently there are two active local sea eagle management stakeholder groups, one covering Argyll and Lochaber and one covering Skye and Lochalsh.

A number of members of the Skye group left recently and the intention is to seek some new members before holding the next meeting. We are working with the other stakeholders on the group to do this and our intention is to target some of the crofters we have been working closely with on targeting management techniques. They will be able to bring their experiences to the group.

At the start of the scheme there was a meeting of a group in Gairloch, but it has not met again, although we have been dealing with individual applicants to the scheme from the Gairloch area since then.

We would be happy to meet with other groups if the need arises. Meanwhile, we encourage crofters and farmers to contact us with their experience of sea eagle issues and we can offer them individual support under the scheme.

There is a national stakeholder group comprising representatives from the key organisations and includes the chairs of the local stakeholder groups.

ON THE CROFT

Rabbit control

Dear editor

I represent a group of close-knit, like-minded friends with a passion for catching rabbits in the traditional manner, using terrets, nets and well-disciplined dogs. We are normally six in total, with an average age of fifty and collectively we have in the region of two hundred years’ experience of rabbit control between us. We do not profess to be professional, nor do we do this for any financial gain.

We consider ourselves an effective resource when it comes to thinning out high populations of problematic rabbits. In the past we have helped land owners under the threat of compulsory gassing from DEFRA, by clearing over one hundred rabbits a day.

We are prepared to travel anywhere in the UK and in particular Scotland, where we have been fortunate to experience much good hunting in the past.

We normally dedicate one week each year, usually in late autumn, for our trips. These have to be planned well in advance to enable us to consult with land owners/tenants to determine the extent of their problem, book time off work and arrange suitable accommodation. All members of our group have the utmost respect for the land and the people, which we hunt and all accompanying dogs are 100% steady with all forms of livestock.

To enable our services to be noticeably effective, the resident rabbit population needs to be sufficiently large enough to cause land owners or tenants real problems that warrant the rabbits being culled.

We consider ourselves to be genuine, respectful and friendly people with an overwhelming passion for our hobby and feel that our services would not only be of benefit to any crofters experiencing genuine rabbit problems, we would relish the opportunity to prove our worth.

SCF HQ has our contact details.

SCF council member Alistair Danter explores the options and challenges.

THERE are over 1000 common grazings in the crofting counties covering just under 600,000 hectares, with the number of actively managed grazings with committees in place is around 500. SGRPFD refers to the committee’s structure as a business, but as part of the registration process the clerk’s national insurance number is recorded. The legal definition of current grazings committee structure is probably closer to an unincorporated voluntary association. A degree of strength is given once formal regulations are adopted. However, there are still significant gaps in the legal structure given that: a) we are in the 21st century and b) opportunities potentially available for common grazings committees to carry out local management initiatives are more than an unincorporated body.

Traditionally, common grazings committees dealt with the management of the grazings for agricultural purposes, i.e. livestock production and peat digging. The introduction of crofter forestry schemes took this a step further, although the activity was still very much a primary economic initiative carried out within the context of the local socio-economic environment. Despite this, towards the end of the 20th century opened up the opportunity of other non-agricultural uses, most notably in the area of renewable energy. Other developments have included affordable housing, tourism initiatives and deer management schemes.

In the face of these new developments the existing structure is not really fit for purpose, as the liability of committee members in an unincorporated voluntary association remains total. Using an unincorporated association as a structure for a committee wishing to develop a renewable energy scheme, where the risks and relationships with outside bodies are complicated, would not be advisable – as unincorporated groups cannot hold property in their own name, are complicated to enter into contracts or undertake legal proceedings.

Taking the wider perspective, voluntary associations form part of the third sector, one that has grown significantly since the 1970s in the UK, having taken over the running of activities and initiatives that were previously considered the role of local or national government. Along with this evolution is the development and use of a variety of legal structures that can be used to protect and support individuals involved in a more complex and highly economic activity. This is referred to as becoming incorporated. Incorporated groups can hold property, employ people, take loans, defend and/or take legal proceedings. Becoming incorporated effectively gives the organisation a legal entity of its own that is separate from the individuals involved in the organisation.

Current options for incorporated structures include charitable trust; company limited by guarantee; Scottish incorporated charitable organisation; community interest company; industrial and provident society; and friendly society. Each has its own specific attributes and groups should seek legal advice before adopting any particular structure.

While becoming a regulated common grazings committee is a positive step, there are further considerations required if a committee wishes to engage in development activities beyond simple grazing management. It is to be hoped that the proposed regulations for professional committees will consider the legal structure of common grazings committees, as their development potential is significant.

ON THE CROFT

Common grazings committee structures
New ideas for grassland

There is considerable excitement surrounding new digital, precision technologies being developed for agriculture. However, there are other aspects of production from grassland that are open to some new things too. A few of these.

At a more fundamental level, the concept that grassland is being challenged. Grass contains protein, sugars and fibre along with a number of other potentially useful products such as silica. In the 1940s a considerable amount of research was carried out in the UK to extract grass protein for feeding to poultry and pigs.

Interest in grass protein declined as the cost of imported soya and other plant protein fell. However, there has been a recent resurgence in interest and we are currently investigating the potential for extracted grass protein as a feedstock for aquaculture and for poultry production.

For such a process to be financially viable it is important that all components are marketable. So high-value markets are needed for the fibre and soluble sugar, after the protein has been extracted. Through funding from the Scottish Government RESAS division, we are already looking at these and it isn’t beyond the bounds of possibility that in the future your dram will be coming from grass!

There is considerable excitement surrounding New ideas for grassland silage-making and winter grazing. There is considerable excitement surrounding grassland trefoil is being trailed as a legume species which can tolerate more acidoic soil conditions than the more traditional white clover.

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ON THE CROFT

How can crofting landscapes deliver for pollinators?

Gillian McKnight of SAC explains

ON THE CROFT

Guidelines for lopping ill in the absence of a vaccine

Lopping ill illness is caused by a virus (LIV) which is transmitted by ticks and principally affects sheep. LIV can cause fever (TBF) where protection is not achieved against the stress of gathering. Adult sheep which are pregnant or which contain a dairymaid and internal egg can lead to transmission of the virus to infected ticks tend to be immune. Lambs of such ewes are protected because they are born to the mother is greater than 20 and LV prevalence within the sheep flock is greater than 10%.

However, with changes in cropping practice such as more grazing on the inbye over the summer, reduced potato-growing, species diversity in grass fields, and less hay and silage cutting, these important bumblebees are now needing help.

Weigh up the benefits of minimising disturbance and handling of sheep when ticks are more active – it is tempting to go into the spring, you may not have been exposed to tick or LV.

What is already used part of many grass seed mixtures in Scotland. Reed canary grass varieties are used in many parts of Canada and in Scandinavia as a forage grass for wet, acidic soil conditions. In addition, on Lewis, birdsfoot trefoil is being trailed as a legume species which can tolerate more acidoic soil conditions than the more traditional white clover.

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ON THE CROFT

Tree planting on Islay. The Western and Northern Isles woodland planting grant is now available for exposed sites in the mainland crofting counties and on the Argyll Islands.

Croft-friendly woodland planting grant now available throughout the crofting counties

Eleanor Garty of Woodland Trust Scotland reports

There’s a host of reasons to plant trees on crofts – to improve wildlife habitats, to produce firewood, to reduce run-off, to restore degraded soils, to improve biosecurity, to leave a legacy for future generations – but the most-often cited reason is to create shelter.

But how to get a woodland growing well in a breeze spot?

One key factor is planting at high density, so the young trees give each other mutual shelter. Another is tree choice.

Broadleaves provide a permeable barrier that slows the wind over a long distance, without causing eddies. Conifers offer good shelter in the shelterbelt matures. Species choice will be accommodated within the forestry grant scheme Northern and Western Isles Woodland Creation option. Until recently, however, the option was not available to crofters on the mainland and in the Argyll Islands. In a welcome change, the option has now been extended to the whole of the crofting counties, for use on exposed sites where it is likely to produce a significantly better result.

There are some limitations – the maximum area that can be applied for is 5ha – but it’s a big boost for crofters who want to integrate small woodlands with grazing, horticulture and other croft activities and reap the multiple rewards that trees will deliver for generations to come.

For details of the Northern and Western Isles Woodland Creation option see www.ruralpayments.org.uk/public/site/futures/topics/all-schemes/forestry-grant-scheme/woodland-creation/native-broadleaves-northern-western-isles.

For free advice on planting and managing woodlands on crofts contact the Croft Woodlands Project crof ting@woodlandtrust.org.uk, tel 0343 770 5847.

Get in touch with your local crofting community plant trees and manage woodland is available. For free advice on planting and managing woodlands on crofts contact the Croft Woodlands Project crofting@woodlandtrust.org.uk, tel 0343 770 5847.

crofting@woodlandtrust.org.uk

Woodland Trust Scotland

Scottish Crofting Federation

NAME OF COMPANY: Scottish Crofting Federation

DATE OF COMPANY: SC 218658

REGISTERED OFFICE: Unit 26 Kyle Industrial Estate Kyle of Lochalsh IV40 8AX

NOTICE OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

NOTICE is hereby given that the Annual General Meeting of The Scottish Crofting Federation will be held in the Spectrum Centre, 1 Margaret Street, Inverness on Friday, 15th June 2018 at 2.00 pm to consider, and if thought fit, to pass the following resolutions:

1. To receive company’s accounts and the report of the directors and auditors for the year ended 30th June 2018. A summary of the accounts will be available at the meeting and the full or summary accounts will be provided prior to the meeting or on request to the registered office.

2. To elect, or otherwise, persons previously proposed as directors (Article 10 et seq) and/or ratify the appointment of co-opted director, namely: Ms Robin Haig

3. To re-elect director Russell Smith under Article 10.10, whose term as director ends as of the date of this meeting, to serve until AGM 2021 being the anniversary of his appointment and the maximum period allowed under Article 10.11.

4. To appoint accountants/auditors proposed by the directors, or re-appoint Ribbons, Chartering Accountants, of 27 Huntly Street, Inverness IV3 5PR as independent examiners of the company accounts and authorise the directors to pay their remuneration.

By order of the board of directors.

Company Secretary: John Bannister

Date of notice: 2nd April 2018

John Macintyre, Russell Smith, Rhoda Grant MPP and Patrick Krause at The Royal Highland Show

If you are involved in planning an agricultural show anywhere in the Highlands and Islands, please let us know.

Free publicity through The Crofter could help your show’s public profile. If you would like to attend a show and look after a stand as our representative, please get in touch and let us know when you know (if not shown below) so it can take place.

Those we know so far are here, but the list does not include the small, local shows which many members attend and enjoy on a regular basis. They are also of interest to us. Anyone willing to do this will, of course, be reimbursed the necessary equipment (within available SCF resources) to put on a good display. Our visibility at shows is very important to our members but relies on our local people to do it.

What we know so far:

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<tr>
<th>Date(s)</th>
<th>Name of show</th>
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<tr>
<td>21st-26th July</td>
<td>Royal Highland Show, Inverness, Edinburgh</td>
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<td>21st July</td>
<td>Thistle Show</td>
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<td>21st July</td>
<td>Sutherland Show, Dornoch</td>
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<td>24th-30th July</td>
<td>Dunvegan Show, Dunvegan, Isle of Skye</td>
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<td>25th August</td>
<td>Black Isle Show, Muir of Ord</td>
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<td>25th August</td>
<td>Inverness Show, Grantown-on-Spey</td>
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<td>25th August</td>
<td>Isle Show, Briggadale, Islay</td>
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<td>25th August</td>
<td>Orkney County Show, Kirkwall, Orkney</td>
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<td>25th August</td>
<td>Mid-Argyll Show, Inveraray, Lochgilphead</td>
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<td>Urquhart Show, Torridon</td>
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<td>25th August</td>
<td>East Renfrew Show, Lang</td>
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<td>25th August</td>
<td>Shire Agricultural Show, Perth</td>
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Please inform HQ of any shows not shown, or your willingness to man an SCF stand at any one of those listed.

Agricultural shows 2018

MEMBERS PAGES

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.
**Assynt milestone celebration**

2018 IS an important milestone in the history of community land ownership, as it was 25 years ago that the Assynt Crofters’ Trust formally took possession of the North Lochinver Estate, on 1st February, 1993.

To mark this anniversary, the trust is organising a week-long celebration of Crofting – Past, Present and Future, from 30th June to 6th July 2018.

Speakers including Alistair Mackintosh and Anne-Marie Fyfe are scheduled to appear. Judith Naper’s definitive biography of Allan MacRae, one of the founders of the trust, will be launched on Wednesday 4th, during a day that will be a celebration of his life. The day will include the Scottish Crofting Federation holding a debate and discussion around one of Allan’s well-known quotes.

Other planned events include a hill race, an all-abilities fishing competition, a creative writing competition involving local schools, a series of workshops based on the archaeology of Caisteal Bhrach, sheepdog handling, sheep-shearling, working with wool and a photographic competition to be judged by Robin Gillanders, whose portrait of Allan MacRae now hangs in the Scottish Parliament.

There will also be a series of music events – a ceilidh to mark the launch of the trust’s new boat and also a mini-fes where budding musicians can come along to join workshops with local musicians Rory Matheson (finalist in Young Scottish Musician of the year), Anna Buodon and Kim Macleod, to improve their performance and skill. The three young musicians will also be performing a concert to launch their very first CD.

The week of celebrations will culminate in the Féis in the Fank – an all-night festival of Scottish music with Blazin’ Fiddles, Skerryvore, Rory Matheson, Kanny John and the Skaila Ceilidh Dance Band. James Graham, Trailgill and 2+1. The fes will truly be a night to remember.

For further information and to buy tickets, go to www.theassyntcrofters.co.uk – or follow us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/25thanniversarycelebrations. Alternatively you can email Leigh or Seonaid at ac25years@btinternet.com and we will get back to you just as soon as we can.

As part of the celebratory week a photographic competition is being held.

His Bloody Project

by Graeme Macrae Burnet

This is a book I can thoroughly recommend, writes SGC company secretary John Bannister, an emotional read for the crofting aficionado by a writer who was listed for the Man Booker prize in 2016.

**IT COMES at a time when crofters in the Highlands and Islands are once again reflecting on proposed changes to crofting law; an opportune time to mull over the legislation crofters won and still have today.**

This book is a novel, but no less absorbing for the detailed research and history contained within. The book is set in 1869, it has historical detail focusing on that period of crofting history immediately preceding the Napier Commission of 1883 and the all-familiar maxim given to the committee of enquiry: “Go listen to the crofters,” and the advent of the revolutionary Crofters’ Act that followed in 1886.

Readers may recall that this first act established our now-familiar crofters’ rights. The right of security of tenure; the right to compensation for improvements made; a right (unique then, among tenants generally) not to be removed from their crofts – were enacted at a time when landlords held sway over all else. The Crofters Commission and a land court with powers to fix a fair rent were also part of that original blessed act.

The plot describes the typical crofting family daily life of the day, which indirectly gave rise to the above act. The lifestyle of the crofter’s hapless young son is at the centre of this account. His destitute father and his twin baby siblings, whose meagre lives are stretched to breaking point by the constable and his perfunctory enforcement of so-called regulations, is nothing short of bondage. The constable purports, without any sense of guilt, to serve the interests of his master – the estate factor.

One will empathise and hackles will surely rise at the behaviour of those in positions of power over the troubled people depicted here – “How dared they?” readily comes to mind as one turns the pages that follow.

The book is written as if the reader were a spectator in the very court room where the graphic detail of the events leading to the bloody prosecution takes place and of the key character during the indictment for the most heinous of crimes.

I liked it very much, despite the harrowing account, having become consumed by the sympathy one feels towards the erstwhile, down-trodden figures portrayed. It’s a book which will trodden figures portrayed. It’s a book which will

**Prize giving:**

Prizes will be awarded during the evening of 4th July 2018 and will be presented by Robin Gillanders. Submissions and entry fee to be sent to: Assynt Crofters Trust Office, Stoer, Lochinver, Sutherland, IV27 4JE, to arrive no later than 4th June 2018.
Donald Linton

SCF lost another stalwart in March.

DONALD LINTON, from Glencruitten, Oban, was involved in the SCU since its inception in 1986 as a local branch chairman and council member. Donald was always a great champion of crofting and crofters. A sheep breeder and mart herdsman, haulage contractor and tourism provider, Donald had a huge knowledge of crofting and was a source of advice and information for many. He was an assessor for the Crofters Commission for many years. Outspoken and popular, Donald was well-kent throughout the crofting areas of Argyll and beyond. He will be missed by many.

All at SCF who knew Donald send their condolences to his family.

STAY UP TO DATE

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

Farewell and hello

SADLY, WE are saying goodbye to Donna Williamson, fondly known as the “spreadsheet queen”. Donna has been a valued member of our training team for a number of years now and will be missed by us all. We wish her the best of health and no doubt she will return to the SCF family in the not too distant future.

As Donna leaves we say a big hello and welcome to Ailsa Strange, who will be based at our Ullapool training office with Tina and Lucy our training managers. Ailsa joins us on 19th March and looks forward to administering the Crofters and Smallholders Skills Boost Project 2016 – 2019.

Donald Linton (center), at an early SCF Council meeting, Angus MacRae to his right, then Alistair MacIver, with Fiona Mandeville on the left. Can you identify any of the others?

Fiona Mandeville, editor

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01599 230 300

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Charity Number SC 031919

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