

Post-Brexit agricultural support could yet be a boost for crofting



AN ATTEMPT at redistributing Scotland's agricultural support could at last be on the cards.

Several major strategy documents on Scottish agricultural policy have been released in the past months, all of them pointing to the crofting areas being unique and needing bespoke support. Reviews of Scottish agriculture undertaken in the last five years or so have not set the heather on fire. But perhaps *A Future Strategy for Scottish Agriculture*, the final report delivered by the agriculture champions,

and the Scottish Government consultation document *Stability and Simplicity* offer more hope.

The recent study carried out for the Highlands and Islands Agriculture Support Group, *Post-Brexit Implications for Agriculture and Associated Land Use in the Highlands and Islands*, found that unless significant steps are taken to support crofting and hill farming in the Highlands and Islands, this unique agriculture, with all its associated benefits, could be lost.

The champions acknowledge that

Scotland has huge areas of less-favoured permanent grassland and rough grazing, where high-nature-value farming is both traditional and common. They recommend that future policies must address the specific needs of this type of farming, including the fact that low profitability threatens its very survival.

This is indeed the case for crofters and ties in with the report to the Highlands and Islands Agriculture Support Group. Scottish Government could pay heed to this,

its consultation document making it clear that the Less Favoured Area Support Scheme (LFASS) will continue to decline. Not to introduce Areas of Natural Constraint (ANC) is a missed opportunity, an opportunity to move meaningful support to where it was intended. The prospect of LFASS being reduced to only 20% in 2020 is completely unacceptable, so more detail is imperative on how Scottish Government intends to make up the shortfall and to

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Crofting law reform update

THE SCOTTISH CROFTING Federation has supported the two-phase approach to crofting law reform, as outlined by the cabinet secretary Fergus Ewing.

No one would deny that crofting law is complex. It is in need of reform and this is, thankfully, under way. SCF is firm in its belief that reform needs to be done in a measured, methodical way, especially because of its complexity. Rushing forward into a wholesale writing of new law would create the likelihood of crofting law not getting changed in this parliamentary life, or indeed for a very long time, bearing in mind how long it has taken to get to this point.

Fergus Ewing, the cabinet secretary in charge of the reform of crofting legislation, gave evidence to the

Scottish Parliament Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee recently. In answer to why he was "tinkering around the edges" or taking a "piecemeal approach" Mr Ewing was clear that Scottish Government is taking "a strategic approach to deal with things in stages that are likely to be efficacious". SCF believes this to be the correct way forward and that it is by no means piecemeal. It is actually tackling the most comprehensive reform, and doing it in two phases to ensure that it happens.

The first phase will deal with the most urgent and pragmatic amendments which will make a real difference to crofters. Identification of these issues, and how to deal with them, is already well under way by stakeholders.

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Message from the chair...

Russell Smith



THE LAST FEW months have been dominated, again, by Brexit and what happens to support payments after we leave the EU.

David Mundell, in a recent meeting, assured us that everything would be fine; but no-one round the table seemed convinced. A recent report by the Highlands and Islands Agriculture Group spelled out the implications for crofters and hill farmers of different scenarios – none of them are good but some are less bad than others. The report *Post Brexit Implications for Agriculture and Associated Land Use in the Highlands and Islands* is worth a read.

We are still working in a policy vacuum (at the time of writing) but the Scottish Government is consulting on future policy options in its document

Stability and Simplicity: proposals for a rural funding transition period. The consultation closes on 15 August so please read it and either let us know your thoughts or reply directly and copy your comments to HQ so we can incorporate your ideas in the SCF response. There are 46 questions to reply to but don't let that put you off, as it is vital that crofting's voice is heard loud and clear.

The first blow could be LFASS being reduced to 80% of current levels in 2019 – which we could just about cope with – but then down to 20% in 2020 which would be crippling for many. As an instance, for us, the LFASS payment is roughly equal to the overall profit of the croft, so a big cut could push us into the red.

The sad thing is that we are spending huge

amounts of finite time and energy on Brexit when there is so much else needing to be done, such as working on making crofts available to young people.

As if there wasn't enough uncertainty in here, I have recently been to a couple of meetings where I have had to argue against vegetarianism being promoted in policy suggestions – healthy diet YES, local food YES but NO to cutting red meat out of diets totally. We have few options as to what we can do with croft land if we can't raise sheep and cattle.

In this issue you can read the SCF training team's annual report. The SCF's Crofters and Smallholders Skills Boost continues to do a great job providing varied and relevant training to so many people. It is very heartening to see such interest in crofting and rural skills. It gives hope for the future.

We held our AGM in June with an excellent talk on mental health from Jim Hume of the National Rural Mental Health Forum. For me, the key message was to make the effort to talk to your neighbours, even if – or indeed especially if – they are being difficult or awkward. A simple "Are you OK?" could make all the difference.

We have started to look at the results of the membership survey which went out with the last edition of *The Crofter*. The results are reported on elsewhere and be assured the board and council will use your input to direct our policies over the next few years. Thanks for your comments.

Finally, we may be the only organisation solely dedicated to campaigning for crofters and fighting for the future of crofting, but we can't do anything about the weather. Just now, the grass is burning up, burns have dried up and I am carting water up to the reseed for the first time in the 20 years we have been here.

Strange times indeed.

Support for local abattoirs

SCF was one of a number of organisations which were signatories to the letter below.

The Rt Hon Michael Gove MP
Secretary of State for the Environment Food
and Rural Affairs
Nobel House
17 Smith Square
London
SW1P 3JR

Dear Mr Gove

We note the government's aspiration to encourage livestock to be slaughtered more locally to the farms where they have been reared.

However, as you will be aware, smaller local abattoirs in the UK have been closing at an alarming rate which shows no sign of abating. After a substantial decline in number in recent years, a further 10% have closed in the last year.

We write to express our deep concern

about this situation, which if not urgently and sustainably addressed threatens to undermine attempts to make UK agriculture more economically sustainable, environmentally benign and supporting our high animal welfare standards. The diversity of our organisations reflects the scale and breadth of concern.

Smaller, local abattoirs offer a vital service to farmers by slaughtering animals close to the point of production and returning the meat from their animals for them to sell as fully traceable and local. Without such abattoirs, there would be no fully traceable local meat for farm shops, farmers' markets, traditional local butchers, mail order suppliers and local caterers. In addition, graziers in sensitive wildlife areas using specialised breeds cannot add value to the animals when sold for meat without a local abattoir.

As more and more smaller abattoirs close, so the distances to the nearest suitable

slaughterhouse increase, until it is no longer financially viable for farmers to travel the extra distances to slaughter their livestock. Businesses will close with the loss of important skilled and semi-skilled jobs in rural areas, both in the abattoirs and the existing and emerging businesses which depend on them. The opportunities for farmers to embark on new enterprises on the farm also become limited.

Morale is low in the industry, and abattoir owners need to see a sustainable future, and a culture where in areas of unfulfilled demand, new businesses, including on-farm mobile abattoirs, can become established and flourish. Urgent action is needed at a number of levels to secure a sustainable future for small abattoirs and for the continuation and development of local meat marketing.

We therefore urge you to do all you can to ensure the implementation of both short and longer-term solutions to these problems.

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reorganise the scheme more along the lines of ANC.

A central provision of the SCF post-Brexit policy document published last year was the need for capping Basic Payments. The champions and Scottish Government have grasped the capping nettle. The champions recommend that income support payments are capped, maintaining current levels for small and medium holdings but reducing payments to bigger recipients, in order to fund a more equitable and results-focused system.

The Scottish Government

consultation states, "A more progressive capping policy could be a first step to a future agricultural policy which widens the benefits and range of recipients and supports new entrants and small businesses". The document publishes modelling which shows the savings that can be made by capping, relating this to

how many people it would affect.

For example, capping payments at £50,000 would release £60 million for wider benefits, yet only caps payments to 10% of recipients. Capping payments at £25,000 would release £140 million and would reduce payments to 27% of recipients. Given that this is still

well above the average income in Scotland – just over £23,000 – it is not unreasonable as an income support payment which can be topped up with further public funding through targeted schemes and through production earnings.

As always, the more difficult phase is the detailed formulation of new policies to enact the guiding principles. Without adequate support we will lose the benefits that crofting brings in terms of retaining population in rural areas, providing secure high-quality food and maintaining the landscape and biodiversity. SCF will be putting forward a response to the consultation on behalf of crofters.

"A more progressive capping policy could be a first step to a future agricultural policy which widens the benefits and range of recipients and supports new entrants and small businesses".

Crofting law reform update

...Continued from page 1

Amendment to legislation is realistic in this parliamentary session.

A second phase could deal with more complex issues, which will take more time to formulate and gain consensus for. The work for the second phase will start now, in parallel with phase one, but the legislation would need to go through parliament in the next session.

It is understandable that some are getting impatient, as crofting law reform has been a very difficult journey, not without setbacks. It is therefore even more critical to take a phased approach to ensure that we get it right.

Forty-three issues are currently being looked at in the first phase. For example:

Deemed crofts – which bring confusion for some crofters over whether they have common grazing rights or not. The whole deemed croft issue brings crofting into disrepute and it is proposed to amend legislation to prevent the further creation of deemed crofts, for example through making grazing rights part of heritable property rights of the croft, preventing a decoupling of the grazing shares from the in-bye croft.

Notification of first registration of croft – it is not clear why notification by newspaper is required, especially when the Crofting Commission is charged with the duty of notifying all those involved. It is also costly for crofters. It is proposed to reduce the requirement to advertise by

newspaper and consider other means, possibly web-based notification of first registration of a croft; and the Crofting Commission should take all reasonable steps to inform neighbouring crofts of first registration.

Requirement for annual notices – the amount of data generated overloads the Crofting Commission. It is proposed to replace the requirement to have annual notices with a more periodic requirement, say once every three or four years.

Grazings committee duty to report – many feel that it is not appropriate for a grazings committee to have to report on the condition of crofts, and any breach of duty, of each tenant and owner-occupier crofter with a share in the grazing. It is proposed to remove this requirement, but keep the requirement for grazings committees to report on the general condition of common grazings.

Joint tenancies – the *Women in Farming and the Agriculture Sector* report has recommended that it should be possible for croft tenancies to be held in joint names. It is proposed that, if necessary, legislation will be amended to allow croft tenancies in more than one name to bring crofting into line with other sectors.

This is just a taste. If you have an interest in crofting legislation, papers from the Crofting Bill Group are published on the Scottish Government website.



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Joyce Campbell

Women in agriculture

YOU WILL REMEMBER that we reported on a fascinating piece of research on women in farming and the agriculture sector which was carried out on behalf of the Scottish Government.

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. Whilst crofting was on the whole better than other sectors, we cannot be complacent. It makes uncomfortable, though familiar, reading. The report can be found on-line.

Following on from the research, the first minister of Scotland, Rt Hon Nicola Sturgeon MSP, launched the Women in Agriculture Taskforce, chaired by cabinet secretary for rural economy Fergus Ewing and Sutherland hill farmer Joyce Campbell. SCF has a place on the taskforce.

A progress report was published at the Royal Highland Show 2018 and it is worth reproducing the first minister's foreword to the report:

"It is my pleasure to offer a few words to the progress report of the Women in Agriculture Taskforce. I was delighted to be able to launch this initiative at the Royal Highland Show 2017, in response to the women in farming and agriculture sector research.

"The research affirmed that women are an

inherent and critical part of Scotland's farming and agriculture sector but are a group whose strengths and contribution remain somewhat marginalised. It has provided a solid foundation upon which to act – and I feel strongly that government has a moral obligation to address gender inequality right across our society and economy.

"There is no doubt that women play a much-valued and valuable role within the farming and agriculture sector in Scotland. However, inequality in the sector and invisibility in leadership roles stops women in rural Scotland from achieving their full potential. That holds us back as a nation and damages the rural economy. I expect the taskforce to help deliver solutions that support the achievement of gender equality in Scottish agriculture. It is already offering a strong and challenging voice, exploring innovative and thoughtful solutions to achieve progress.

"I hope that the taskforce's work in the short term will help introduce longer-term change. That change is needed to help us to move to a culture which enables women and girls within farming to be more empowered and for the sector to make the most of the undoubted skills and abilities they have to offer.

"I am extremely encouraged with progress to date, and I look forward with interest to their final report."

Women inheriting crofts – busting the myths

"Wild women – whose land is it anyway?" was a day exploring women's connection with the land held on 16th June 2018 at The Birks Cinema, Aberfeldy. Brian Inkster, of Inksters Solicitors, comments.

SAW A TWEET by Lesley Riddoch from the event quoting Alison Hall as saying: "I'm wild and furious because women have been pushed off land if they have a brother because he can inherit the lot. Same in crofting. Widows lose tenancies if they can't prove their farming bona fides. Men aren't asked for proof."

I am not sure where Alison got this information from. I cannot comment on the position with regard to agricultural law, but the situation she describes certainly does not apply under crofting law.

A crofting tenancy can only be bequeathed to one person unless you seek, in your will, to divide the croft amongst more than one person (ie create more than one tenancy from separate parts of the croft) with the consent of the Crofting Commission.

It is certainly not unusual for widows to succeed to a crofting tenancy either through bequest in a will or on intestacy (death without leaving a will).

On intestacy a crofting tenancy in the name of a man would be inherited by his wife. If there is no surviving wife, his children would share equally in the value of the croft. They might have to come to some agreement amongst themselves as to whose name the tenancy will be taken in to avoid the sale of the croft. But a brother would not inherit over a sister as Alison Hall suggests.

A widow inheriting a croft does not need to prove any "farming bona fides" to the Crofting Commission or anyone else. She simply needs to ensure that she follows the appropriate procedures, within the relative time limits, to give notice of the bequest to the landlord and copy this to the Crofting Commission.

An owner-occupied croft can be left to more than one person. Accordingly, several children could all be bequeathed such a croft in a will or inherit the same through intestacy. A widow would have the right, in the first instance, to inherit such a croft.

A woman's right to succession of a croft is therefore no different from a man's right. If you are a wild woman who has heard differently you should consult a crofting lawyer about your own particular circumstances to set your mind at rest.

EU farming: a male-dominated profession with relatively few young farmers

ec.europa.eu/eurostat 

WE THOUGHT members might be interested to read how agriculture across the EU compares with crofting.

The most recent EU farm structure survey shows that, although numerous, most of the EU's 10.3 farms were small in nature, two-thirds being less than five hectares (ha) in size. In contrast, the 3% of EU farms of 100 ha or more in size worked over half of the EU's utilised agricultural area.

A little over 171 million hectares of land in the European Union were used for agricultural production in 2016 – about 40% of the EU's total land area. This supported about 10.3 million farms and farm managers.

Only 11% of farm managers in the EU were younger than 40 years old, in contrast to 32% who were 65 years of age or older. Young farmers were particularly few and far between in Cyprus (3.3% of all farm managers), Portugal (4.2%) and the United Kingdom (5.3%). They were more common in Austria (22.2%), Poland (20.3%) and Slovakia (19.0%).

Nevertheless, the youngest farm managers tended to have bigger farms in terms of area, livestock and standard output than the oldest ones.

The farming profession is dominated by men, with only about three in ten (29%) women being EU farm managers. The proportion of young farm managers who were women was lower still (23%).

This information, published by Eurostat, the statistical office of the European Union, comes from provisional results for the 2016 EU Farm Structure Survey and is the latest snapshot available.

Utilised agricultural area includes arable land, permanent grassland, permanent crops, other agricultural land such as kitchen gardens (even if they only represent small areas of total utilised agricultural area). The term does not include unused agricultural land, woodland and land occupied by buildings, farmyards, tracks, ponds, etc.

Farming in the EU is broadly characterised by three distinct groups: (i) subsistence farming, where the focus is on growing a majority of food to feed farmers and their families (ii) small and medium-

sized holdings that are generally family-run businesses and (iii) large agricultural enterprises.

Romania has one third of the EU's farms, but they tend to be small in size. Another third is found in Poland (14%), Italy (10%, 2013) and Spain (9%).

However, the 7% of farms that were of 50 ha or more in size worked a little over two-thirds of the EU's utilised agricultural area (UAA). So although the mean size of an agricultural holding in the EU was 16.6 ha in 2016, the median was under 5 ha.

Among member states, this distribution was most contrasting in Romania; nine in every ten farms (92% or 3.1 million farms) were smaller than 5 ha, but the 0.5% of farms of 50 ha or more in size farmed half (51%) of all the UAA in the country.

Larger farms (of 50 hectares or more) were much more common in Luxembourg (52% of farms), France (41%), the United Kingdom (39%) and Denmark (35%). In most member states, a majority of UAA was concentrated on the largest farms (50 ha or more in size).

Just over half of EU turnover in agriculture came from France, Germany, Italy and Spain

Contrasts in the size of farms were also reflected in terms of their economic size. Of the EU's 10.3 million farms, 4.0 million had a standard output below EUR 2,000 and were responsible for only 1% of total agricultural economic output. The 296,000 farms (or 3% of all holdings) in the EU that each produced a standard output of EUR 250,000 or more were responsible for a majority (55%) of the EU's total agricultural economic output in 2016.

About one half of the standard output generated by agriculture in the EU was from farms in France (17%), Germany (13%), Italy (12% in 2013) and Spain (11%) in 2016. Although Romania accounted for about one third of the EU's farms, they accounted for only 3.4% of the EU's standard output.

France, Spain, the United Kingdom and Germany together account for half of EU's agricultural land

France used 27.8 million hectares for agricultural purposes in 2016, the largest of any member state (16%



Small farm in Romania



North Spain



Slovenian small farm

of EU total). A further 23.2 million hectares were farmed in Spain (14%), 16.7 million hectares in the United Kingdom (10%), 15.2 million hectares in Germany (9%) and 14.4 million hectares in Poland (8%).

Agricultural landscapes dominated the countryside in some member states; upwards of two-thirds of the land area of

the UK (69%) and Ireland (72%) was used as agricultural land and the share was also particularly high in Denmark (62%). This was in stark contrast to Finland (8%) and Sweden (7%) where forest dominated the landscape, as well as Cyprus (12%).

For how much longer will Scotland / UK figure in these statistics?

Promoting the Interests of crofting

EVERYONE KNOWS that the Crofting Commission is crofting's regulator, but did you know that we are also responsible for promoting the interests of crofting?

Our board and staff have been thinking through what this means and how we can do it better, and cabinet secretary Fergus Ewing emphasised this aspect of our role when he met the commissioners on 29 June.

The Commission wants to see crofters, and their communities, succeed and thrive, both through traditional and innovative uses of crofts and common grazings. We want the land and its cultural heritage to be protected and enhanced, and crofting communities to be able to play their full part towards the development and prosperity of the Highlands and Islands. We also want to see communities grow, with more young families able to live and work in the crofting areas.

A well-regulated crofting system has been designed to encourage population retention, good land use and, wherever possible, opportunities for crofters and would-be crofters to live and work in their areas. That is why our main focus will always be on good, fair and efficient regulation. This includes the work we do to bring crofts back into use where there has been neglect or breaches of residency.

It also includes explaining



Cabinet secretary Fergus Ewing with commissioners

better how crofting works. Did you know that we produce several information leaflets about the different applications that crofters make to us? While these leaflets are available on our website, we want to make them more widely available through our different activities. In addition, we're developing other ways of explaining aspects of the crofting system, for example through short corporate videos that are in preparation.

We also work directly with grazings committees and shareholders to encourage crofting townships to have an active grazings committee,

which makes it easier for crofters to use the common land for grazing livestock and other purposes. We help committees to develop sound regulations which work well for all the shareholders and which encourage active crofting.

But while regulation is our main function, it is not the only thing that affects the interests of crofting. Crofters also depend on local employment opportunities, improved broadband connectivity, financial support payments and incentives, the planning process, and many other matters including good transport links. Other public

agencies are responsible for these matters, but it is for the Commission to thoughtfully advise government on the whole situation for crofting communities.

Six of our nine commissioners are elected directly by crofters, so we can help reflect crofters' concerns to the other agencies which impact their lives.

The Commission can only promote the interests of crofting if we know the real issues that crofters face in their daily lives. It is therefore vital that the Commission is open and in touch with these communities. That's why we have appointed a panel of assessors, so that we can take time to liaise properly with local communities and understand their important insights into what is happening all across the crofting counties.

Later this year, we will be implementing a rolling programme of visits to different crofting areas so that crofters, landlords and others can come and talk to commissioners, assessors, and staff from the Commission. You will also find at least one commissioner at some of the larger agricultural shows across the crofting counties.

We feel very strongly that the Commission exists to support and promote crofting and to help crofters and crofting communities succeed. We are always open to hear ideas on how we can do that better.



Scottish Parliament public gallery seats

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Cross-Party Group on Crofting

SCF HAS organised the Cross-Party Group on Crofting in the Scottish Parliament, for which Patrick is the secretary, for high on 20 years.

It is a very powerful forum for informing MSPs of crofting issues and garnering their support for pressing the Government to act. The current group was registered at the beginning of this parliamentary session and we held our AGM at the last meeting on 20th June.

MSP members of the group over the last year have been Rhoda Grant (co-convenor); Tavish Scott (co-convenor); Kate Forbes (co-convenor); Angus MacDonald; David Stewart; Donald Cameron; Edward Mountain; Emma Harper; Gail Ross; John Finnie; Liam McArthur; Richard Lochhead. Ministers cannot be members of cross party groups – so we have to say goodbye and many thanks to Kate for her excellent co-convenership – but we have several who keep abreast of the group's work and attend on occasion for specific issues.

The group is attended on a regular basis by representatives of over 30 organisations, and individuals, with an interest in crofting.

Over the past year the following topics have been on the agenda:

- Crofting legislation reform (standing item)

- Crofting administration (standing item)
- Crofting development (standing item)
- Crofting support: update on CAP payments and SRDP schemes (standing item)
- Woodland crofts
- National Development Plan for Crofting
- Control of wild geese
- Local abattoirs
- Rates on sporting rights
- Plus two meetings with the minister for crofting, Mr Fergus Ewing, on taking crofting law reform forward.

The theme for the last meeting was crofting support and we had excellent presentations from:

- Henry Graham, agriculture champion: A future strategy for Scottish agriculture
- Steven Thomson, SRUC: Post-Brexit implications for agriculture and associated land use in the Highlands and Islands
- Jonnie Hall, NFUS: Steps to change: a new agricultural policy for Scotland
- Bill Barron, Crofting Commission: update on the study *How the subsidy system currently supports crofting and proposals on how it might do so post-Brexit*
- and Russell Smith, SCF: Crofting agriculture post-Brexit.

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SPIRIT OF CROFTING

Celebrating the spirit of crofting



Boer goats at Elchies

SCF IS HOSTING a weekend event in Moray on 5th and 6th October 2018.

The event will truly celebrate the spirit of crofting, its endurance, resilience and strength. It will be a chance for crofters, aspiring crofters and anyone interested in this way of life to celebrate the unique nature of the people and land in crofting areas.

Moray, a relatively new crofting area since the 2010 Act, will be the location. The event has kindly been supported by Moray LEADER, National Lottery Awards for All, The Princes' Countryside Fund, The James Hutton NEWBIE project and the Isle of Harris Gin Company.

Moray LEADER programme manager, Norman MacAskill, whose family originate from a crofting area of Assynt, said "While crofting is not usually associated with Moray, local action group members were impressed by the energy and ambition of the proposal from SCF and believe it will be a worthwhile investment and a vital part of Moray economy.

"In particular, it will contribute to Moray LEADER's objective of building stronger local supply chains for Moray food and drink."

Guest speakers will include Fergus Ewing, MSP, Mel Irvine of BBC "This Farming Life", Dr Lee-Ann Sutherland of the James Hutton Institute,

the River Spey Anglers Association, the Kylesku Hotel and Simon Erlanger of the Isle of Harris Gin Company. Training workshops and site visits will focus on food and drink, including visits to Elchies Goat Farm and Auld Mill Alpacas, with workshops in charcuterie and curry-making using fresh and local produce.

As Brexit looms, there is a time of uncertainty ahead, but we hope that this event will bring people together to celebrate the resourcefulness and resilience of the crofting way of life.

The evening event will be a time to dust off your boiler suits for a three-course meal served by Dede McGillivray of Croft no 8, followed by dancing to the Dandy Ceilidh Band. Preceding this celebration we will be making two special awards – the Young Crofter of the Year and the Best Crofting Newcomer, as part of SCF's commitment to young crofters and to mark the Year of Young People 2018.

For more details contact HQ or visit www.crofting.org/events.



Celebrating 25 years of the Assynt Crofters' Trust

Assynt crofters certainly know how to throw a party, Leigh Sedgley reports

FROM THE MOMENT the first tent peg went in until the last bit of rubbish was collected off the site, the sun shone, fun was in the air and the North Assynt Estate buzzed with excitement.

The first all-ability wheelyboat to be launched in Assynt is now proudly in the water alongside the purpose-built jetty. And what a great day it was for the launch. Forty people heard a speech by Andy Beadsley, director of the Wheelyboat Trust.



Maree Todd MSP, minister for children and young people, give a short speech, then Nancy Miller named and launched the boat with a wee dram poured over her hull and into the loch. All those gathered by the loch then enjoyed cake and a wee dram. The sun continued to shine and the craic was great.

The sold-out ceilidh in Drumbeg Hall following the launch really got the party started and the buzz of excitement got louder.

On Sunday 1st July events moved into the marquee on Stoer Green for the all-faith thanksgiving service, which was a tremendous success. Murray Campbell, superintendent at the fisherman's mission in Lochinver at the time of the buy-out, delivered a service that was relevant and uplifting, supported by John Mackenzie, one of the original trio of Assynt crofters who masterminded the buy-out. Donations by the 60+ congregation raised £165 to be split between the RNLI and Highland Hospice.

Ullapool pipe band opened proceedings on the Monday morning and again 60+ people filled the seats in the marquee for the keynote speech from Alastair MacIntosh, which followed a brief history of the trust from John MacKenzie. A steady flow of people during the day visited the geology exhibition (kindly lent by the Lairg community) and the wonderful photographic exhibition from Anne Chown, of life on the North Assynt estate. The inaugural running of the Peat Road Challenge saw 33 runners cover some 10km round the Stoer and Clach toll peat roads on a glorious sunny evening. All seemed to love the run and the hardened runners amongst the field asked if it was going to be an annual event. The winner of the men's race enjoyed the race so much that he donated his prize money to the trust.

The mini fèis on Tuesday saw children and adults participating in various music workshops – from big kettle drums in the broch to fiddles in the marquee and bhodran on the green. Meanwhile, poet Anne Marie Fyfe fine-tuned the creative writing skills of some of our budding



authors. Three local talents – Rory Matheson, Kim MacLennan and Anna Buxton – mentored during the day and in the evening launched their first CD, *The Soil Beneath our Feet*, with a well-attended concert.

The SCF debate (reported on page 11) on Wednesday was followed by the launch of Judith Ross Napier's biography of iconic crofter and founding member of the Assynt Crofters' Trust, Allan MacRae. Over 100 people filled the marquee seats and the book was launched to rapturous applause.

Thanks to funding made available from SCF for township training, Thursday was our Ewe to You day. The morning saw three training workshops (sheep herding, sheep shearing and sheep husbandry) outside in the fank, all attended by over 40 people and delivered by three local crofters who did a great job. Inside the marquee, events including demos of wool carding, spinning, dyeing, felting, weaving and knitting. Feedback from visitors for this day was especially great; they loved hearing all about the sheep, watching the activities and participating.

Finally the main event – the huge concert and party on Friday night. After months of preparation and planning, the day dawned warm and dry and by the 7pm kick-off it was bright and sunny and a perfect evening. The bands were nothing short of spectacular. From piper Michael Ross who launched the evening, to local band Traligill and on to James Graham, Rory Matheson and The Skala Ceilidh Dance band and The Cowans, the crowds cheered and danced and applauded. Blazing Fiddles and Skerryvore were sensational and seemed to enjoy the gig every bit as much as their thrilled audience. The atmosphere in the marquee was electric and the crowd buzzing but good-natured and friendly. The bands seemed to feed off this energy and played better than ever.

Then suddenly it was all over. People left with happy memories of an incredible week that was a true celebration of a historic event that will be remembered for a long time to come.



SCF hosts Allan MacRae memorial debate

Russell Smith, who chaired the debate, reports

THE SCF WAS delighted to host a debate at the Assynt Crofters Trust (ACT) 25th buyout celebrations in July.

The debate resurrected a long-standing tradition within the organisation for thoughtful and well-mannered debating in memory of past members who had enjoyed a good argument in their day.

The debate was preceded by a tribute to Allan MacRae by Ray MacKay of ACT. Allan had been a prime mover in the Assynt buyout but had also been a stalwart of the SCU/SCF and local chair for a number of years. We miss him.

The motion was "This house believes that land reform measures in Scotland to date have done little to further their primary objective of greater social justice". Proposer Peter Peacock, former MSP, cabinet minister and policy director of Community Land Scotland, argued that much more needed to be done. Iain MacKinnon, long standing SCF member from Skye and research fellow on the governance of land at Coventry University, described the community land ownership movement as a step in land reform dating back to the middle ages which was furthering local democracy and local empowerment. The motion was eventually carried by 29 votes to six, with both speakers being warmly applauded for their erudition and efforts.



Russell Smith and Ray Mackay

The audience also got to have their say, with a range of considered and thoughtful comments – many from people who are at the forefront of the community land movement. Some of the themes that emerged were:

- whether the "willing buyer/willing seller" model was outdated and that more forceful measures were needed to break up big estates;
- a lot was being put on a limited number of volunteers to deliver and that put considerable strain on those involved;
- more help was needed from central and local government and agencies to support local development, eg in planning and infrastructure;
- and that community land furthered local democracy but this had its limits, as outside

agencies could still impose restrictions on the land and its development.

There was applause for the suggestion that we shouldn't be talking about "owning the land" but use the Gaelic sentiment "belonging to the land".

The overall feeling was that land reform was urgently required – 432 people own 60% of rural land in Scotland. Things were moving in the right direction but should be moving much more quickly.

Some quotes from the debate –

- "It is not easy."
- Community land bodies need the "right to go wrong"
- and from Glasgow – "Nothing about us, without us, is for us."

The debate was live streamed thanks to the generous support of Alan Weldon, Ecosse Technology and Communications Ltd.

Garbh Allt is on the map

THE GARBH ALLT Community Initiative Estate, outside the village of Helmsdale on the east coast of Sutherland, came into being in June.

In almost two years of determined effort by the volunteer directors, they traversed the complexities of business planning and detailed mapping inherent in purchasing the 3000 acres of mainly working croft land on behalf of the community. This buy-out cost in the region of £250,000, financed via the Scottish Government-funded Scottish Land Fund (SLF), administered by Highlands and Islands Enterprise and the Big Lottery Fund, and the SSE Beatrice Fund (BOWL).

Sutherland Estates approached the local grazings committee, indicating they wished to sell the crofting townships of Portgower, Gartymore, West Helmsdale and Marrel. This tract of land – steeped in history, moulded and bounded by hill, strath and coast – is sustained and peopled by communities young and old. These people, whether recently arrived or those who have been there for generations, are the heart of this crofting community.

The Garbh Allt buyout will bring a new approach to land ownership in the east of Sutherland. The significance is not lost on the directors, who follow in the historic footsteps of the founders of the first branch of the Sutherland Land Law Reform Association in the 1880s, which in turn became the parent of the Highland Land League. Today communities here and beyond can retrace the past from Garbh Allt land up into the Strath of Kildonan.

Land ownership, resettlement and ideas of rewilding are hot topics nationally, with much



Marrel, Garbh Allt Community Estate, Nr Helmsdale.



Indicative map of Garbh Allt buy-out area

discussion about the action needed to support community-owned lands to play a pivotal role in the sustainable futures of their communities.

Garbh Allt chairwoman Anne Fraser says the initiative is ambitious and aims to develop a solid, economically-viable basis from which to push on with opportunities identified in the early stages of making the buy-out case. The community ballot gave 95% support in favour of buying the land, meaning Garbh Allt can move forward with this mandate to deliver with and for the community.

In an area which has long suffered from a lack of employment and depopulation, Garbh Allt will work to stimulate and support socio-economic opportunities, giving more people the chance to be part of a thriving forward-looking community.

Priorities will be informed through on-going collaboration locally and with others who are further ahead on the community land-ownership journey.

Events are planned to celebrate the purchase and give communities near and far an opportunity to unite and appreciate what being community landowners can bring to all the people in and around the buy-out area.

To be part of this new initiative, people can join, free, the growing membership and/or support Garbh Allt's soon-to-be-launched Founding Funders scheme. Please see www.garbhallt.land for more information.

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Contact: hello@garbhallt.land 07507696795
www.garbhallt.land
 Garbh Allt Community Initiative, c/o Community Centre, Dunrobin Street, Helmsdale KW8 6JA
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TRAINING

Another successful year for SCF training

Great to see SCF's Crofters and Smallholders Skills Boost 2016 – 2019 going from strength to strength.

THE ANNUAL REPORT presented by our training and development managers, Tina Hartley and Lucy Beattie, describes a busy year where the training team made every effort to meet demand. This resulted in an additional 11 courses taking place between July 2017 and June 2018.

The project aims to provide demand-led short-duration training for crofters and smallholders in a progressive sequence, from access level to practical courses in selected skills in primary agriculture. This year courses have run in Skye, Gairloch, Aultbea, Moray, Caithness, Argyll, Easter-Ross, Wester-Ross, Lewis, Shetland and over the past two years of the project SCF has trained 1039 participants over 1214 training days – an impressive range of new and improved skills.

SCF chairman, Russel Smith, said "I congratulate the training team on their continued success in running the courses and workshops. It is difficult to set high standards and then maintain the quality every year but they manage it repeatedly. I am always impressed by the enthusiasm of the organisers, tutors and participants and I come away from the courses energised and re-invigorated. Every year brings in new topics and ideas, so that the syllabus is always relevant and up to date. Thanks for another successful year."

quote in Applecross on small jobs, and nearly impossible to get more than one quote for grant purposes, so it's easier to do it ourselves. I appreciated that this training was for women. I would not have had the confidence to attend a course requiring physical effort with men. I enjoyed the course."

"I feel more confident about the process of setting up a croft. I know where to go for advice. Great presenters and good atmosphere."

Highlights from project evaluation in year 2

New entrants: The Access to Crofting Toolkit feedback makes it clear that new entrants appreciate meeting other crofters, interacting with experienced crofter tutors and interacting with peer crofters. One new entrant is hopeful that the training will support his future crofting aspirations: "I am hopefully going to be given my father's land," (Access to Crofting Toolkit, Skye). A successor noted "I plan to replace the fences on my grandfather's croft, following this course," (Fencing, Wester Ross).

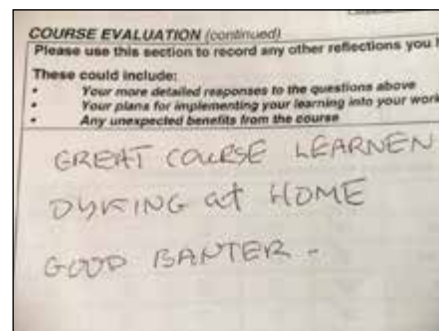
Increased skills acquisition and confidence: Participants on the bite-size practical skills courses noted: "Feeling confident about using a scythe... it instilled confidence in me to handle sheep... now feel confident to tackle a line of fencing, before I wouldn't have done so... I have gained lifelong skills I can build on."

Early stage decision making: Many participants have noted that training is useful in terms of helping them to make better decisions that save time and money and help towards the goal of more effective management decisions. In the access course: "The questions raised by participants and the answers/debate that resulted was a great learning opportunity... crofting has turned from a long-term pipe-dream into an achievable goal."

The practical skills courses yielded tangible feedback in terms of decision-making: "The course improved my knowledge and inspires me to make a better decision to go for it" (Beekeeping, Wester Ross). "The most important learning point from the day has influenced my decision about the type of polytunnel suitable for my site" (Polytunnels, Shetland).

And to sum up feedback, you can't get better than this:-

The training team are now heading into their



Strained wire fencing for women courses received publicity both in the press and on TV. Tina and Lucy had noticed comments in course evaluations suggesting women-only courses would be beneficial, especially in some of the more physical, hands-on practical skills courses such as fencing, shearing, drystone wall etc. So, inspired by the work coming from the Women in Agriculture Taskforce, the training team advertised two fencing events which took place near Ullapool and were extremely successful and well attended.

Valerie Hodgkinson from Applecross, one of the participants, said "I have wanted to learn to fence for some time. I feel I can save money to put towards other areas of the croft by doing fencing myself. It is difficult to get fencers to come and

Quality of tuition and peer support: The choice of tutors and preference of local tutors who are actively involved in agriculture has been highlighted as excellent in feedback scores. Comments include: "I feel more confident about the process of setting up a croft. I know where to go for advice. Great presenters and good atmosphere," (Access to Crofting Toolkit, Kilmartin). "Always good to meet and share experience with other crofters. Just as helpful as the tutor," (Sheep Health, Wester Ross).

Hands-on training: "All of the course was important – being able to get hands-on and see so many aspects of lambing was great," (Lambing, Easter Ross).

third and final year of the project and training manager Tina said "Time is just moving too quickly. I cannot believe we are heading into year 3 of our training project already. Year 2 has taught me that although it is wonderful that we have received funding for the project, some funding criteria do limit us in what we can provide compared to the demand for certain types of courses."

"I would love to run a training project that can include lots of different elements – digital, diversification, heritage, added value plus primary agriculture. Let's see what the future brings!"

Courses fly out the door very quickly and we now hold a waiting list of folk wishing to attend, so keep an eye on our website www.crofting.org and our Facebook page, Scottish Crofting Federation @croftingcraic – and don't forget to sign up for our training newsletter via the website. For all training enquiries please email training@crofting.org.

TRAINING

Learn about strained-wire fencing

IN JULY SCF ran two strained-wire fencing courses at Turriefield in Shetland.

We are looking forward to hosting a few more dates in Shetland this coming year and if this interests you, please get in touch to register your interest training@crofting.org.

If you are keen to learn more about strained-wire fencing, get in touch as we can offer this training through the SCF Crofters and Smallholders Skillsboost project.

How to place a strainer in a stock fence:

Step 1

First dig a square hole with a spade as far down as you can go.

Step 2

When you can go no deeper with the spade use shovelers to dig deeper and extract soil and stone. If it's a strainer for a stock fence the hole needs to be 3 feet deep.

Step 3

Note how the strainer hole has nice square edges. This is easier to work with and ensures more stability when packing in stones.

Step 4

Find some good-shaped, flat-faced stones to pack down next to the base of the strainer for a heel and a facing stone. NB Don't let the stones touch in the strainer hole as this affects the stability of your strainer.

Step 5

Once the strainer and heel and toe stones at the base of the hole are placed and driven in using a punch bar, put some of the soil in. The next level of stabilising stones will be put in once soil is back filled about half way up the strainer.

Step 6

The final layer of stones near the top of the hole. These have to be driven in hard with a punch bar.

Step 7

Complete the backfill of soil and pack down. The strainer is now ready to become part of a fence line.

One question that often comes up on the courses is – what if my ground is too stony to dig down the right depth? Well we've heard a few suggestions from sharp gravel stabilisation to postcrete.

There are lots of challenges when making a fence, if it's not stones it's the midgies.



UPCOMING training dates

Access to Crofting Toolkit

- 1st & 2nd September – Strathpeffer Community Centre
- 17th & 18th November – Rothes, Moray

Practical Skills Courses

Woodland, sheepdog handling, horticulture and livestock.

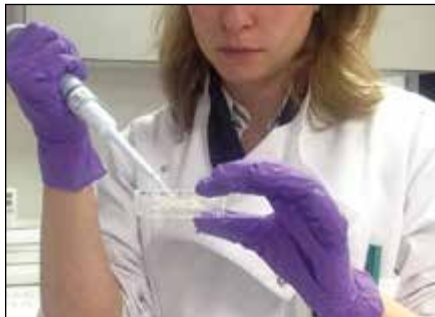
More dates to be released for Assynt, Caithness, Skye and Shetland.

Sign up to the SCF newsletter to keep in the loop – training@crofting.org

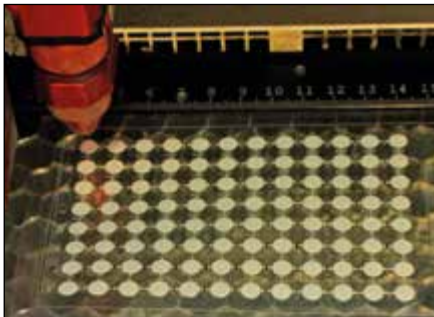


ON THE CROFT

Smart engineering for the development of new sheep scab diagnostics



The author with the developed paper device carrying out a blood test for sheep scab



A prototype of a laminated paper device fabricated using a laser cutting machine

SHEEP SCAB IS the most important ectoparasitic disease of sheep in the UK and it represents a significant threat to both animal welfare and farm economics.

In the current climate of widespread antibiotic and anthelmintic resistance and especially after the first report of resistant sheep scab mites to injectable treatment, it is definitely no longer appropriate to apply whole flock treatments without a confirmed diagnosis. At the same time, farmers are extremely busy and the prospect of waiting days for a diagnosis or having to gather animals more than once is not exactly appealing, meaning that a rapid and accurate diagnosis would really make a difference in the battle against this and other diseases.

Something that has been at the core of agricultural research, and that should really be exploited to its full potential, is the use of the modern technologies to make farming more efficient and less labour intensive – what is now called smart farming.

Among the emerging technologies, one in

particular can be applied to disease diagnosis, by allowing diagnostic labs to be transferred into the field. The technology has been developed from engineering methods for the fabrication of microchips (commonly used in the electronic industry) and consists of a fabricated plastic platform that can analyse extremely small amounts of fluid – just a few drops of blood, for example – using interconnected networks of channels measuring less than a few millimetres. These “pocket” laboratories have the potential to automate all the processes involved in performing a diagnostic test and can provide reliable (comparable to the centralised lab), rapid (within minutes) and on-site results.

A particular smart evolution of these technologies is the use of paper to fabricate the devices. Paper is cheap, easy to source and biodegradable. Chips made from paper are low-cost, do not require external power sources, whilst fabrication techniques and machinery for production are usually less expensive, with minimal technical expertise required. In the specific case

of sheep scab, the recent introduction of a blood test for early, sub-clinical, diagnosis of the disease has considerably improved the tools available to combat the disease.

The game changer now would be the possibility to diagnose the disease at the animal-side (a pen-side test), especially at markets or before incoming stock join the main flock. Therefore, this disease represented an ideal model to evaluate how smart engineering can be adapted to solve relevant problems in a practical way.

A PhD project, in collaboration between Moredun Research Institute and Heriot-Watt University, allowed the sheep scab blood test to be transferred onto a paper device (image 1). The fabrication technique used for these devices was based on a combination of paper cutting by laser machine and packaging through thermal lamination (image 2). The device was fabricated at a very low cost (£0.3), with a simple, rapid and versatile method which did not require special expertise. The next step will be validation of the test results on the paper devices and the final design – a paper device that will be available to farmers and vets as a pen-side test for sheep scab.

The most important outcome of this collaborative project was the process of thinking outside of the box by exploiting available technologies in new ways, promoting the collaboration between experts from different fields, but most importantly to target the research at the end-user, ie what needs should be addressed and what outcomes are available to them as practical solutions to solve challenging situations.

*Valentina Busin
Moredun Research Institute*

Feed the beast; cultivate compost

Jamie Robertson, honorary research fellow, University of Aberdeen

THERE IS NOTHING new about composting, but as a task that relies on little more than labour and foresight, just like dry-stone walling, ditching, weed control and maintaining drains, it is a task that has fallen away from use. And the benefits lost.

Those benefits include adding a complex of organic matter and nutrients to the plant-growth zone of soils, the slow release of those nutrients and the stimulation of microbial growth in the root zone. All these will contribute to improved plant growth.

Composting can be lifted from the casual chucking of green waste into a corner of the yard to a more controlled process that is able to produce a steady annual contribution to soil improvement.

The base requirements are to construct a simple bin to contain green waste as it becomes available and a lid to cover the compost and prevent persistent rainfall from turning the whole process into an anaerobic mess.

The compost bin should be treated like a healthy stomach, with a steady supply of varied inputs. Large volumes of the same material such as bracken fronds or long grass ignored by sheep need some help to promote composting. Mixing different types of vegetation into the bin is the simplest solution.

A compost pit can take many forms and will depend on what materials are available at minimal cost. The target is to create a container that allows air to permeate the contents at all levels. For example, take seven pallets, stand them on end, nail together, and form two open topped cubes.

Fill with green waste as it becomes available, and spread evenly within the container.

The detail IS important, as clumps of densely packed material will not compost easily. The process is greatly helped by the addition of small quantities of manure such as hen pen or sheep droppings which add nitrogen to the mix and improve the carbon/nitrogen ratio. Compost accelerators are not expensive and make a good investment, whilst nettles, comfrey and vegetable waste will all increase the diversity of minerals in the mix.

The compost will settle; keep adding material until the box is full. In our climate the lid is valuable as it prevents the composting process from slowing down, maintains aerobic conditions and retains the heat that is vital to degrade unwanted seeds. I use discarded sheets of OSB, cut to size. When



one box is full, start another, with useable material available after a year or two. Open up the side of a box using a crowbar. Expect a variety of material, with the finest compost for the vegetable patch and the rough stuff suitable for mulching. Easy.

ON THE CROFT

Donald's hortiblog

WELL, I'VE SAID it often enough.

Every year is different – and what a year this is turning into. As I write in early July we are experiencing hot and dry, indeed drought, conditions. Here in northwest Skye we recorded an astounding temperature of 31.5 degrees at the end of June.

This was in complete contrast to the middle of the month when we were hit by Storm Hector. Weather forecasters described this event as very unusual for the time of year. This is not so, at least in the western and northern isles; and in fairly recent experience.

Where we used to live and work, in the west of Lewis, there was a name for this recognised weather phenomenon; *rotach bhodaich bhig*, "the storm of the wee old men" (please, anyone, feel free to correct my Gaelic). The wee old men referred to were two fishermen who set out under sail in fine, settled weather to fish around the Flannan Isles, those isles notorious for the 19th century disappearance of the lighthouse keepers. A severe storm blew up out of nowhere, for that is the characteristic of the June gale. The fishermen's boat was driven ashore and, fortunately, they were rescued after a few days.

The effects of a June storm could be devastating for crofters in the days when growing food was a matter of life and death. The tender, newly-emerged shaws of potatoes would be broken off. In Shetland, the recently-planted



Tropical conditions in the polytunnel.

cabbage crop might be written off, with severe consequences the following winter.

Luckily, our outdoor brassica crops were protected and the damaged potatoes appear to be recovering.

Following this year's June gale, the weather change was dramatic. Polytunnel crops are well advanced but supplying them with water in the arid Isle of Skye is even more challenging than usual. The public water supply has not kept pace with the island's boom in tourism and house building, and there is little natural water storage capacity due to the island's geology and topography. As long as the burn running through the croft continues to trickle, we can manage.

Outdoor strawberries have cropped very



Leeks struggling in the drought.

well, but are coming to an end early due to the conditions. We are eagerly awaiting what appears to be a heavy tomato crop to ripen, but meantime, we are picking cucumbers and we have aubergines at least a month early. Overwintered garlic has been lifted and is drying for storage; and onions from seed sown in February are ready to lift. A huge crop of sugar-snap peas has been very popular with our customers and a second crop of these is ready to plant out. We optimistically planted a polytunnel crop of broccoli hoping for a quick return, but this has struggled in the heat and we have been fighting off a cabbage moth attack.

So far so good. A good drop of rain would be more than welcome, as long as it stops...

Skye grassland trials update

SAC's Janette Sutherland reports

THIS IS THE second year of the Skye and Lochalsh Grassland Group, which is funded by the Universities Innovation Fund.

The meetings and trials have all been kindly hosted by crofter Ian Duncan of Feorlig, Skye. On 3rd July nine crofters and farmers met to discuss the on-croft trials undertaken so far and ideas for future trials. This was excellent attendance in light of a world cup clash. Visits to the trial plots sparked a range of interesting discussions. "How can we measure soil microbes?" one participant asked.

SRUC grassland expert David Lawson suggested the tea bag method, where tea bags are buried and their breakdown used to assess soil decomposition. As facilitator, I offered to provide the tea bags if people were willing to bury them. Other participants mentioned the bury-your-underpants method they had read about in the farming press

on Monitor Farms. You can follow these results on social media using #soilmyundies. The Farm Advisory Service nutrient network farm, in Watnish, Skye also used bait lamina sticks to try to assess this in 2017. Another discussion focused on the biodiversity benefits of liming, since wading birds – such as lapwing, oystercatcher and curlew – feed on earthworms and other invertebrates, which thrive in soils with higher pH.

In previous articles we have talked about the slow-release fertiliser trials. We are testing slow-release fertilisers for a second year, in very different weather conditions from 2017. The initial grass height measurements do not favour the slow release fertilisers this year, unlike last. However the experiment is not over. We will shortly be taking silage yield measurements.

This year we have established a new trial on different types of nitrogen fixers. These are plants that can convert nitrogen from the air into the soil. In the spring of this



Grassland David Lawson describes the slow release fertiliser trial

year various nitrogen-fixing plants were oversown into an established grassland sward. The trial site has a pH of six and also moderate levels of soil phosphate. This is an excellent basis to establish clovers, as most struggle with low pH and low phosphate conditions. It is always worthwhile to know your soil pH and fertility levels. If you wish to know more about getting soil analysed please contact your local SAC office.

Species sown included white clover, crimson clover, berseem clover, alsike clover and red clover.

Other species trialled were yellow trefoil, bird's-foot trefoil and vetch. In addition, plantain was sown due to its potential health benefits for sheep. It will be interesting to see how these plants fare over the season. In addition to the production benefits, the plants will provide a food source for many pollinators. There are estimates that bird's-foot trefoil is a food source for 160 invertebrates, so incorporating these species can benefit both your crofting enterprise and the natural world.

ON THE CROFT

Cheese, ice cream, soap: adding value to crofting

Mary Norton reports

THE BRINGING Back Dairy conference was held on Grimsay in March, with 22 participants from the Uists, Lewis and the mainland. The practical side of small-scale dairying was explored in talks, discussions and a workshop. Some of the high points were:

Animals on the land

Whatever animal you keep, it needs to be the right breed for the land. This is easier on the beast, the crofter and the wallet. Smaller is better. Anything they can do in the Nordic countries is physically possible here.

Sheep – Don't try Frieslands, they can't stand the wet. Any breed can be milked. Note the ewes with the healthiest lambs and try them. Texels are quite good; even Hebrideans can be milked. Sheep's milk is richer than cows' in protein and fat. Ten litres of sheep milk can produce two kilos of cheese, but cows' only one kilo. Sheep cheese does not have to taste of sheep.

Goats – The group learned useful details about raising goats. They do need some shelter, like a polytunnel. They can be bred at 18 months, and can run through into a second year of milking. With good care, a good animal can produce three litres of milk daily.

Cows – Recommended were Dexters, Shetlands and Belties. Highlanders' milk is rich, making top-notch ice cream.

Any milking animal needs some extra input as they are being pushed harder. Pay attention to grazing management and good access to water and shelter.

All about milk

There's a lot to know about milk that affects how you work with it, whether making cheese, pasteurising or freezing. Milk products are complex and full of living organisms. Managing the bacteria and enzymes is what makes the different products and flavours. The group learned about the structure and behaviour of milk.

Raw milk? Pasteurised? The conclusion was that making raw milk products for sale is not a good idea anymore, for two reasons. It's expensive, as the cost of fortnightly



Cheese-making workshop with Kathy Biss (West Highland Dairy)



Talk on dairy, land and breeds, Bosse Dahlgren



Dairy conference panel L to R – Kathy Biss, Ena MacDonald (Uist crofter), Bosse Dahlgren (Swedish dairy cooperative), Wendy Barrie (Scottish Food Guide Slow Food Scotland), Dave Eastwood (Lewis Cheese Company)

testing has risen from £5 to £40, due to changes in legislation. Also modern people have weaker immune and digestive systems, and are less able to tolerate diverse bacteria. But pasteurising (64° C for 30 minutes or 72° for 15 seconds) can be done with a bucket in a boiler.

Facilities can be very small. Isle of Lewis Cheese built their entire dairy for about £5,000 (using an existing building) by sourcing used materials and equipment. There must be a milking stand and yoke, whether milking by hand or by machine. Some prize-winning Swedish dairies are housed in small wooden

cottages. Keeping things clean and organised is essential to a good product.

Value

Added value comes from well-made, distinctive products with a good story. Dairy products vary greatly in return on investment of time and money. Because liquid milk has a guaranteed market and no storage/cash flow problems, with low labour/ time requirements, it is the most cost-effective way to sell milk. All the other products are costly in time/labour/storage and most cause cash flow problems. The best

return comes from ice cream, then butter, hard cheeses, soft cheeses, then yoghurt (huge supermarket competition) and kefir.

Value also comes from figuring out what kinds of production and what daily/annual schedule works for you, and wasting nothing. For example, at West Highland Dairy they kept lambs for only three weeks and sold them on for finishing, but others might want to include meat in their business plan. We tasted a Swedish cheese selling at £50 per kilo.

There was some discussion of other possible croft products – from soap to salami. Viable food businesses enrich the community, provide food security for the area, and offer interesting tourism opportunities.

Progressing

The cheese-making workshop group tended toward two different models:

1) get on with it, get started and work cooperatively. One croft could have the stock and milk, another could make products.

2) seek funding and establish a dairy.

The group plans to meet up again to sample their hard cheese, now being aged at West Highland Dairy, and see where their thoughts have led them.

The overall view of the presenters was that small can be high-value and manageable. There's no need to think big. Make a good product, don't be pressured into expanding more than you want to. Small dairying can be a good add-on to a crofting business.

Thanks to the exceptional presenters for bringing their expertise to Uist:

Kathy Biss of West Highland Dairy (Wester Ross), Dave Eastwood of Lewis Cheese Company (Back), Wendy Barrie: Scottish Cheese Trail / Scottish Food Guide (Fife), Bosse Dahlgren: traditional farming and native breeds (Sweden and Fife). Thanks also to Uibhistich Ena MacDonald and Phil Jubb for sharing their experience, to Alasdair MacEachen for reference material, and to SNH (Scotland's Natural Larder programme) for financial support.

ON THE CROFT

Teas an t-samhraidh

THA SAMHRADH ceart againn agus teas is tiormachd a' dol fad sheachdainean.

An dèidh geamhradh air leth fliuch, tha e na thlachd a bhith a' coiseachd air talamh gun a bhith a' dol sìos gu na h-adhbrannan ann am poll. Chan e a-mhàin sin, ach tha a h-uile rud cho furasta. Chaidh obair an earraich a dhèanamh gun strì, eadar threabhadh, innearadh agus cur, agus thàinig fàs aon uair 's gun robh beagan teas san talamh.

A-nis, leis cho tioram 's a tha e, rinn sinn feur, ged a tha e nas taine nan abhaist, ach bha an cothrom ann. Chan eil e soirbh feur a dhèanamh san taobh an iar, agus am bitheantas bidh againn ri plòigh air choireigin a chur am feum, ge b' ann le cocannan a chur suas no am feur a chrochadh air ueirichean.

Ach, am-bliadhna, cha robh ann ach a thionndadh dhà na trì trupan, agus bha e deiseil airson bèileadh. Mar sin, obair a bhios tric a' dol fad an t-samhraidh dèanta aig toiseach an luchair. A-nis ge-tà tha, an talamh a' fàs cho tioram 's gu bheil cuid de bhàrr ann an cunnart seargadh uile gu lèir. Tha glasraich feumach air uisgeachadh



agus eadhon am buntàta fhèin a' coimhead tioram. Tha feur air na tomanan a' dol ruadh agus chuala mi air na naidheachdan gu bheil cuid de thuathanaich a' gabhail dragh nach bi geamhrachadh gu leòr aca do na beathaichean – ged a tha cuid eile ag innse gu bheil an stuth a rinn iad den ghnè as àirde – agus 's e an fhirinn a tha sin. Mar an ceudna, tha gnè na measan boga, na sùbhan, aig àirde cuideachd – agus an t-iarrais air an son.

Bha mi a-mach air drèanadh an turas mu dheireadh, 's am baile againn a' cur air dòigh sgeime drèanaireachd. Bha plan againn, chuir sinn a-staigh airson grant agus bha sinn a'

feitheamh air digear. Gu fortanach cha b' urrainn do fhear an digear tighinn gu o chionn goirid, agus mar sin, tha am monadh cho tioram 's a bha e riamh. Bha an digear a' siubhal tro àiteannan a bhiodh gu tur do-dhèanta dha, beagan mhiosan air ais. Ach an dèidh sin, aon uair 's gun robh na digean fosgailte bha uisge a' ruith annta – annas nan annasan!

Ged a tha cion uisge na dhuilgheadas, tha buannachdan na lùib agus gun teagamh togail-inntinn a bhith faicinn na grèine!

le Gabhan Mac a' Phearsain

Scottish Smallholder Festival returns to Forfar

AFTER SIX YEARS at Lanark Agricultural Centre, the Scottish Smallholder Festival returns to Forfar Mart, with a new date and format but with all the inspiring and informative content of previous years.

This year's festival moves to Sunday 28th October, later in the year, but giving an opportunity to get in a bit of early Christmas shopping at the variety of craft and trade stands.

With no showing classes for goats and sheep this year, the festival will showcase as many breeds of cattle, sheep, goats, pigs and native equines as possible, with a focus on the breeds most likely to appeal to smallholders. Visitors will be able to chat with owners, breeders and breed society representatives as well as watching (and taking part in) a range of demonstrations.

The seminar programme remains – fifteen talks on a wide variety of subjects – plus craft and rural skills demonstrations.

The poultry and waterfowl show continues, as does the garden, craft and food competition, with a wide selection of classes including sticks and crooks, jams and jellies and crafted fleece and fibre.

With the return to Forfar, there's a welcome return of local artisan food, with a range of producers lined up to provide fantastic food to take home or enjoy on the day.

Thanks to support from the Scottish Government, entry to the main event will be free, with tickets giving entry to demonstrations and talks available for only £10.

Rosemary Champion, one of the organising team, said, "We're working hard to finalise the programme and details will be on the website soon – www.ssgf.uk. We're really looking forward to being back at Forfar and being more accessible to folk from the north of Scotland."



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- ♦ Trade stands and exhibition
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ON THE CROFT

Focusing on local seed

Project coordinator Maria Scholten describes a new initiative

IT HAS BEEN a bit quiet around local seed and local corn landraces on the Hebrides since the end of the Machair LIFE+ project.

The recently-launched EC-funded Farmer's Pride project described below creates an opportunity to take stock of what crop diversity crofting areas still harbour and how this can be linked with and benefit from other European networks for the conservation of traditional farmers' varieties.

A second project by The Gaia Foundation, covering the UK and Ireland, could potentially underpin the Farmers' Pride inventory.

The general background to the UK and Ireland Seed Sovereignty Programme (2018-2020) is that the market for organic or low-input produce is growing and the use of organic seed made compulsory for organic producers. Existing seed businesses are unable to meet demand and are looking for more vegetable and cereal seed producers. The Seed Sovereignty

Programme is currently being rolled out and has seen the development of a series of training events on different aspects of seed saving and production.

Groups involved thus far are mainly small-scale commercial vegetable growers with an interest in diversifying into valuable seed crops. Seed-saving groups have also expressed interest – in Scotland, for example, in Aberdeenshire.

As coordinator for the programme in Scotland, having been involved in research and conservation of local seed with Machair LIFE+, Crofting Connections and learning modules about local seed for the crofting course at Sgoil Lionacleit, I find some irony in the name of the project "Seed Sovereignty", when in crofting areas entire islands of seed sovereignty exist – think Shetland or Uist – where generations of crofters have been maintaining traditional crops through local seed production, processing and storage. The DIY seed-drying facility in lochdar on South Uist comes to mind as a good example of crofters' inventiveness and independence.

For those who are not familiar with it: this started in 2012 with a Lister motor, a fan and a shipping container and is still evolving.

So how can the Seed Sovereignty Programme be useful for crofting areas beside flagging up nation-wide crofters' crops and seeds? Is there interest in training about field harvesting crofters' corn, to transfer the expertise of seed production to younger generations? Or even to reintroduce crops and seeds to crofting areas where traditional crops have been lost?

Your views will be sought later this summer. Hopefully both projects will offer space to evaluate the legacy of work done previously; what needs have arisen since; what interests crofters have in further action to promote this unique crofting diversity.

You do not have to wait to be contacted, email or phone – maria@gaianet.org or 07388086438.

www.gaiafoundation.org/what-we-do/food-seed-and-climate-change-resilience/seed-sovereignty-uk-ireland-programme

The importance of crofting in landrace cultivation



Shetland kale on Whalsay

Nigel Maxted outlines an important new survey

ENSURING FOOD security for now and the future is one of the greatest challenges of our time.

One in nine people worldwide suffer from chronic hunger and the human population is projected to rise to 9.7 billion by 2050 – meaning an extra 2.2 billion mouths to feed. Food production is also expected to be greatly impacted by climate change, with production likely to decrease by 25% in the latter half of the century, if crop varieties are not adapted to the changing environment.

In addition, other pressures such as dwindling ecosystem services, diminishing water supplies, scarcity of pollinators and competition for land emphasise the urgent need

for more sustainable and efficient agricultural systems. Although food security can be improved by changing social behaviours, such as altering diets and preventing unnecessary food waste, mitigating the agricultural impact of climate change is likely to have the greatest benefit. This will involve developing more sustainable and extensive agronomic management systems and climate-smart crop varieties better able to withstand changing environmental conditions.

The Scottish northern and western islands have a role to play.

In 2003 - 2004 the University of Birmingham undertook a review of the cultivation of UK crop landraces, that is those traditional varieties not formally bred but maintained on farms and crofts. The highest concentration of these landraces was found on Scottish islands,



Uist barley at Lionacleit Benbecula

mainly in crofting areas. Landraces are particularly important in terms of food security because they still sustain diversity, not being actively bred like commercial cultivars for uniformity.

The University of Birmingham recently obtained funding from the EU for the Farmer's Pride project (www.farmerspride.eu), which aims to establish a network of stakeholders and sites across Europe (not just the EU) where landrace or crop-wild-relative (wild species closely related to crops) diversity is maintained.

Living in the UK, we wanted to ensure UK landrace maintainers and hotspots of crop diversity were included, so we wish to survey which crofters still grow crop landraces and how the network to be established might better support landrace maintenance on a long-

term basis.

Therefore, this summer Liv, Maria and I will be traveling through Orkney, Shetland and the Hebrides meeting up with crofters to record what landraces they maintain, their cultivation and uses and importantly, what are your views on how the network can better help you continue landrace cultivation.

If you are a crofter who does, did or would like to grow crop landraces and would be willing to speak to us, please contact Maria Scholten at 07388086438 and we will get back to you to organise an interview.

*Nigel Maxted¹, Olivia Shoemark¹ and Maria Scholten²
School of Biosciences, University of Birmingham¹
² Free-lance researcher and advisor, Inverness*

Croft woodlands need YOU – a call for volunteers



SINCE 2015, the Croft Woodland Project has been helping crofters and smallholders create woodlands. Interest in planting trees has grown so much that our small team of advisers is now looking for up to five local woodland volunteers to help meet demand across the crofting counties.

If you have practical skills and a bit of knowledge about trees, crofting, or the natural

environment, we would love to hear from you. Failing that, enthusiasm and a willingness to get involved is enough to start with. We'll give you some training, and you'll develop plenty of new skills and experience along the way.

Each woodland volunteer will be working closely with one of the three regional croft woodland advisers. We are hoping to have one volunteer based near Inverness, one on Lewis and one near

Oban, as well as one each on Eigg and Islay.

We'll aim to find activities for each person as close to home as possible, but there will be some travel, and volunteers will need to have access to suitable transport. Assistance with travel expenses will be provided.

The roles will be varied, but are likely to include:

- visiting sites to carry out an initial assessment of suitability for tree planting;

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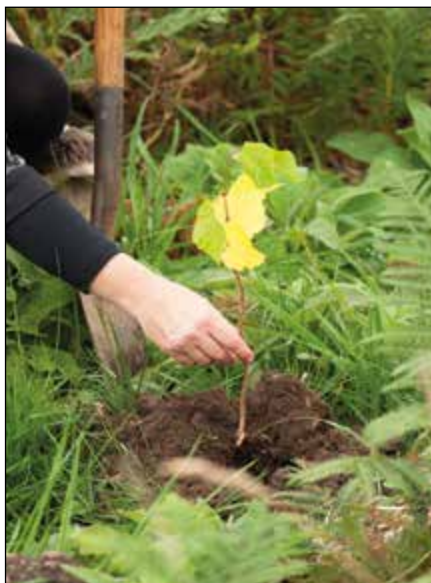
Trees for the crofting community

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

Free advice and support is available to crofters, common grazings and smallholders to help with planting and managing woodlands.

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

to help meet demand for creating new woodlands



© John Macpherson

- co-ordinating local distribution of MOREwoods* trees during the planting season;
- helping crofters source and order trees for Forestry Grant Scheme† projects;
- giving a hand with planting, including practical help with tree identification, site layout, tree planting and installing guards;
- visiting planted sites and offering advice on aftercare ;
- promoting croft woodlands on social media, at shows and events;
- taking photos to record what's being delivered;
- other exciting things – maybe some tree nursery work.

The woodland volunteer opportunities will be advertised on the Woodland Trust website later this summer – www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/get-involved/volunteer-with-us/opportunities. Or just drop us a line at crofting@woodlandtrust.org.uk and we'll send you an information pack as soon as it is available.

If you have time, an affinity with trees and are willing to give your neighbours a hand, then the Croft Woodlands Project needs YOU!

*MOREwoods offers subsidised trees and guards to crofters, farmers and landowners.

†The Forestry Grant Scheme offers grants for new woodland planting

Highland self-build loan fund



The Highland Small Communities Housing Trust (HSCHT) is a registered charity set up in 1998 to help rural communities secure long term solutions to their local housing needs.

HSCHT has made affordable rural homes a reality for local households and communities across the length and breadth of the Highlands.

HSCHT receives funding from a variety of sources including the Scottish Government and various charitable trusts and foundations, in addition to its own income from housing development work and other fee-earning business activities.

www.hscht.co.uk

FOLLOWING A review of the self-build loan fund pilot in the Highland area, the minister for local government and housing announced in November 2017 a three-year £4m self-build loan fund, which will offer financial assistance to people who want to build their own home.

The fund, which will be launched in Autumn 2018, will offer eligible self-builders across Scotland in both urban and rural areas loans of up to £175,000 for development costs related to their self-build project. This will enable self-builders to reach build completion and therefore access a traditional mortgage which can then be used to repay the loan.

Applicants will be expected to have:

- full land ownership of their building plot or have a contract to buy the land; and

- have both planning permission and a building warrant in place to allow work on the project to start within a period agreed between the self-builder and the fund administrator.

The house has to be the sole residence of the applicant once the project is completed and applicants must demonstrate that standard bank lending is not available to support the project.

The review of the Highland pilot indicated that several respondents would welcome more specific guidance on the implications of crofting. Scottish Government officials confirm this will be addressed in the revised guidance for the national fund.

Further information on the Highland pilot can be found at the Highland Small Communities Housing Trust website – www.hscht.co.uk/highland-self-build-loan-fund.html.



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MEMBERS PAGES

What our members think of the SCF

THANK YOU TO the 363 members who replied to the survey in the last edition of *The Crofter*. We are a membership organisation so it is vital that we are aware of who our members are and what they are thinking.

This article looks at some of the high-level results from the survey. We will look at the responses to the question on which member services are most useful in more detail in the next edition.

The key question for the board is perhaps "How do you rate the effectiveness of the SCF?"

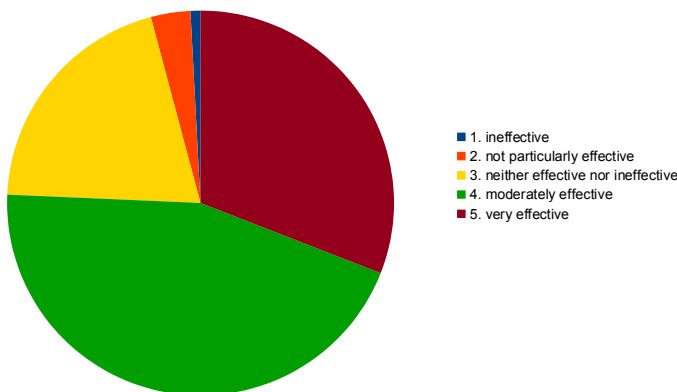
This showed that most people thought that the SCF was moderately or very effective with an average rating of 4 out of 5. This is slightly better than the rating the last time we asked this question four years ago, so we are moving in the right direction. But there is still room to improve.

Newer members are more likely to give a higher rating.

The written comments ranged from "I guess they are doing the best they can with the resources available," to "thank goodness SCF is in existence," and the enigmatic "we get the committee members we deserve." Training gets a number of very positive comments.

We will take them all on board.

Q11: Effectiveness of SCF rated - weighed average 4.02



The biggest concern for the future of crofting was about economic viability – support payments, Brexit etc. Secondly, you were concerned about access to crofts for young people and the aging of the crofting population. These are key issues that SCF is tackling. The future of crofting depends on it being profitable and on getting new people and new ideas into the fank.

Crofting law is also important for the future but was less of an immediate concern for members, as it is something that only touches us now and again.

Only one member had "no worries"!

Looking at some of the other

questions (and bearing in mind that the results are for those who answered the survey so may not be representative of all members or of crofters in general) –

87% occupy or have the use of a croft.

72% have a share in a common grazings, but we don't have information on how many actually use their share or in how many cases the grazings share has been separated from the in by.

The average length of time that respondents have held their crofts is just over 20 years and the average length of membership is 10 years.

62% are tenants, 37% owner

occupiers, so we as an organisation need to represent both strands of crofting and treat them the same. There were four sub-tenants in the survey.

63% keep sheep and 27% keep cattle. Around 20% keep poultry and practise horticulture, with 12% mentioning forestry.

The main reasons for joining the SCF were to support crofting and to be kept informed, with assistance and advice also featuring prominently.

Just under a third of responses were from females.

Around 34% have other on-croft income-generating activities, mainly tourist accommodation but also including crafts, some contracting businesses and a few unrelated professional services which use the croft as a base. Other crofters or family members will have outside employment to boost household income.

We are also grateful to those who supplied their contact details, as we endeavour to keep our database up to date so we can get in touch with you. If you haven't given your email address to hq@crofting.org, please do so and you will get the monthly newsletter and other useful information delivered to your inbox.

Thanks again for taking the time to complete the survey.

Helping our members

ONE OF THE many benefits of SCF membership is access to information and assistance on the wide range of issues which may arise on and around the croft.

Queries can range from responsibility for maintenance of mutual boundary fences; creating a croft; apportionments; appealing on refusal of a grant; access by others onto croft land; shooting rights; marauding deer; training; croft woodlands; sheep stock clubs; management of common grazings and use of shares; accessing finance; plus many and varied other topics.

Members are advised to contact SCF HQ with as much background detail as possible, preferably by email, in order to help us provide the most appropriate signposting and information. If SCF HQ staff are unable to assist immediately, they refer the case on to our panel of volunteers, who are all members with practical experience of crofting and its administration and challenges.

It can occasionally take a few days for these busy people, who are all unpaid volunteers with crofts to run and day jobs, to find time to reply to HQ in detail to members' queries, but from these HQ staff will compile a response as quickly as possible for the member.

If the member's enquiry is of a legal and complex nature, he or she will be referred on to SCF's legal advisory service, which provides initial free advice and a discounted rate on legal fees if the solicitor takes on the case. This service is only available to paid-up members.

Dear Sandra, June '18

Thank you for supporting me. It's people like you and the case workers that make me proud to be a member of the SCF!

All the best.



Brian Inkster, Fergus Ewing and Russell Smith at the Royal Highland Show.

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Alasdair Allan MSP/BPA

If anybody would like to meet with Alasdair Allan,
Member of the Scottish Parliament for the Western Isles,
he can be contacted using the following details:

Ma tha duine sam bith ag iarraidh coinneachadh ri
Alasdair Allan, Ball-Pàrlamaid na h-Alba airson nan Eilean
Siar faodaidh sibh a cleachdadh na seòlaidhean a leanas:

Address/Seòladh:
20 Kenneth Street
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MEMBERS PAGES

A sympathetic ear when you need it

Jim Hume, convener of the National Rural Mental Health Forum, outlines a resource for us all in times of difficulty.

THE SCOTTISH Crofting Federation is part of the National Rural Mental Health Forum, a growing body of organisations committed to tackling mental health and wellbeing across rural Scotland.

Membership includes government departments, NHS organisations, mental health organisations and, importantly, organisations like the SCF with outreach into remote and rural parts of Scotland. The forum is raising awareness through its membership of mental health, feeds into different government policies to ensure that the rural aspect of experiencing mental ill health is taken into account, furthering research and building capacity in communities.

One of the organisations is the Samaritans. Most people have heard of them, yet not many have a real understanding of what they do and how their service works and why you might want to contact them. We therefore think it useful to give you an insight into their work. Below, we tackle some myths and misconceptions.

- 1. You have to be suicidal to contact Samaritans**
Most people who contact Samaritans are not suicidal. They're here for anyone who is struggling and who might need someone to listen. They will give you an



opportunity to talk about any thoughts or feelings you have, whatever they may be. They won't make decisions for you, they're here to listen and help you find your own way through.

- 2. They are a religious organisation**
They're not religious. They don't impose any personal attitudes or beliefs on you and are a non-judgemental organisation.
- 3. They don't work in Scotland**
Samaritans opened their first branch in Scotland in 1959 – their second-ever branch in the UK. They have around 1,000 trained volunteers in branches across Scotland, from Stornoway to Selkirk.
- 4. They'll speak to someone local if I call**
When you call their free 116 123 number,

you're put through to the Samaritans volunteer who has been waiting the longest from across the UK – not the one nearest you. So you're just as likely to speak to someone in Cornwall as you are someone in Inverness.

- 5. It won't be confidential or anonymous**
When you call Samaritans, your number is not displayed to our volunteer. The phones we use don't have caller display information on them. In fact, when you call us our number won't even show up on your phone bill. You don't have to give your real name or any personal information if you don't want to.
- 6. I can only call once and only for so long**
You can contact them whenever you need by phone, email or text. And you can take as long as you need. Your call is completely free – you don't need credit on your mobile and can call without money from a phone box.

Anyone can contact Samaritans for FREE any time from any phone on 116 123. This number won't be on your phone bill. Or you can email jo@samaritans.org or visit www.samaritans.org to find details of your nearest branch.

For more information on the National Rural Mental Health Forum, visit www.ruralwellbeing.org. The convener's email is JHume@supportinmindscotland.org.uk.

John MacLeod, Daviot

IT WAS WITH great sadness that we learned of the passing of John MacLeod on 14th June.

John was raised in Linicro, North Skye, where he took over the family croft from his elderly father who was not in robust health.

This is just a potted history and a much fuller account can be read in *Kilmuir and Kilmaluig, North Skye, More Echoes from the Past*, namely *From Stallions to Smolts, the Iain Uisdean Story*.

From there he ran a sixty-acre farm in the

Black Isle and eventually settled at his croft at Daviot West, where he made his home with his wife Annie and family of three sons, Hugh, Alastair and Ruaridh and his daughter Kay.

John's lifetime passion for all things mechanical and agricultural was realised when he became an avid collector and custodian of vintage farming and crofting equipment. He was instrumental as a co-founder in the setting up of the Strathnairn Vintage Machinery Working Show which is held every year. Without his knowledge and a wide circle of fellow enthusiasts, a precious heritage would have been lost.

He willingly embraced modern technology which culminated in the award of a first prize in Scotland for energy conservation and a high placing at UK level.

John was an entrepreneur, with the unfailing support of Annie. During the course of a very full life he had been a pioneer in the then fledgling but fragile fish farming industry, where his company Bridge of Faille Smolts became a byword for quality and innovation, acknowledged as one of Europe's largest producers in his time.

At various times he ran a haulage company, a bed and breakfast establishment as well as the myriad duties of raising a family and a large crofting enterprise.

John had been very much in the mainstream

and heady days of setting up the SCU, where he became a very effective vice-president and an excellent local area chairman and ambassador. His support for crofting was steadfast and time spent in his company was a link to the past interspersed with a vision for the future.

Always willing to espouse the crofting interest, John was very often the go-to man for an opinion or quote. His work for the media was always well thought out and equally well received.

His funeral from Smithton Free Church, Inverness, where he was a faithful member, was standing room only, a testament to the man and a life well spent. The cortège left the church to the strains of what was obviously a favourite family song which was very poignant and well suited to the occasion.

We pass on our sincere condolences to Annie and his family, who were a great source of pride to him. They will miss him greatly but will be strengthened by fond memories.

Crofting is the poorer for his passing, but his contribution will not be forgotten, a luminary with strong links to the past and positive about the future, which can best be summarised in his native tongue, *Fior dhuine, caraid dileas agus deagh Ghaidheal*.



MEMBERS PAGES

Retirement at last for John Bannister MBE



John received an industry training award

ORIGINALLY A policeman from the Midlands, John Bannister arrived on the Isle of Skye with the intention of retiring for the first time in the 1990s.

But instead, over the next ten years he established a successful croft from nothing and helped form the Skye and Lochalsh horticultural development association. He served as the local grazings clerk and as secretary to the Sleat and Strath branch of the Scottish Crofting Union, which became the SCF.

In that role John designed and managed the popular SCU crofting induction courses which have grown in demand over the years and are now used region-wide in

the SCF's training programme. He also formed and administered the Highlands and Islands crofters and small landholders training panel and helped secure funding to expand the SCF training programme.

John was also instrumental in the establishment of the Glenelg ferry community company – all this while he was retired.

In 2006 he was awarded an MBE for his services to crofting, which was presented to him at Buckingham Palace by Prince Charles.

He chose to step down from his role as SCF training manager, but again retirement did not last long because he continued as company secretary. John said: "I never really



John Bannister showing African agriculturalists round his croft

understood the concept of retiring because there is always work to do. Work expands to fill the time available for its completion."

That work has been praised by former colleagues in the SCF like chairman Russell Smith who said his work was "the fixed point around which we all circulated."

"He was also secretary of the Skye and Lochalsh branch of SCU and SCF, and a great passion of John's was practical, accessible training in crofting skills. John really took the training and pushed it round the rest of the Highlands and it is now on a professional basis. He was an innovator."

John Bannister proved equally adept when dealing with the fine

points of regulations as company secretary. Mr Smith said: "In the work he did as company secretary he kept us on the straight and narrow, the governance of the charity was always above board. For me as a board member and now chairman that was incredibly useful."

Russell added: "We expressed our thanks at our board and council meeting, awarding John an honorary life membership of the SCF and presenting him with the traditional shepherd's cromag, a symbol of his stewardship role."

We are grateful to the *Press and Journal* for use of its report on John's achievements.

General Data Protection Regulation

OH NO, not another privacy notice. Please bear with us. If you were wondering why a flurry of privacy notices came your way, it's because the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) was introduced into UK law on 25th May, an evolutionary improvement of the Data Protection Act 1998. By now, along with members of other similar organisations, you will have received numerous and various versions of what is known as a fair processing notice, or more simply a privacy notice.

SCF is obliged by law to serve our version of the notice on all our members and others for whom we hold personal information,

electronically or in hard copy. We have tried to include every eventuality where we may have cause to use your data. At first glance they may appear to be the most unlikely instances, but the more usual day-to-day use of data will simply be for purposes of annual renewals, training courses and so forth.

If you have not already received this notice by email, then you are urged to read the copy which can be found on the SCF's website www.crofting.org/join; or contact HQ for a printed version.

The SCF has had a privacy and data protection policy in place (under the Data Protection Act 1998) for many years, which has

served our purposes well. The preamble to that policy reads: *SCF is committed to the privacy of its members, staff, directors, volunteers and representatives in a manner that fosters trust and confidence. This commitment includes protecting the privacy of all the personal information in its care.*

Nothing in GDPR changes this fundamental belief. Members and others whose data we care for can be assured their privacy is in safe hands.

John Bannister MBE – former SCF company secretary

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Russell Smith presents John Bannister with honorary life membership of the SCF and a cromag with Patrick Krause on the left

Scottish Crofting Federation AGM

THE SCF'S well-attended AGM, held in Inverness in June, saw a change of company secretary after a decade of dedicated service from John Bannister MBE.

"John has been doing a sterling job as our company secretary," said SCF chair Russell Smith, "and it is very sad for us, but understandable, that he wishes to retire from official duties and concentrate on his croft business. It is a very responsible governance role and takes a great deal of attention to detail.

"We expressed our thanks at our board and council meeting, awarding John an honorary life membership of the SCF and presenting him with the traditional shepherd's cromag, a symbol of his stewardship role."

Russell continued, "We also gave a warm welcome to his successor, Fiona Mandeville, whose role was ratified at the AGM. Fiona is very well-known in crofting, having been one of the first SCU staff members, a board member and chair of the SCF, and is still editor of *The Crofter*. Her willingness to continue to serve the SCF is very much appreciated."

The AGM was initiated with a talk by Jim Hume, convener of the National Rural Mental Health Forum. This is a very important subject and the talk by Jim was well received, with a lively discussion following.



Fiona Mandeville

The AGM received the company accounts, showing, we are happy to say, that SCF is solvent and has a secure financial reserve. Retaining members and recruiting new members is always on top of the agenda.

SCF is the only organisation solely dedicated to campaigning for crofters and we always have a great deal to do for our membership. We call on all crofters to join the collective voice for crofting.



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

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