

SCF is dedicated to campaigning for crofters and fighting for the future of crofting

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## Principle of convergence not fulfilled



Ewe hogs and cast ewes loaded and ready for the off

**I**T IS recognised that things can change very dramatically in a week in politics and it is the same for the agricultural politics of Scotland.

SCF had to spell out crofters' anger at cabinet secretary Fergus Ewing's announced allocation of the convergence uplift, having welcomed an announcement made by him only two days earlier. The first announcement indicated that Scottish Government was moving far away from the much-criticised proposals the farmers' union had published and would be ensuring "the money goes to where it was originally intended." In fairness, the direction Scottish Government has taken is not what NFUS demanded, thank goodness, but it is not in "the spirit and original premise of convergence" promised by Mr Ewing, a promise which, it is felt, was misleading.

The original intention of external convergence was to ensure a more equal distribution of direct agricultural support between member states. Member states that had direct payments per hectare below 90% of the union average were to close the gap between

their level and this average, with all member states arriving by financial year 2020 at a minimum level representing roughly 75% of the union average.

Scottish Government has clearly disregarded this intention in allocating an over-generous proportion of the money to Region 1, land that already receives 91% of the European average. The rationalisation given by Scottish Government is very weak and demonstrates a lack of political will – or a completely different view of what convergence is about. It looks remarkably like a ruse to give more to those that already have.

It does not, as Mr Ewing claimed, help those who need help most – those who farm on our marginal land. These producers still receive a pitiful amount on Region 3 land.

Following the outcry by crofters to the announcement, and SCF's robust stance taken in the media, the cabinet secretary and officials met with SCF to make an offer. The intentions of the Scottish Government are good, it seems,

...Continued on page 3

## Brexit and crofting – threat or opportunity?

**W**ITH A GENERAL election in December and the Brexit deadline extended to 31st January, everything is still up in the air.

We could leave with a deal on transition arrangements, leave without a deal sooner or later, or have a another referendum after the election delivers a hung parliament. If the prime minister doesn't know what is happening, how are we crofters supposed to know and plan?

But if we stop and think for a moment – the debate has been about the withdrawal agreement. This defines transition arrangements,

ie what happens over the next year or so, which is that basically nothing changes. We then have a short length of time to negotiate long-term trade arrangements between the UK and the EU, probably with different arrangements for Northern Ireland.

These long-term trade agreements are covered by the political declaration, not the withdrawal agreement. The political declaration runs to only 27 pages and to describe it as woolly is to do a disservice to all sheep everywhere. I couldn't find a specific mention of agriculture at all; and about tariffs it just says "The economic partnership

should, through a free trade agreement, ensure no tariffs, fees, charges or quantitative restrictions across all sectors." Note the word "should," not "will".

There is a section on fishing, but only four short paragraphs of aspirations. So even if the withdrawal agreement is passed by parliament eventually, the arguing is just beginning and we are not really any wiser on what happens in 2021.

This matters.

The lamb trade has a substantial export market

...Continued on page 3

### INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- update on geese and sea eagles
- gaining ground project
- crofting law reform

- self-build loan fund
- silage wrap disposal
- ethnodiversity

- on the croft
- crofting diversity pays!
- ... and much more

# Message from the chair...

Yvonne White



**I AM NOT** going to dwell on the background to the convergence rebate given by the EU, as much has already been written.

The outcome was the cabinet secretary's rebate allocation announcement in Holyrood on Halloween. Like many, I am deeply disappointed at the unjust distribution of the rebate. It is not going to those areas that were the reason for the rebate being given in the first place.

It seems as if crofters and hill farmers were robbed for six years by the UK Government, then once the rebate was given, mugged by the Scottish Government.

There is a glaring unfairness in the rebate allocation, not to mention a missed opportunity for significant investment into our most rural fragile areas. This is probably the saddest part, the lack of vision and care for a historically under-resourced area – where gaining any productivity from the fragile land costs more, as it requires higher input for less return.

Just imagine what could have been achieved in the crofting counties with the extra £80 million. The extra finance could have helped transform the crofting counties. It would have gone a long way in providing new modern handling

facilities including sheds, making working conditions safer and helping increase productivity. It could have created much-needed employment, benefitting the wider community. It could have paid for measures to address goose and sea eagle issues; and paid for pilot agri-environment projects tailored for crofts and hill farms. So much could have been achieved for crofting.

SCF was invited to meet Fergus Ewing to discuss the matter further. As suspected, adjustment of the rebate allocation was not forthcoming. However, the talks held with the cabinet secretary were constructive. He stated he had listened to lobbying by SCF on behalf of our members, crofters and hill farmers, and realised he had not gone far enough in addressing our concerns.

Mr Ewing was prepared to provide another £10 million for the least favoured areas with the aim of it targeting those in the most fragile and marginal areas where it is most needed. As always, the devil is in the detail and although SCF welcomes the extra funding, as the modelling work is yet to be completed, we await the outcome cautiously. SCF will be talking with SG to help ensure the extra funding

is targeted appropriately.

Looking forward, SCF will be actively engaged in doing all it can to ensure that the next instalment of the convergence rebate is more fairly and evenly distributed to those areas for which it was originally intended.

The additional £10 million will be paid out by the end of March 2020. The first component of the cabinet secretary's proposal was a replacement for LFASS. If we were still in the EU it would be a switch to SCF's long-advocated ANC. If we were out of the EU it would be a replacement support system. SCF, on behalf of its crofting members, will be part of the stakeholder group helping design and decide upon any new support system.

As the only organisation dedicated to representing crofting interests, SCF will continue to make our voice heard loud and clear. On an individual basis, you can contact your MSPs, MP and councillors to make your view known regarding distribution of the final convergence rebate. Democracy has a voice and it comes from ourselves.

For those not on Twitter, and in the interest of balance – Fergus Ewing responded to SCF after the meeting, saying, "Since my statement setting out my approach to paying farmers and crofters £80million in convergence funding, I have received representations from crofters and crofting organisations expressing concern. I met SCF representatives and listened carefully to the points they raised.

"It goes without saying that I take their concerns very seriously. As a result, I propose to address their concerns by going further in the package of measures for farmers and crofters in the most challenging areas. The measures I have shared with them include redistributing a further £10 million

in 2019/20 to those farming and crofting Scotland's most challenging land; and commencing work on a replacement for LFASS to be developed with the involvement of appropriate stakeholders.

"This would be additional to the proposals already set out, including providing additional funding to those farming and crofting in less favoured areas and to put more funding into the coupled support schemes. Meantime I will continue to consider what more we could do to provide support to those farming and crofting on our marginal land. I am unlikely to be able to announce anything further until 12 December, due to the general election rules."

Whilst welcoming the encouraging fact that Fergus Ewing has listened and tried to address at least some of our concerns, we need to keep in mind the percentage rates of the main distribution which clearly show the inequality and unfairness of the distribution.

The percentage increases quoted regarding the convergence rate are deceptive. A 67% increase sounds fantastic for Region 3. However, if your starting point is low, it does not mean a significant monetary increase. For example the existing rate for Region 3 is £13.50 per ha compared to £221.56 for Region 1. The position after the convergence uplift is Region 3 gets £19.78, so Region 3 has £6 per ha increase. If you have 100 ha of Region 3 it is a c. £600 increase. If you have 100 ha of Region 1 the increase is c. £1586.

The original convergence payment has fallen short on logic, fairness and the true spirit under which it was originally awarded.

However SCF has succeeded in gaining much-needed extra funding for the fragile crofting areas and will continue to lobby the Scottish Government on behalf of its membership.

## Crofting law reform sidelined

**IT CAME AS** a disappointment to see that crofting legislation did not appear on the Scottish Government's Programme for Government for this year.

The announcement by cabinet secretary Fergus Ewing that it is not going to proceed through parliament at all in this parliamentary session is a blow for crofters. There were to be two bills, the phase 1 bill going through in this parliamentary session and the phase 2, the more difficult amendments, being taken forward in the next session.

Mr Ewing gave the clear commitment on many occasions that the first phase of the legislation, the urgent stuff affecting crofters'

day-to-day lives, would be dealt with in this parliamentary session. Scottish Government is ignoring this commitment, despite Mr Ewing putting up a strong fight, we are told, to keep the bill alive.

Stakeholders and Scottish Government officials have committed a massive amount of resource over many years to get to the point that a bill is almost ready to proceed. Opposition parties have been kept on board and consensus sought, with the intention that the bill should progress relatively unhindered.

But then there is Brexit.

The Brexit shenanigans is adding a huge amount to parliamentary and government work-

load with many Brexit-related bills having to go through the parliament and many government officials being drafted on to Brexit-related tasks.

We met with the cabinet secretary to discuss how this will go forward in the next session – as one bill or two phases again. The advantage of one bill is that it gets it all done, but the risk is that if consensus cannot be found, the whole bill is lost. Having it in two phases again could ensure that at least the more urgent amendments happen, with the possibility that the more complicated things could happen too; but if not, do not hold back some legislation from proceeding.



# Principle of convergence not fulfilled

...Continued from page 1

and it is understandable that an existing mechanism to effectively target funding is relatively broad-brush. The practical gesture of coming up with a further £10 million for this tranche, which will be targeted to the more fragile areas, is appreciated.

So it is recognised that the government has listened and has gone some way to move

further in the direction desired by SCF. But it is not far enough, yet – and our assertion that the principle of convergence is not being fulfilled stands.

Mr Ewing made it clear in his address to parliament that he sees this money as a way of making up the LFASS shortfall which was caused by the Scottish Government not introducing a new system based on Areas of Natural Constraint when they had the opportunity. SCF

reiterates the assertion that the convergence money exists to compensate producers who have received very low per-hectare payments; it is not there to fill a self-inflicted funding gap in a scheme that the European Commission is phasing out.

The LFASS gap will need to be filled, as Mr Ewing has pledged, but from elsewhere. Or convergence money going in to LFASS will have to be targeted only to the more fragile areas.



Yvonne's croft in Kingsburgh, Skye

## Brexit and crofting – threat or opportunity?

...Continued from page 1

in the rest of the EU. If subject to tariffs (up to 48% according to some sources) UK lamb will be priced out. The glut of lamb will then come back onto the home market, which could crash. If we couple this scenario with a government doing deals with Australia and New Zealand to bring in cheap lamb as part of a cheap food policy and a desire to get financial services into these countries, then we have a double whammy. We could also be facing reductions in subsidy as CAP ends and agriculture has to battle with

NHS and other services for the public purse – a triple whammy.

Leaving the EU could give us the opportunity to devise a subsidy system which enables crofters and farmers to provide good quality food at a reasonable price in a way that respects animal welfare and the environment, whilst sustaining rural communities in the Highlands and Islands. However there does not seem to be a lot going on and the Scottish Government is stressing simplicity and stability – noble ambitions, but limited.

When we produced a paper containing SCF ideas on the future of agriculture post-Brexit, still available on [www.crofting.org](http://www.crofting.org), I didn't imagine that it wouldn't have been overtaken by events two years on.

So what can we do as producers of store lambs and calves to get ready for Brexit, as the UK government exhorts us to do? Nope, I don't know either!

*A personal view from Russell Smith, who leads SCF's agriculture working group.*

# Donald's hortiblog



**THIS MAP** – Land Capability for Agriculture in Scotland – makes me angry.

You see, all that pink and mauve area is supposedly only fit for rough grazing or, at best, improved grassland. It's as though there has never been human intervention; that people have never lived and worked there; and have never fed themselves and their livestock from half the nation's landmass.

The map totally dismisses the backbreaking labour of crofters and their predecessors over many hundreds of years. The only excuse is that it is drawn to a very small scale. But if you look at it in the context of agricultural policy, especially at this crucial point in time, it goes a long way towards explaining why crofting has always had such a poor deal.

For example, after eleven years in north-west Skye, I am still astounded by the quality of our mineral-rich, free-draining, volcanic soil. Other crofting areas are favoured with soils of remarkable fertility, especially where rotational cultivation continues. The south end of Shetland and the Uist machair are examples. Where nature has not been so kind, fertile soil is still to be found on most crofts, thanks to the efforts of our forebears. An area of our former croft in Lewis was surrounded by an ancient retaining wall containing a good soil of remarkable depth, which must have been built up over centuries using the materials available – peat, clay, shell sand, manure and seaweed.

A great many of the crofts in the islands and north-west mainland are on the blacklands, the term coined to describe the peaty ground that historically has been improved but has, in most cases, reverted. For the past ten years the Blackland Centre in Grimsay, led by the indefatigable Mary Norton, has carried out comprehensive research into the past, present and future of this type of land, including the practical restoration of a degraded croft to a productive state. The results of this work are published at [blacklandcentre.org](http://blacklandcentre.org). It is a fascinating resource and highly recommended.

Which brings me back to that map, and the dismissive mindset that it symbolises. In a climate emergency, the current model of food production and distribution has to change; and that is possible in our region if the capability of our land is properly recognised.

I'll finish with a wee anecdote, at the risk of revealing my age. As a teenager on holiday in Stornoway at the time, I recall the seamen's strike of 1966. The mainland was cut off for several days but there was no panic. Meat, milk, bread, eggs, fish and potatoes were all produced on the island. Contrast that today with the empty supermarket shelves if the ferry misses a couple of sailings.

## Classification and funding anomaly

*SCF member Dina Murray from Lewis has been making the case with MSPs on the transport costs faced by crofters in the Western Isles for feed deliveries. Below are extracts from her most recent letter to Donald Cameron MSP.*

**ISLAND CROFTERS** face additional costs for feeding their livestock which mainland crofters do not have to bear, although they receive exactly the same subsidy as island crofters do, for the identical land region categories they occupy or farm – whether Regions 1, 2 or 3.

The extra annual freight costs to us just for importing hay was over £850. That figure does not include the cost of the hay, or the mainland road haulage costs, and is entirely the ferry costs to Ironside & Son, who provide our island with an essential lifeline service, ensuring we have good quality fodder to feed our livestock over the

winter months.

Lewis Crofters Ltd, major supplier of animal feedstuff to island crofters, has estimated that the additional costs to them for the ferry element of their animal feed haulage would be around £130,000. They have to pass that cost on to the crofters who buy the feedstuff.

Now Fergus Ewing is about to hit our island crofters hard, with what could be considered a death knell. We understand that our predominantly moorland and uplands Region 3 allocation of the EU convergence allocation is totally at the mercy of the NFU, who are the chief "advisers" to the Scottish Government on such matters – and who mainly represent farmers occupying best quality mainland Region 1 prime arable lands, which are already paid a rate per hectare that most of us could only dream about!

Island crofters continue to face grinding

hardship, simply to keep afloat and meet our daily costs. That convergence money could have been a lifeline to Lewis and Harris crofters – the difference between sinking or floating.

We sincerely hope that the government will address the serious anomaly that exists in how they classify the land regions purely on the agricultural quality of that land, while totally disregarding – even ignoring – the additional costs and hardships for crofters living in the Western Isles in particular, where the land is predominantly Region 2 and 3 and where every single bite of feed that their livestock consumes has to be taken across the Minch by ferry.

There is a classification/funding anomaly – otherwise known as The Minch – between us crofters on Lewis and Harris, (and the Western Isles in general), and mainland crofters who are paid the same subsidy rates, but who have none of the additional costs as detailed above.



# The crofting environment



Board members on their visit to Argyll, reading information on the common grazings they visited

## *Crofting commissioner David Campbell on crofting's environmental benefits*

**O**NCE A YEAR, in the autumn, we take our board meeting out of the Highland capital and hold it in a crofting community.

During my tenure as a commissioner we have been on various islands to the west and north; and visited Caithness, Sutherland and Ross-shire. This year we travelled to Taynuilt in Argyll via crofting townships on the north side of Fort William.

Occasionally, whilst getting on with the day job, we can become a little isolated from what is happening on the ground with crofters. These public meetings are invaluable to re-tune ourselves to the issues and challenges that crofters are facing. Often, despite the challenges, there are real good news stories to be seen.

In most crofting townships there's a mixed story in relation to croft activity and croft use. The area around Taynuilt is no different. We witnessed a real positive story with an active common grazings, where shareholders are making full use of the grazing and have some enterprising

ideas for its betterment, long-term management and use. Many of the decisions are being made by the younger generation, with the approval of the senior shareholders.

Common grazing land has always had the potential to unlock opportunity for shareholders, through historical livestock grazing, sheep stock clubs and now renewable energy, where crofters have benefited from their rights to an equal share of the spoils that wind energy in particular has brought to the Highlands.

One of our hot discussion points at a board meeting was the result of the presentation of a paper on climate change, a very topical subject at the moment. It's clear that the extensive system of livestock production expounded by crofters and the crofting system, whilst accepting it may possess some of the same impacts of mainstream agricultural production, has unmeasured benefits to the land and the environment which are unobtainable through intensive farming methods.

On common grazings, a very large percentage of land is based on a peat structure, an extremely valuable source of carbon storage. Much of this value is retained simply by the extensive use that these large areas of land are subject to – light

grazing by sensible stocking densities formulated more than 120 years ago.

As we face a time of much change in agricultural production, it seems very logical to me that the type of land use embraced and promoted by crofting for future generations should be at the heart of the changes, particularly if we are to move to a support system much more focused on the delivery of public benefits in return for public investment.

Land in crofting tenure, by the very nature of its succession rights, has always been seen by those occupying it as a custodian role with a responsibility to pass it on to the next generation in better condition, and uniquely this has always extended to its ecological condition as much as its productive condition.

It would be nice to think that the positive environmental land management practices honed by crofters over generations would attract the recognition and reward that they deserve but have so often been passed over, in favour of the 'stack them high – churn them out' practices so often seen in the wider UK agricultural sector.

Here's hoping.

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# Goose policy is not working

*After successful lobbying to increase local representation, the National Goose Management Review Group has been reformed as the National Goose Forum, writes SCF council member David Muir from Benbecula.*

**T**HE FORUM held its first meeting by video conference, with delegates attending from Orkney, Lewis and Harris, Uist and Barra, Tiree and Coll andIslay.

The next meeting will be held in January, when a resident greylag goose conservation plan will be discussed, to help local goose management groups set target populations. A number of goose policy and adaptive management reports and documents have been published by SNH and these can be found at [www.nature.scot/national-goose-policy-framework-review](http://www.nature.scot/national-goose-policy-framework-review).

All the foregoing seems well and good. However, reality presents a different picture.

Although presently financed by challenge funding, this is likely to end in spring 2020, when groups are expected by SNH to be financially self-supporting. There is little chance for most groups to become financially sustainable without continued assistance from SNH and the Scottish Government. There must be financial incentive for marksmen to control geese numbers, even if unconstrained sale of goose meat is eventually allowed.



© Martin Benson

As has often been predicted, throughout the west coast greylag geese populations have grown immensely this year. For example, in Uist and Barra alone the September count showed an increase from about 5,300 birds in 2017 and 2018 to 9,000 birds this year. This is an enormous increase and it is difficult to know, under the present funding model and national policy, how to pull these numbers back. There is serious concern among crofters that this situation will further escalate and become unmanageable and irretrievable.

Present policy is just not working. Immediate change in direction from SNH and Scottish Government is required.

Although geese are being shot, it is obvious

that insufficient numbers are being taken out of the system. Measures by which more geese are removed must urgently be determined and resulting actions need to be adequately resourced.

Some ways of doing this include placing resident greylag geese on the general licence; lifting restriction on crofters shooting geese on their own land – as is the case for deer; and removing constraints on sale of goose meat.

If action to reverse the increase in geese numbers is not taken now, there is serious risk that previous financial investment and human effort undertaken over many years is totally undone and leads to the destruction of crofting agriculture as we know it.

## Sea eagle predation

*A report from a meeting of the national sea eagle panel, on which SCF chair Yvonne White represents members. Kate Forbes MSP called this meeting.*

**O**VER 100 crofters and farmers are in the scheme and SNH is dealing with 80 applications this year.

An action plan and supporting up-to-date information has been published, including acceptance that sea eagles do predate live lambs in some locations.

The scheme is bureaucratic and some participants are leaving as they find the process unhelpful. Though money is not going to solve the problem, a proper compensation scheme needs to be looked at which takes into account the value in subsidies for each animal lost.

We are running out of options to prevent sea eagles taking livestock. If all techniques are tested without success there must be a last resort. There are mixed results. Diversionary feeding, very successful on one site, failed on two others. The most direct action has been tree felling, also unsuccessful. SNH is investigating whether manipulating nests and eggs would involve a research license.

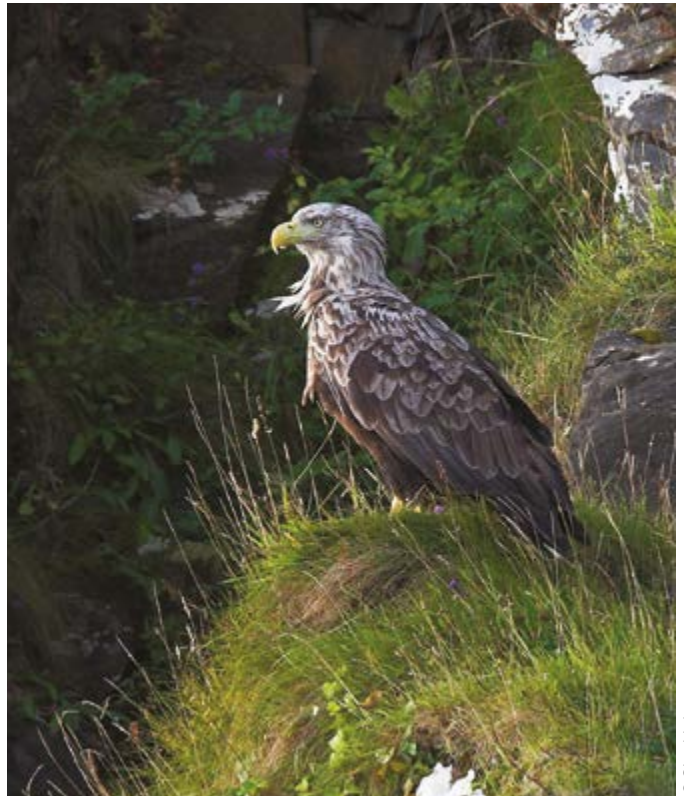
Breeding pairs are not the only problem; immature eagles hunting in packs are also thought to be

responsible for some impacts. Immature sea eagles are often mistaken for golden eagles and tourists and the public may be under the impression sea eagles don't take food from land sources.

There is not always clear evidence that it is a sea eagle that has killed a lamb. The issue of evidence is down to scale and proof, as other things kill lambs too. Circumstantial evidence is now being looked at, as well as direct evidence. SNH is working closely with crofters and farmers to gather that information. What constitutes serious agricultural damage in law is not clear, but the SNH licensing team is looking at a test license approach to improve the situation. There is no upper limit as such, but sea eagles would self-manage numbers through territorial disputes.

Croft and farm businesses are bearing a heavy cost for a public good. A formula must be developed to recognise the value of the public benefit of sea eagles that farms and crofts take on. This is not just a SNH species management issue but also a wider farm support question for the Scottish Government. Hosting species should be rewarded and there can be tourism benefits. There is a public benefit of sea eagles flourishing; and public expectation is only getting bigger.

While there are animal welfare



© Skyebirds.com

concerns due to the state of some sheep after an attack, the mental health impact on farmers and crofters is not being discussed. There is also a lack of research and evidence on the impact of sea eagles on other wildlife.

The problem isn't solved, but we have come a long way in terms of understanding it. Monitor farms/

crofters and stakeholder groups are a very positive step. Good research and prevention work has been done on the farms/crofts within the scheme. There is resolve to continue working together to find solutions and Kate Forbes is taking forward key points from the meeting to raise with Scottish Government colleagues.

# Section 50B Agreements must not be detrimental to the interests of the owner

Brian Inkster, Inksters Solicitors, outlines a recent high-profile case.

**SECTION 50B** Agreements came under the microscope in the July decision of the Land Court in *Crofters of Aignish Common Grazings and Others v the Crofting Commission*.

The appeals were brought by four crofting townships in Lewis, against decisions of the Crofting Commission refusing to grant approval to proposals submitted to them under section 50B of the Crofters (Scotland) Act 1993, for the use of their common grazings to develop community-owned wind farms.

The applications were opposed by the Stornoway Trust which, as landlord, in conjunction with a commercial developer, has its own plans for the development of a much larger wind farm, spanning all four townships and several more.

The Commission, being satisfied that the proposals were detrimental to the interests of the trust, refused all four applications on the view that it was obliged to do so by section 50B(2) of the act. That provides that the use proposed must not be detrimental to the use being made of the other parts of the common grazings or to the interests of the owner.

It was argued for the crofters that the Commission had erred in law by taking the wrong approach to the legislative provisions. Section 50B governed procedure up until the point at which the crofters voted on the proposal and applied to the Commission for their approval. Once it got to the Commission, different considerations applied and section 50B was no longer relevant.

The Court did not like this argument: "We notice immediately that, although it is true that the legislation does not expressly give the

Commission an appellate or reviewing role in relation to decisions of grazings committees under sec 50B, the position taken by the appellants produces an artificial and undesirable result in that it requires the Commission to process an application which it believes to be invalid... a proposal for the use of common grazings land for a purpose which would be detrimental to the interests of the landowner is not a valid proposal. The language of subsec (2)(b) is, after all, quite explicit: "The use proposed **must not be** such as would be detrimental to ... the interests of the owner" (emphasis added)."

The Court found that the Commission did not therefore err in law. There were other less significant grounds of appeal, which the court also found all failed.

This decision is under appeal to the Court of Session.

## Inksters recognised for crofting law prowess

**INKSTERS SOLICITORS** picked up the Niche Law Firm/Specialist Team of the Year Award and the Most Innovative Marketing Award at the Symphony Legal Awards 2019.

Both awards went to Inksters for their expertise in crofting law and the manner in which the firm has marketed that expertise, especially with the publication earlier this year of *A Practical Guide to Crofting Law* by Brian Inkster.

Brian Inkster said, "I am delighted to see the hard work we do at Inksters in this very specialist area of the law being recognised at a UK level."

The awards were presented at a dinner compered by comedian Celia Delaney following the annual Symphony Legal Source conference.

Inksters provides the SCF's legal advisory service. Initial advice on crofting matters is free to paid-up SCF members and is available by phoning 01599 230300. You will need your membership number, which will be checked to make sure your membership is current before advice is provided.

Many members have used our legal advice service and have been helped with a wide range of crofting issues. We hope to have an article in the next issue of *The Crofter* highlighting some of these (anonymously, of course).

SCF's panel of advisors can also help with members' crofting problems. You can phone or email SCF HQ, and outline your situation. If Sandra cannot help you directly, she will circulate the panel with the details (but again anonymously). Panel members then consider the matter and offer their suggestions from their wide-ranging experience.

Help from the SCF HQ and our advisory panel is not legal advice. Only members of the legal profession can provide that.



Left to right Viv Williams (Symphony Legal), Brian Inkster (Inksters), Adam Bullion (InfoTrack), Celia Delaney (MC & comedian)



# North Talisker Hydro Company



Looking down over Talisker

*SCF member and sheep stock club secretary Cheryl McIntyre reports on a successful local green energy scheme.*

**N**ORTH TALISKER Sheep Stock Club (SSC) runs on North Talisker common grazings, where there is a waterfall of 74 metres on the Huisgill burn which falls into Talisker bay just above Shepherd's Cottage.

In 2014 the SSC committee decided to develop a micro-hydro scheme here to take advantage of payments for producing sustainable energy. As the common grazings were not owned by the SSC, permission had to be sought from the landlords, Scottish Ministers.

Scottish Agricultural College's commercial arm was then engaged to carry out feasibility studies, underwritten by the Energy Saving Trust. Planning permission was granted by Highland Council, the CAR water abstraction licence was obtained from SEPA, a national grid connection established and registration with OFGEM. Approval from the Crofting Commission for a change of land use also had to be sought; and a subsidiary company for the hydro scheme was formed.



Sam Brooke, SSC chairman, at work on the dam

Significant difficulty was encountered in raising the initial capital for the scheme from banks. The relatively small size of the scheme and the fact that the land was rented not owned appeared to be the primary reasons for lack of support. Fortunately a private lender came forward with the major part of the money. Shareholders and others were then approached to lend the balance at a minimum contribution of £2000. To encourage lending it was decided to offer a good rate of interest: 7.5% overall, with different types of repayment for the major

lender and small lenders.

At time of writing the scheme has generated over 860,000 kWh, giving an annual average of approximately 225,000 kWh. The main loan was repaid in 2018 and the small lenders are now being paid back, with the objective for the hydro to be debt free by 2021. Funds generated by the scheme, less operating costs, will then be fully available to support the activities of the sheep stock club.

This is a fantastic success story, not only for the future of the North Talisker Sheep Stock Club, but also

for its significant contribution to the environment. Enough energy is generated by the scheme to power approximately 50 households per annum and this displaces about 70,000 kg of CO<sub>2</sub> annually.

The micro-hydro scheme at North Talisker is a good example of diversification that helps underwrite the continued operation of a successful sheep stock club on marginal hill land in NW Scotland. This is set against a backdrop of increasing uncertainty over future markets and subsidies and a well-telegraphed change to a reward system based on public goods rather than acreage and production.

North Talisker SSC committee is looking at further diversification projects, including an additional renewables scheme; and also finishing lambs for the burgeoning market for low-carbon, local provenance and naturally raised red meat. The marginal hill land of the NW of Scotland is the natural home for renewable energy and grazing ruminants.

The land can support little else and while it is doing this it is also storing thousands and thousands of tons of carbon as an added bonus.

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# Cross Party Group on Crofting discusses crofting support

**SCF HAS** organised the Cross-Party Group on Crofting (CPGoC) in the Scottish Parliament for nigh on 20 years and is secretary to the group.

It is a very powerful forum for informing MSPs of crofting issues and garnering their support for pressing the government to act. The CPGoC meets regularly in Edinburgh and Inverness and is co-convened by Rhoda Grant MSP, Alasdair Allan MSP and Edward Mountain MSP.

It is always very well attended with over 30 representatives of organisations and individuals regularly attending. Some meetings are held in Inverness to give crofters a better chance of attending.

If you wish to attend please let SCF HQ know.

Standing items on the agenda are crofting legislation reform; crofting administration; crofting development; and crofting support. We usually have a specific theme and invite a guest speaker to present this.

At the September meeting in Inverness Alison MacKinnie of Zero Waste Scotland led a discussion on the disposal of black plastic silage wrap, which SEPA has banned from being burned. The ban makes sense for environmental reasons but there is no other effective means of disposal or collection in place. Zero Waste Scotland is working on this.

Another issue of burning was discussed – the

burning of wood on the household fire. Many crofters have used the facility offered by Forestry commission Scotland – now Forest and Land Scotland (FLS) – to scavenge for firewood on felled sites. Members have reported that they are not being granted a licence any more.

The group wrote to FLS to ask why. We were told that the issue of licences is being reviewed, but that this was likely to continue.

Crofters are finding that in reality the licences are not being issued and we have been told informally that FLS does not intend to continue with this, preferring instead to let firewood contracts to companies. The cross party group will follow up.

## Women in crofting



**THE SCOTTISH** Government Women in Agriculture Taskforce was set up to examine findings and implement recommendations presented in the report *Women in Farming and the Agricultural Sector*, led by Professor Sally Shortall of Newcastle University.

The taskforce was co-chaired by Fergus Ewing, cabinet secretary for rural economy, and Joyce Campbell, the well-kent sheep farmer in Sutherland. The other members of the taskforce are highly skilled and committed to gender equality in the agricultural industry. Their biographies are available on the Scottish Government website.

Patrick Krause represented SCF on the taskforce, which will publish its final report at the end of November. The report makes over



twenty recommendations in seven key themes: leadership, equality charter, training, rural childcare, succession, new entrants, health and

safety and crofting.

The research recognised that crofting, distinct from farming, appears to be more egalitarian. Within the survey it was found that 81% of those women on crofts who were interviewed indicated they were responsible for all the decision-making: "Women on crofts were more likely to indicate a strong role in decision-making...in both major and day-to-day decisions."

However, it was also noted that 43% of crofting women would like to have a stronger role in decision-making, suggesting that women in crofting may benefit from the support to self-efficacy.

As a result of the taskforce's work, the Scottish Government has announced funding for a Women in Agriculture Development Programme. This will consist of three different training courses focusing on personal development, knowing your business and leadership development. A clear message across the board for women in agriculture in Scotland is that they are very under-represented in leadership positions in agriculture, whether this is within national-level organisations such as NFUS or at localised levels such as grazings committees.

Registration for the new Women in Agriculture Development Programme is open and we'd strongly encourage our members to get involved.

For enrolment details and further information, contact Sara Thorpe and Karen Mowat, [womeninagriculture@gov.scot](mailto:womeninagriculture@gov.scot) or call 0131 244 6880.

Lucy Beattie, training manager for SCF, has been conducting research for a master in education postgraduate degree that she is taking via distance learning at Lews Castle College. She interviewed several women crofters throughout September and October 2019, to gather their views and opinions on access to training and education, in light of the findings presented by the *Women in Agriculture* report.

In October a group of women crofters, including crofting commissioner Mairi MacKenzie, met to discuss the interim findings as a focus group. A summary of results will be published in the next issue of *The Crofter*.

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## GAINING GROUND

# Gaining Ground is gathering pace



*Project officer Ailsa Strange reports*

**T**HE SCF Gaining Ground project had its second gathering in late September.

Hosted by SCF members Julie Comins and Brian Cameron at Elchies Boer Goat Farm in Aberlour, the event brought together a range of crofters, smallholders, service providers and interested individuals. Project manager Lucy

Beattie launched the project's newly designed digital hub which offers a simple, user-friendly space for sharing information about social crofting.

Activities for the day aimed to follow from and build on participant feedback from the first event at Glachbeg Croft, North Kessock. Brian and Julie gave an overview of their business model and talked about how involvement in their local community adds to this model. They have built relationships through this community involvement and feel initiatives such as their specially tailored course for a group of local school children are a way of giving something back. They also said that this sort of social crofting has a profit in terms of their own satisfaction.

They agreed that if they were to do these activities more regularly, they may need to look at a cost attached, but felt it was something it was hard to put a monetary value

on. We then enjoyed a tour of the farm in the sunshine, a chance to ask questions and meet the friendly goats.

Stephen Wiseman and Ruairaidh Milne from N4H (Nature for Health, for Happiness, in the Highlands), talked about their experience of time outside with groups, bringing benefits for health and mental wellbeing and about the many pieces of research which back this up. Stephen and Ruairaidh feel there are obvious links to be made between their work and social crofting, perhaps by bringing their experience of effective group work into a crofting situation.

Lunch gave a chance for networking, exploring the new Gaining Ground website and also potential links between those present in terms of sharing of knowledge and experience. Then small focus groups looked at possible formats and content of useful factsheets and

toolkits. These will form part of the website and offer a starting point for crofters and smallholders interested in exploring how they might provide social crofting opportunities.

Karrie Marshall from Creativity in Care offered an inspiring end to the day with a presentation about their work, which aims to celebrate life, land and people across all ages and abilities. Karrie showed film footage and talked about her own wide experience of positive outcomes when people spend time creatively outside.

Funded by Highland and Moray LEADER, the project is beginning to attract attention in the wider press and chimes a chord with current focus on health and wellbeing.

*Details of further events will be confirmed soon.*

*For more information visit the website on [social.crofting.org](http://social.crofting.org), find us on Facebook or email [gainingground@crofting.org](mailto:gainingground@crofting.org).*



Attendees enjoying a tour of Elchies, Scotland's largest meat goat producer



Valuable input from attendees was captured in focus groups



N4H presented a researched perspective on the benefits of outdoor activity



Author Karrie Marshall shared her experiences of working creatively outdoors



## CROFTING DIVERSITY PAYS!

# Marketing research progress for Shetland kale

*The commercial potential of Shetland kale, one of the oldest vegetable landraces in the UK, is being studied for the first time as part of a project run in partnership between crofters, SCF, Queen Margaret University and SASA, reports joint project manager Su Cooper.*

**S**HETLAND KALE is a hardy, multi-purpose, club-root-resistant brassica ideal for crofters and small-holders.

The younger, more tender leaves can be used for home cooking, with the remainder of the plant suitable for feeding livestock during winter months. The Blackland Centre on Grimsay, North Uist, has been growing Hebridean Shetland kale for

some time, evidence that there is potential for it in crofting areas outwith the Shetland archipelago.

Making seeds more widely available will encourage further use, while also supporting crofters on Shetland to keep seed production going. After the June visit, reported in *Crofter 118*, crofters growing kale were approached to check their interest in taking part in a seed-growing network, with the aim of selling seeds.

A core group of highly experienced kale seed growers is now formed, from across Shetland mainland. Communication with other local groups on Shetland is ongoing to explore further collaboration potential. Professor Wendy Russell at the Rowett Institute is investigating the

nutritional qualities of the kale as part of ongoing research into native Scottish food ingredients.

Seed marketing promotion will be launched at the Taste of Shetland event in Lerwick at the end of November. The beautiful seed pack design, developed by former SCF staff member and young Kintail crofter Sarah MacRae, was inspired by the Shetland kale scenery. Seeds will be made available more widely as part of a pilot phase both locally in Shetland shops and by mail.

Members of SCF who wish to order for planting next year, or as an original Christmas present, please contact Aurore at [aurore.mercier@gmail.com](mailto:aurore.mercier@gmail.com) or text 07501110497. For general information about the project and the work on Shetland kale, please contact Maria Scholten on 07388086438 or [maria.scholten@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:maria.scholten@yahoo.co.uk).

This work is being done as part of the Crofters' Diversity Pays! project, which has been awarded funding from the European Social Fund (Social Innovation Fund) and the Scottish Government. It is a partnership with SCF, Queen Margaret University and Science and Advice for Scottish Agriculture (SASA) and several crofters and other SMEs, to test and develop new ideas that will help to add value to local crofting produce.



Kale flowering on Shetland



Shetland kale seedlings



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## Restoring grain growing to the Highlands

*SCF member Adam Veitch gives an update on an innovative project.*

**T**HE SLOW PURSUIT of restoring grain growing to the Highlands, including the local cereal rye landrace known as Hebridean rye, continues under the umbrella of the Crofting Diversity Pays! project.

This summer we sowed three trial varieties of summer cereal rye in a dedicated nursery area on our croft, enclosed by deer fencing. In an adjacent neighbour's field we had a larger acre trial of the Uist cereal mix (bere, rye and small oats) sown with and without various undersown legumes.

The acre trial was a good learning experience, highlighting the challenges of cereal production in our part of the world. Word swiftly got around the local deer population that grain had returned to Lochaber and nightly grazing of the drilled rows ensued. The deer were deterred but the damage was done; and to finish us off the weather conspired against the oats with a fungal disease known as smut. The harvest of this area was therefore abandoned.

In contrast, the cereal rye in the protected nursery area established well and during the summer season formed full drooping ears of grain atop swaying chest-high straw. There was some

lodging at the perimeters, but it generally stood up well despite the frequent heavy rain. On a warm summer day the nursery plots were harvested by hand sickle, bound and stored under cover.

There was some further learning to be had in terms of how to correctly store grain on the sheaf – the challenge being finding a cool free-flowing area that was also free of animals. We protected the grain from livestock and vermin, but the store was a bit warm with too little air flow. Nonetheless, the sheaves of grain were taken to the Blackhaugh Farm harvest festival in Perthshire and threshed through a mobile Alvan Blanch thresher owned by Scotland the Bread.

The result – a 3.7kg bag of cereal rye grain, now dried to a low moisture content and ready for milling. Later this year some of this grain will be compared in baking trials alongside cereal rye from elsewhere.

This autumn the nursery area was subsequently turned over and five test plots of winter rye drilled into the soil. These cereal rye varieties originated from Norway, Germany, Estonia, Finland, Sweden and closer to home – Uist. Though not common in the highlands, winter habit cereals are routine in the Nordic countries, being established in the autumn and harvested the following summer.

As I write, the winter rye has germinated in

neat rows. During the cold winter it will slow down and go dormant, before hopefully establishing a strong head earlier next year. It will be interesting to compare the yield and success of summer and winter varieties.

We will keep you updated.



Harvesting cereal rye by hand sickle



## ON THE CROFT



A recent Farm Advisory Service meeting explored the uses of polytunnels in the western isles for livestock housing

## Polyunits for production

*Rob Black from SAC Consulting Oban suggests new uses for horticultural structures.*

**N**OT EVERYONE can afford an agricultural shed and not every community or common grazings has the ability to put up a communal shed for shareholders to utilise.

Using a structure that is typically designed for horticulture to be applied to livestock enterprises is more cost-effective for the business and provides more adaptability for a crofter in the event of changes to their circumstances.

Since the first polycrub was approved for grant funding through CAGS in 2017, ideas for croft diversification have gone from strength to strength. As of October this year, polycrubs have been approved for the purposes of livestock production.

An applicant in the north west of Lewis, with the assistance of SAC Consulting Stornoway, has pioneered the way and taken on the task of applying for grant for something that typically serves another purpose and adapted it to his own needs. Working with Polycrub, the Shetland-based company behind the product, the original design was altered and tested to provide sheep housing, especially for lambing.

It is not just polycrubs, however, that can be used. Grant funding also applies to conventional polytunnels and other alternative designs such as the Keder greenhouse. Each variation of a polyunit offers something different, giving anyone considering utilising such a tool for their business more options to play with. Polycrubs are robust and hardy, with their core design suitable for the harsher and windier climates of the Highlands and Islands. Keder greenhouses offer larger sizes with a robust framework. The polytunnel is the cheapest in most cases and more adaptable in size, but less suited to windier areas.

Now crofters can benefit from developing multiple enterprises on their crofts using polytunnel-type structures. For example, fruit and vegetable production can benefit from utilising the fertiliser in waste manure from housing livestock.

Additionally, stock feed can be grown with higher yields and better nutritional quality, out of the risk of exposure to the elements with the use of a polyunit, to better serve the animals being reared on the croft. Necessity breeds innovation; and with such a tool at the disposal of a crofter, interesting developments are likely to be seen in the future.

Adding value to produce, and diversifying crofting activities through growing or rearing stock using polytunnels, were discussed at a FAS event at the end of October. The importance of marketing and customer base was explained by Calum Johnstone from SAC, whilst Rob Black covered production and grant aid for these types of structure.

Discussions covered animal health and welfare, design and space of units, cost benefits and comparisons of different types of structure. Attendees looked at an on-site example of a polytunnel being used for production in a sheep enterprise, courtesy of *Air an Lot*.

# A load of rubbish



**T**HE END OF the exemption extended to burning agricultural plastics came into effect on January 1st this year.

Members have been in touch, concerned about the lack of available options for disposing of plastics, in particular silage wrap; and the associated costs of collection.

SCF contacted a number of organisations, businesses and local authorities on behalf of members, to try to establish the state of play. This has proved difficult, as the picture varies across the crofting counties. While in east Sutherland there do appear to be regular collections – although a member was quoted £100/£150 tonne for collection dependant on whether the plastic was clean or dirty – the same cannot be said on the west coast and on many of the islands.

Classed as commercial waste, silage wrap presented at landfill sites in the Western Isles would currently carry a disposal charge of £56.50-£67 per tonne (sorted/unsorted) plus £91.35 landfill tax. CnES is reviewing all waste charges due to difficulty of disposal. Silage wrap may move into the “special or difficult” waste category, incurring a cost of £216 per tonne (plus £91.35).

Zero Waste Scotland lists a number of farm plastic collectors on its website. However, SCF was told by one that it was not financially viable for them to collect from the more remote communities. They stated that the Scottish Government went ahead with the ban without plans in place and this was being fed back to them at meetings leading up to the ban. SCF was told “There is so much plastic at the moment that no-one knows what to do with it”. Zero Waste Scotland’s Alison McKinnie was invited to the recent Cross Party Group on Crofting to take questions. She felt that things were

improving and that there was huge scope for communities working together to provide central recycling collection points, citing the Irish model as a success story.

In Ireland, collection is subsidised by producers of farm film products, as there is a legal responsibility placed on them to specifically support recycling. The recycling levy, applied to all product based on the Irish market, funds subsidised collection and operation of “bring-centres” across the country.

A similar scheme operates in Sweden, where collection dates and locations are publicised online for the year ahead. You must have a receipt to show that you have recycled your farm plastics or you can be fined through cross-compliance.

Longer-term solutions here include trials of clear wrap from Europe, currently underway with a group of local farmers in Dumfries; and compostable /edible wrap which is at the early trial stages.

In the short term, centralised collection points may be something that grazings committees might consider as a way forward. SCF approached CAGS officials to see whether compactors/balers would be eligible for CAGS funding. While the collection bins are, the “moving parts” equipment is not.

Pressure could also be brought to bear on suppliers/manufacturers to adopt a sale-and-return policy. Speak to your local councillor, MSP and MP about this ill-thought-through approach.

Without affordable and easily accessible collection solutions, the burning ban will result in plastic washing up on shores and piling up on croft land – not the intended outcome of the legislation.

*SCF would be very interested to hear your experiences of this issue, as it is not going to go away under present arrangements. Please email Sandra (hq@crofting.org).*

ON THE CROFT

# In the weeds

SAC Portree's Janette Sutherland reports

**A** WEED is a plant in the wrong place. It is important to not demonise them. Whether they pose a problem depends on their location and number, or if they are more beneficial though providing habitat for wildlife.

At the latest meeting of the Skye Grassland Group (funded from the Universities Innovation Fund from Scottish Funding Council) we were fortunate to have guest speaker Sandra MacKenzie from Acoura, who undertakes QMS inspections. I really enjoyed working with suppliers and assessors to try and work out when and how to control weeds on crofts in Skye.

We started with a weed quiz:

- 1. Where I grow can often be damp and acidic.
- 2. I am poisonous to livestock but I am important to moths.
- 3. Although I sting I can provide cover for birds, especially corncrakes.
- 4. Lots of my yellow flowers in a field may indicate need to test soil for low pH.
- 5. My large spreading leaves can reduce grass yields.

**Common issues at department or QMS inspections are:**

- incorrect spraying certificate
- product rate wrong
- product no longer licensed
- incorrect storage

**Spray certificates**

To apply pesticides which include common weed control such as glyphosate – ie Round Up and Clinic Ace – for killing the old sward or treatment for thistles and ragwort and docks, you now need a certificate. Grandfathers' rights no longer exist. You need to have someone with this certificate and be filling in your spray records. The type of certificate depends on whether it's a handheld like a knapsack sprayer or machine mounted.

**Using the correct products at the correct rates**

The approvals for herbicides are changing all the time. A common one is Assulox, which gets approved on a year-by-year basis. We can use it in 2019 but we don't know whether the rules will have changed next year. To help you navigate the maze, we have a new system in our crofting offices.



Common weeds

If you complete a sheet with the information requested, the really clever bit is that the spray recommendation can be easily changed to become your spray record. All you need to do is mark the wind conditions and the name of the person applying the treatment (who has the correct qualification).

Sandra agreed that this would make her life as an inspector easier.

All the best for planning your grassland management for 2020.

Quiz answers: 1) rush 2) ragwort 3) nettles 4) buttercup 5) dock

## Grassland Improvement Group Skye



Facilitated by  
Janette Sutherland  
SAC Consulting, Portree  
[janette.sutherland@sac.co.uk](mailto:janette.sutherland@sac.co.uk)

Spray Recommendation

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Crofters/ Farmers Address	
Contact no / email	
Field name / number	
Field size (ha)	
Age of current sward	
Target weed(s)	
Spray to be used (if known)	
Needing a spray recommendation?	
Vehicle mounted sprayer or Handheld	

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## ON THE CROFT

# Shetland sheep – a Highland perspective

*I have kept Shetlands on the east coast of Sutherland for thirty years, writes SCF member Sally Wild.*

**T**HEY ARE small, easy to handle and a charming breed with many fine attributes, making them perfect for small producers.

Doing well on rough natural grassland, they are kind to the ground, hardy and clever at finding shelter in rough weather. Lambing time is usually very straightforward, Shetland sheep being tremendous mothers, very milky and preferring to lamb outside by finding their own favourite place.

A reputation at jumping fences is not unfounded, but once hefted to their own parks, they settle in well. The meat is excellent, with little fat, though better slaughtered as hogget. Naturally very popular with small-holders and crofters, they can also be run as commercial flocks.

The Shetland Sheep Society has membership throughout the UK, USA and the Netherlands. Originally a rare breed from Shetland suited to the harsh conditions, their popularity has spread and purebred Shetlands are now widely distributed. The 1927 Breed Standard was set up in the Shetland Isles amid concerns that the pure breed was disappearing, with many animals being crossed. The Shetland Sheep Book Trust and the Shetland Sheep Society still run on those standards today.

It is not always easy to buy registered Shetland sheep in the Highlands, as the main sale outlets are flock book sales in Shetland, Lanark, Aberdeen/Thainstone and marts further south. However it is hoped that marts in the Highlands will support the sales of good quality Shetland sheep in the future.

Shetland wool is one of the finest British wools, with its unique colour variation giving it worldwide appeal. Though wool prices fluctuate like any other, there is always a demand from private sales for hand spinning and other crafts as well as commercial use. For the small producer this is an added bonus.

The rise of local farmers markets and wool events is another chance to market fleeces or prepared wool. Getting the perfect fleece is an interesting challenge with genetics, welfare and ground type all coming into the equation.

For the new entrant into crofting, Shetlands are the perfect animal.

*The Shetland Sheep Society northern meeting takes place on 13th March, 2020, at Dornoch Social Club, 10am to 4pm, with guest speaker Oliver Henry. For more information and booking please contact Sally Wild – [thewildmeadows@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:thewildmeadows@yahoo.co.uk).*





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## Alasdair Allan MSP/BPA

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## ON THE CROFT

# Where are we with BVD?

*Dr George Russell, a principal investigator at the Moredun Research Institute, updates on the industry-led initiatives which are making headway with disease eradication.*

**B**OVINE VIRAL diarrhoea virus (BVDV) is an important cattle pathogen that causes respiratory and diarrhoeal disease in young animals, potentially making them more susceptible to other infections by suppressing their immune response.

BVDV infection of cattle is therefore a concern for the health and welfare of animals and for the productivity of farming operations. Control of BVD would lead to widespread benefits for the farming community, including savings of up to £552 per cow per year, based on reductions in clinical and subclinical disease and improved productivity in BVD-free herds (Yarnall & Thrusfield 2019 Vet Rec 181, 347).

The spread of BVDV infection is caused mainly by persistently infected (PI) animals, which become infected in the womb and are born tolerant of BVDV and excrete virus for life. These animals are the major source of BVDV infection for uninfected cattle and remain virus-positive in blood and tissues for life, shedding infectious virus in saliva, tears, urine and faeces, while calves born to PI cows will always be PI.

There are industry-led initiatives to eradicate



© Yvonne White

BVDV infection across the UK, with compulsory schemes in Northern Ireland and Scotland; and voluntary schemes currently in England and Wales. In Scotland, the industry-led and government-supported eradication scheme started in 2010, with subsidised and then mandatory screening of all breeding herds, followed by restrictions on the movement of cattle from non-negative herds. The campaign is in its fourth phase with phase 5 due for introduction in late 2019. ([www2.gov.scot/Topics/farmingrural/Agriculture/animal-welfare/Diseases/disease/bvd/eradication](http://www2.gov.scot/Topics/farmingrural/Agriculture/animal-welfare/Diseases/disease/bvd/eradication)).

By 2018, the number of BVD non-negative premises had reduced from 40% to fewer than 10%, with most of these confined to the south-west of Scotland ([www2.gov.scot/bvd](http://www2.gov.scot/bvd)). Currently,

less than 1% of holdings are BVDV-positive, but the number of non-negative holdings remains close to 10%.

Phase 5 of the eradication will increase pressure on BVD-positive and non-negative herds to investigate the cause of infection and remove PIs, with further restrictions on movement and housing. Measures imposed on herds with BVD-positive cattle will stop when the herd is shown to be BVD negative or any PI cattle are removed. Phase 5 should therefore uncover the PIs that are currently not disclosed.

Further progress depends on livestock-keepers maintaining high standards of biosecurity and vigilance. This can include using BVD testing routinely, especially for all bought-in cattle, being alert for potential sources of infection, such as trailers or other equipment that may have been contaminated on other premises; and not using quarantine to protect herds.

*A range of online resources contain useful information on BVD and how to avoid infection/reinfection:*

<https://sefari.scot/research/taking-the-bull-by-the-horns-helping-eradicate-bovine-viral-diarrhoea-bvd-from-scotland>

[www.moredun.org.uk/foundation/outreach/animation-series](http://www.moredun.org.uk/foundation/outreach/animation-series)

[www.sruc.ac.uk/info/120112/premium\\_cattle\\_health\\_scheme/1232/scottish\\_bvd\\_eradication](http://www.sruc.ac.uk/info/120112/premium_cattle_health_scheme/1232/scottish_bvd_eradication).

## Fusty seeds after drying?

*The Scottish landrace protection scheme could help you out.*

**W**ITH unpredictable weather during this year's harvest and good seed-drying opportunities scarce, some home-saved seed may have been left a little too long before drying.

Affected seed can look a bit dark-coloured and have a fusty smell. Germination may have been severely affected, which could contribute to poor future crop establishment.

This is a wee reminder for growers who have registered with the Scottish Government's Scottish Landrace Protection Scheme (SLPS) – you have the opportunity to get information about the quality of your seed (germination, diseases) in good or bad years. The scheme was started in 2006 to preserve the genetic diversity of Scottish local varieties such as Shetland kale, bere barley and the Uist mixtures.

If you are already registered with

SLPS and would like to have seed quality testing done by donating another sample of your seed stock, you can send the sample directly to SLPS, SASA, Roddinglaw Road, Edinburgh, EH12 9FJ. Quite a few crofters have signed up in the last decade.

By enlisting with SLPS, your good-quality seed stock will be stored under gene-bank conditions and a proportion made available, with your consent, for breeding, research and education projects. Most importantly, some of your own seed can be returned to you in the event of a crop harvest failure.

*If you are not yet a member of the scheme but would like more information, please contact Lesley or Susan (below) or follow this link:- [www.sasa.gov.uk/variety-testing/scottish-landraces/scottish-landrace-protection-scheme-slps](http://www.sasa.gov.uk/variety-testing/scottish-landraces/scottish-landrace-protection-scheme-slps). Phone Lesley McCarthy at 0131-244-8820 (non-cereal crops) or Susan McFarlane 0131-244-8930 (cereal crops).*



Scottish Government  
Riaghaltas na h-Alba  
[gov.scot](http://gov.scot)



Hebridean rye

## ON THE CROFT

# Ethnoveterinary medicine



Yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*) is used to treat diarrhoea in rabbits in Norfolk.

*William Milliken from the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew asks for our help.*

**C**ROFTERS, farmers and vets used to use plants to treat their livestock.

Traditionally, for example, bog-bean was used as a medicine to unblock calves' stomachs (Hebrides); nettles boiled with oatmeal to treat constipated cattle (Colonsay); and ash branches as a laxative in goats (East Lothian). Information was passed from one generation to the next and often was not written down. How much knowledge now remains in the population?

The use of wild or cultivated plants as animal medicines (ethnoveterinary use) is common across the world. For many years, scientists have collected information from farmers in India, Ethiopia and Uganda, for example, and have studied the effect on treating animals with these plants.

The Ethnoveterinary Medicine Project, established by Kew, aims to record the remaining knowledge from across the British Isles before it disappears. Some data has already been collected, mostly previously published information from the past, but we also interviewed rural people for existing knowledge.

Duncan Matheson from Kyle of Lochalsh explained that rosebay willowherb (*Chamaenerion angustifolium*), which used to be rare, is now extremely common. "The root is very valuable if you boil it down, particularly for healing wounds on horses. Horses are extremely delicate: cuts and saddle burrs are very difficult to correct. But this stuff is particularly good for it."

Similarly, wild plants used as feeds were thought to influence the health, behaviour or flavour of the meat or milk. Tufted vetch (*Vicia cracca*) was used in the past as a fodder plant in

South Uist. It was said that a cow that ate well on this plant would take the bull more easily and earlier in the season. On Colonsay, sea plantain (*Plantago maritima*) was thought to improve the cream and butter yield of cows and was also gathered as food for domestic rabbits.

Kate Anne MacLellen from North Uist explained that in the past they would boil cow tang (*Pelvetia canaliculata*), a seaweed, in large pots with potatoes, ears of corn and sometimes oatmeal. "If you had a cow that calved, it would leave the milk rich and more abundant. They also used to give it to the young beasts and they would get this lovely sheen off their coats."

We will be collecting data through websites, letters to local newspapers, agricultural and veterinary communications and subsequent interviews of knowledgeable people. We need to record this information, which forms part of the traditional rural culture, before it is lost.

This knowledge could also be used practically in animal management (livestock, pets) to improve their health and the economy. Over-use of antibiotics in veterinary use, for example, can generate antibiotic resistance in bacteria. Finding new plant-based treatments could also help support Soil Association organic standards, which restrict the use of antibiotics and chemically synthesised allopathic veterinary medicinal



Bog-bean (*Menyanthes trifoliata*) is used in the Hebrides (Scotland) to unblock calves' stomachs



Gorse (*Ulex europaeus*) was excellent food for horses and sheep and is said to increase the milk yield of cattle

products for preventive treatments.

Some companies in Britain are already supplying plant-based treatments for animals, including nettle (*Urtica dioica*), plantain (*Plantago major*), eyebright (*Euphrasia officinalis*), elderflower (*Sambucus nigra*) and thyme (*Thymus spp.*).

*If you have any information about ethnoveterinary medicines, feed supplements or other information relating to plants/fungi and animal health from the British Isles, please contribute by sending an email to [ethnovet@kew.org](mailto:ethnovet@kew.org). Or alternatively, write to William Milliken, Royal Botanic Gardens Kew, Wakehurst Place, Ardingly, RH17 6TN.*



# Hedgerow jelly packs for crofting schools

Woodland Trust Scotland's Eleanor Garty explains

THE RUBY glow of a pot of hedgerow jelly is a cheering sight on a winter's day. Not just the most delicious thing to spread on bread, it's the essence of the sunshine and gathering and making that went into it. The gift of a pot of jelly is precious indeed.

The Croft Woodland Project has been offering free hedgerow jelly packs to schools in the crofting counties since 2018, with 80 packs distributed so far, with another 50 available for delivery in March 2020. New for this planting season is a Gaelic version of the pack.

The packs help children learn about planting

and caring for a hedge, as well as about hedgerow biodiversity and responsible foraging – and most importantly, how to make their own pots of that yummy hedgerow jelly. Each pack includes trees for eight metres of hedging, teaching resources and colourful posters detailing the recipe.

Of course a hedge won't become fruitful until it has been growing for a few years, but these are common species – blackthorn, hawthorn, rowan, crab apple, dog rose, bramble and elder – and many schools will be able to gather them in the local area, allowing the hedge to be planted and the jelly to be made all in one year.

Hedges need reasonable soil and a bit of shelter to get established, which may be difficult for some schools. For this reason the project has

been restricted to mainland schools so far, but this year it is being trialled on the Western Isles, with croft woodland adviser Viv Halcrow helping schools to assess whether their site is suitable.

The hedgerow jelly pack was inspired by Pam Rodway, who ran the very successful Crofting Connections programme. Pam has made this particular jelly annually for more than 40 years, planting the hedge required to provide it wherever she and her husband have been living. The packs are part of Scotland's Natural Larder Project and are supported by Woodland Trust Scotland, SNH, SCF and Point and Sandwick Trust.

Application forms for hedgerow jelly packs can be requested from [eleanorgarty@woodlandtrust.org.uk](mailto:eleanorgarty@woodlandtrust.org.uk).



bramble fruit



crabapple malus sylvestris



elderberry



haws



rosehips



rowan berries in August



# Crofting, the positive way forward

*SCF young crofter Malcolm MacKenzie shares his vision and enthusiasm for crofting.*

**GREW UP** in the village of Plockton at a time when the sights and sounds of crofting were much more visible than they are today.

In 2011 I was lucky and grateful to be able to take on the tenancy of my aunt's croft at Dubhaird, Plockton, which she and her late husband Dolan had looked after for many years.

For me, crofting was not just an opportunity to continue looking after the croft as it had been for decades before, it gave me chance to build up my own small fold of Highlanders – and most importantly a chance to return to the village I grew up in and loved, after 15 years in Glasgow.

The chance to have somewhere to live and work is hugely important. Without access to crofting – and with that the chance to build my own home – I imagine I would still be in Glasgow; and moving home would remain a near-impossible dream. Even with statutory rights, the process of purchasing our house site from our landlord took almost four years, as we found them at best indifferent and at worst obstructive – a story you hear all too often.

That aside, a few weeks ago we completed the purchase of our house site and hope to start building next year. Having somewhere to live is clearly fundamental in enabling people to run their crofts in a meaningful way and to help sustain fragile rural communities and all that goes with that.

What does the 21st century croft look like

and how does crofting continue its positive and relevant role in sustaining our communities in the future? As rural areas struggle to retain working-age people, I can't help but feel that crofting has something really exciting to offer in a connected and modern Highlands.

For some, this might be the more traditional livestock enterprises – with the custodianship of the land as important as ever – but for others,

returning home to the Highlands, crofting could provide flexible solutions to live and work here, where land use provides an opportunity to have a workshop, a studio or space for an online graphic design business, for example.

We all have the same goal, which is to see the Highlands prosper. As the green sticker on my van says, 'Crofting, the positive way forward'. I believe it is just that.



Malcolm on his croft in Plockton



## Trees for the crofting community

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

The Woodland Trust offers free planting and woodland management advice to crofters, common grazings and small holders.

Find out how useful trees are. **Get in touch.**



0343 770 5818



[crofting@woodlandtrust.org.uk](mailto:crofting@woodlandtrust.org.uk)



[woodlandtrust.org.uk/plant](http://woodlandtrust.org.uk/plant)





## Crofters' access to the Self Build Loan Fund

*Neil Walker from the Highlands Small Communities Housing Trust describes how crofters can obtain a loan to help fund a self-build project.*

**T**HE HIGHLANDS Small Communities Housing Trust (HSCHT) has been appointed to administer the Self Build Loan Fund (SBLF) on behalf of the Scottish Government.

Funds are available until August 2021 to assist self builders where they have been unable to obtain mainstream self-build mortgage finance. The SBLF is available Scotland-wide in rural and urban areas. Eligible individuals can borrow up to £175,000, which they can draw down in staged payments similar to a traditional self-build mortgage, with the loan being repaid either via a

**"We have been very fortunate receiving a self-build loan from the Scottish Government and a crofter's grant. This funding has allowed us to build our croft house beside our animals, which will be of huge benefit to ourselves and them. Up until the house is finished we have to make a 15-mile round trip several times a day to check our sheep and lambs and at lambing we need to be checking them more regularly. Living on the croft will allow us to be part of the crofting community."**

mainstream mortgage or by using the equity from the sale of their existing home. The loan from the SBLF funds the build costs of the property

and the Croft House Grant scheme is compatible with the loan.

Whilst both the Croft House Grant scheme and the Self Build Loan Fund are Scottish Government initiatives, they have different terms attached to them in relation to eligibility. Both schemes can be used together to assist you in delivering your new home.

*The house plot requires to be decrofted prior to any loan being offered from the SBLF.*

*For useful information visit [www.scotlandselfandcustombuildportal.co.uk](http://www.scotlandselfandcustombuildportal.co.uk)*

*Further details can be obtained from:*

*The Highlands Small Communities Housing Trust  
7 Ardross Terrace, Inverness IV3 5NQ  
[selfbuild@hscht.co.uk](mailto:selfbuild@hscht.co.uk)*

*[www.hscht/scotland-self-build-loan-fund.html](http://www.hscht/scotland-self-build-loan-fund.html)  
01463 572 030*

## Changing our communities for the better

*SCF vice-chair Brendan O'Hanrahan reports*

**T**HE HIGHLAND Small Communities Housing Trust (HSCHT) held its annual mini-conference and AGM in September, in the splendidly refurbished Inverness Townhouse.

HSCHT is easily one of the most impressive charities active in the crofting counties – and now involved in Scottish Government-funded projects right down to the Central Belt. Its record of delivering affordable housing, often for crofters, is simply unequalled in this area.

The conference had several interesting speakers. These included Calum MacLeod of Community Land Scotland. He talked of his own experience as a hybrid Sgitheanach/

Hearach, pointing to the era immediately after WWI when government, through the Land Settlement Act (1919), directly purchased land on a relatively large scale for new houses and crofts to be established for ex-servicemen. Perhaps something similar might be appropriate again, considering the urgency and scarcity of affordable houses in parts of the Highlands and Islands which benefit from, but also are partially cursed by, the current tourism boom.

David Cousland of the Ecology

Building Society explained how his firm stood ready to lend to make affordable housing happen, right across the country. Petra Biberbach explained how her charity, Planning Aid Scotland, provides pro bono advice to community groups, community estates etc to help them navigate their way through the planning system. She also discussed the potential of new community land use plans and local place plans. These could dramatically improve the input local communities might have into

planning around them.

Finally, Hugh Ross of Staffin Community Trust took us through the story of how the crofting community of Staffin managed to raise money and gain planning permission, despite many obstacles, for a small affordable housing project at the north end of Skye.

An excellent day, offering lots of new information and encouragement that changing our communities for the better and giving our young a people a future is very much possible.



# Farm hack – cruinneachadh mu innleachdan airson àiteachais

**‘S E DUILGHEADAS** a th’ ann don mhòr chuid de chroitearan gu bheil gach seòrs’ acainn agus inneal a tha ri fhaighinn an-diugh cho mòr agus cho daor.

Tha cruaidh fheum air innealan a bhios a’ freagairt air croitear aig nach eil ach pios beag fearainn agus sporan gann. Ged nach eil cus ùidh aig na companaidhean mòra ann an leithid a rud, tha diofar bhuidhnean a’ nochdadh a-nis a tha ag amas air daoine chuideachadh gus sgilean a thogail agus uidheaman a chruthachadh iad fhèin.

Bha mi fhìn aig tachartas o chionn goirid a bha ga ruith leis na h-amasan seo. ‘S e sin “Farm Hack”. Thàinig suas ri ceithir fichead duine còmhla san Tom Bhreac, tuathanas ri taobh Loch Tatha gus ionnsachadh bho chèile agus sgilean practaigeach leithid obair ghobhainn no ciùird eile a thogail.

Tha mòran dhaoine a-nis ag aithneachadh, ma tha sinn ag iarraidh smachd a ghabhail air siostam a’ bhidhe againn gu h-ionadail, gu bheil smuaintinn ùr-ghnathach agus cruthachadh innleachdach mar phàirt de thoradh seasmhach. Ach an-dràsta chan eil uidheaman freagarrach ach gann airson toradh aig sgèile beag. Tha cruaidh fheum air innealan beaga a dhèanadh sùgh, a ghlanadh glasraich, muilnean beaga airson min a bhlèith, a leigeadh le coimhearsnachdan am biadh fhèin a thoradh, a bhiodh a’ neartachadh cheanglaichean eadar tuathanaich/croitearan agus luchd-ceannachd.

Bha e na bhrosnachadh a bhith faicinn nan

diofar ciùird a bha gan taisbeanadh, cluinntinn ciamar a ghèidheadh tu siol bho bhàrr airson na h-ath bhliadhna agus nan robh thu ag iarraidh, ionnsachadh geàrradh closach muice agus isbeanan a dhèanamh.

Bha còmhraidhean agus deasbadaan a’ dol, air cuspairean leithid, geàrradh sìos air cleachdadh na h-ola. Chuala sinn bho aon ghàradh-margaidh a bhios a’ libhrigeadh an glasraich air fad aca le baidhsagalan. Bhiodh sin gu mòr a’ crochadh air luchd-ceannachd a bhith faisg air làimhe

Bha e na bhrosnachadh a bhith tachairt ri daoine a tha an sàs ann an toradh an fhearainn

aig sgèile beag, a’ mhòr chuid dhiubh a’ reic gu dìreach gu daoine ionadail agus feadhainn eile a bu mhaith leotha a bhith ri àiteachas ach aig nach eil fearann (fhathast) no aig a bheil fearann air mál gun tèarainteachd. ‘S e daoine car òg a bu mhotha a bh’ ann, co-dhiù mòran na b’ òige na an croitear abhaisteach!

Chaidh Farm Hack a chur air dòigh le co-obrachadh eadar Landworkers Alliance, agus Biadh Math Coitcheann le taic bho Fhearann an Tuim

Bhric, Comann Ùir na h-Alba agus Bunait Gaia.

A visit to Farm Hack Scotland, where small-scale farmers and growers across Scotland come together and share knowledge and skills around the tools that they use and new tools which could be developed.

The event was organised by the Landworkers’ Alliance and Common Good Food with support from Tombreck Farm, the Gaia Foundation and the Soil Association.

*le Gabhan Mac a’ Phearsain*



## Journey to the west

*SCF member Rebecca Cotton reflects on her time in a crofting community and now further south and west.*

**O**NE EARLY morning, stumbling half asleep downstairs, it dawned on me something fundamental had changed.

In the dogs’ water bowl on the doorstep a lone newt was doing a lap of honour. Newts (and frogs and toads) are not native to the islands, so I was not on Uist.

After the first strong cup of tea, I remembered I had moved house.

I am now based in Dumfries and Galloway, in a cottage perched on the edge of an ancient wood, with a peaty burn flowing past the window. I’m seven minutes’ drive from the shore of the

Solway Estuary, where at low tide a huge area of muddy, sandy flats is revealed and up to forty thousand mainly barnacle geese winter before returning to Svalbard in the spring. I doubt Ena MacNeill would be impressed.

This has been an intense three months of readjustment after accepting a job at Loch Arthur Camphill Community as assistant gardener in the organic and biodynamic vegetable and cut flower gardens. I have also just begun work on the farm with their easy-care sheep. They had mainly blackface and texel breeds but have recently changed over to minimize the workload and make handling easier close to the farm. The community ethos with its working life for adults with learning difficulties is impressive.

While mourning the loss of island life, especially

the rhythm of the Atlantic tides, there are things I do not miss – like the annual black eye from wind-buffed car doors and rocket launch proposals that threaten protected areas and their wildlife – and divide the community, while purporting to bring jobs.

With loss comes gain. Living among a sea of trees, with their myriad related ecosystems, is part sensory overload, like gorging on a banquet after a modest Uist diet. I am used to a kind of fragile simplicity: the sight of otters, the only true native Hebridean mammal (alongside the St Kilda super-size field mouse). Fungi galore line vibrant green woodland tracks created by new native land mammals, like badgers, hedgehogs (welcome) and fallow deer. Exotic jays screech overhead in the grand old oaks.

These are early days. While I count down to my next trip north, I am relishing the return to pastures old and the opportunity to understand the western lands afresh after almost a decade of island life.



Easy-care sheep with Loch Arthur and Galloway hills in the background



Rebecca in Loch Arthur gardens



Easy-care ram in foreground, this year’s rams



# A pilgrimage, of sorts



In a pub in Barra - left to right Joanne Fraser, Carmen Lawrence, Christy Buchanan, Margrit Gahlinger



"Bay St Lawrence, where I live on the cliff above the wharf, at the top of the long white looking driveway, an old road. Now scruff spruce is covering the old meadows. So hard to believe the bare mountains in Scotland."



Neil MacLeod at his loom, with Carmen to the left



Stornoway - Joanne Fraser on left, Christy Buchanan in middle with herring girl, Margrit on right



The airplane on Barra beach

**M**ARGRIT Gahlinger from Cape Breton contacted SCF earlier this year as she was coming over with a couple of fisherwomen from Nova Scotia who were tracing their roots. We put them in touch with Neil MacLeod in Lewis, and through him Alastair MacEachen in Benbecula.

Margrit says of herself: "I am of Swiss blood, reared on praise for the land and the freedom that comes with it. Swiss traditional music is called *landler*, land music. I carried a ukelele and I've learned the local old tunes, all about the land, from the old folks here."

We arrived from Glasgow on the twin otter, landing on the beaches of Barra. My companions were impressed with the bits of daylight around the airplane door.

Joanne Fraser, her mother a MacNeil, is a saucy storyteller. "My dream was fulfilled, to walk where my people had walked. I left part of my mother and I there – we will never leave."

Christy Buchanan, her mother a Mackinnon, is a retired lobster fisherwoman at the infamous St Paul Island. "The whole pace so gentle, calming, slow. Even the sheep slowly going along. There was a feeling of coming home – I can't explain it."

Their families stretch back

generations here on this remote tip of Cape Breton Island. Back to the time of the Clearances when whole little communities were transplanted across the sea, from 20,000 to 30,000 people, filling the island and carving the beloved face the world knows today. Immigration came to an abrupt end with the potato famine.

Long before then the good land was taken by earlier immigrants. The later ones, mostly cottars, their belongings a meager pile at their feet, squatted on the poorer un-surveyed backlands. Yet they stepped off the lumber boats proudly. "We are not refugees. We are settlers."

Here there was no need for money. A settler wrote home: "No living soul forces me to do a turn against my will, no factor, having no rent, nor any toilsome work but what I do myself."

Why should such a desperately poor people step ashore with such confidence? Because they carried a rich ancient culture that needed only land.

Twenty years ago I taught an upgrading course to adult students in my village. To touch on history I asked them – who are you? They answered proudly, we're Scottish. It was all they could say. My hunt for their story began then, following them back all the way to the tomb builders and before. I could see only one long unbroken story that ended

here.

In the early 1970s, the last people left a hamlet down the coast, my neighbour among them. Her way of life had so closely matched the ancient way of the Hebrides described in archaeological studies, shearing sheep for wool, planting seeds in the ashes of burnt stumps. "We had no money," she said, "but we were not poor."

My daughter Carmen joined us in Barra, our chauffeur and spirit rouser.

We saw many ruins, travelling from Barra north to Lewis, but our highlight were visits with local people – Mairi Mackinnon in her museum in Castlebay. Alasdair MacEachen, a crofter on Benbecula. Neil MacLeod, crofter and weaver in Lewis, showed us cleared villages and the blackhouse where he spent time with his grandmother.

Much of the land is fallow now, as is ours. For the young, land is scenery. We take food for granted. Crofters know better. The future should, must, lie in their hands. Cape Breton and the Hebrides – it's time we wed our story again.

That society (one could call it that because it came over the sea intact with people and culture) you sent over during the Clearances back in the 1820s and 1830s stayed in its original form, yet shaped by the land and sea, into today. That feisty,

witty, generous, musical, nature-loving people.

I was bringing you a version of yourselves back 200 years ago. Just like the music in Cape Breton that was brought here from Scotland, so the character also. I was bringing you a treasure. Unfortunately there were few places for my companions to shine with their wit and their stories!

I realised the most incredible part of the trip, besides meeting the crofting world, was an intimate glimpse into clanish, sharing quarters as I did for two weeks with my companions. Here clan is distinct and strong, a few families making up the village. It's been that way since the 1800s.

Not all like each other, but they are connected in a way I had never experienced. There is no concept of loneliness, of being apart, no confusion of sense of place. People say you've been here for 40 years and they still consider you a newcomer! I say of course. I'm not one of them. And glad to be here.

I believe your standing stones carried a message, not needed by those building them. The stones connected the people to the land in the most powerful of ways, meant to withstand the centuries. Perhaps it's time to honour those stones and the society that created them. Some kind of tribute. It's said: When you're ready, even the stones can speak.

## MEMBERS PAGE

## It's never too soon to put your affairs in order

**M**AKING A will is all too easily set aside, but the importance of doing so in good time can never be over-emphasised. When a crofter dies without having made a will, dealing with the future of the croft can be complex and uncertain if the tenancy of the croft has not previously been assigned to someone else. The Crofting Commission website has guidance on this and we have had a number of articles in previous issues of *The Crofter*, most recently in Crofter 117.

Equally important as we all get older is the issue of paying for care. There have been a number of cases where the local authority has considered the croft to be an asset which must be capitalised to pay for care. The fact that there is a tenancy and security of tenure does not give a croft protection against this. Crofts are seen to have a fair market value and this may have to be realised to cover care costs.

A petition has been raised with the Scottish Parliament and Western Isles MP Angus Brendan MacNeil has asked the Scottish Office to intervene, to protect croft properties and crofting tenure from being used by local authorities as part of the assessment of crofters' liabilities for care charges. Currently a croft could have to be sold to pay for care if it has not been previously assigned.

No-one wants a croft to be lost to future generations, so forward planning is essential. When our bones start creaking and physical work gets harder, it's wise to assign the tenancy to a younger family member, or someone else, who will work the land and contribute effectively to township activities. The outgoing tenant can decroft the house site and remain resident on the croft to provide advice and knowledge to the new crofter.

Making a will with clear instructions for the future of the croft, and assigning it to someone else as described above, are the only ways your wishes for the future of your holding can be ensured.

*If you need legal advice, contact your solicitor or SCF's legal advisory service – 01599 230300.*

## SCF 100 Club



**S**CF IS to launch a 100 club for its members.

Many organisations similar to SCF run successful clubs of this kind. They are a popular method of helping organisations increase funding, usually on a small scale. SCF does not anticipate a huge sum being raised, but every little counts, especially when costs keep rising.

Any profit will be ploughed back into helping support the services and benefits SCF provides to members. For example, contributing to *The Crofter* production costs; facilitating an annual gathering; or helping fund SCF's presence at key agriculture shows, such as the Royal Highland and Black Isle.

The cost is £10 per entry. This is an annual payment made by bank transfer or cheque. You can buy more than one entry and you are allocated a number per entry. The lottery draw will take place annually at the AGM in July. You need to be over 16 years old, but applications are not restricted to members – get your friends and family involved too, to support SCF and have a chance of winning a worthwhile prize.

It will be a 50/50 draw, so prize money will be a fixed percentage of receipts – 50% of revenue to be paid out in prize money, comprising 1st, 2nd and 3rd prizes, with 50% of revenue retained by SCF. To give an idea of the prize money, 100 entries means a prize pot of £500.

A joining form is included in this edition of *The Crofter*. If you are interested in joining and helping to further support SCF, please complete the form and send it back to SCF HQ by email or post.

You will then be allocated a number per entry. The more who join the higher the prize money.

Good luck!

## A letter from the chief executive

Dear member

*The on-going uncertainty of Brexit means that you will be particularly concerned with what you spend your hard-earned money on and naturally you will be scrutinising expenditure, including SCF membership.*

*You will see from the articles in this issue that we achieve a huge amount on your behalf as the **only** organisation dedicated to campaigning for crofters and fighting for the future of crofting. For example, we got Scottish Government to move considerably away from the farmers' union proposals to give the bulk of the convergence funding to their well-off members. So you will get more.*

*We also offer you many valuable individual benefits.*

*With inflation rising again over the last year, and costs therefore rising, we can't continue to do as much on the money we get in from subscriptions, so every year we have to make a hard decision. Do we cut back on what we do, or do we charge more to do it?*

*I don't think that we can afford to do less. Crofting is constantly under threat and a strong voice for crofting is essential. This will be even*

*more critical over the next few years as life outside the European Union unfolds. It is only by having strong representation that we can help crofting to not only survive, but thrive.*

*The board and council have agreed, therefore, to put subscriptions up in the new year in line with inflation, a rise of £2. This takes full individual membership to £68.50. To put this sum in perspective, you'd pay more for a pair of muck boots or a tank of diesel for your pick-up. It's a vital investment in the future of crofting.*

*I hope that 2020 will be good to you. Thank you for your continuing support and all good wishes.*

*Patrick Krause*

Patrick Krause  
Chief executive





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# New member on the SCF board

**H**ELLO, my name is Jonathan Hedges. I live in Rogart with my wife Mairi and our four children. We moved here 12 years ago, taking on a bare-land croft from Alistair Maciver.

We arrived towing a touring caravan, progressing to a static for 11 years and have finally built a house. Not quite finished, but a big improvement. We are still living off-grid, on a generator and batteries, but hopefully will get mains electricity soon. We cook and heat the water with wood.

We started with 10 ewe hoggs and not much else. Things have moved on since then, but there

is still a long way to go. We are up 40 ewes now, plus more ditches, fences, trees and better grass.

I am a relief postman – perfect for getting on with jobs when you get home – but also do forestry work and grass/verge cutting with a two-wheel tractor. Mairi does the day-to-day croft jobs. It would be great to make more money out of the croft so I could work more at home. Croft tourism is one of the plans for the future.

I have been an SCF member since Alistair first encouraged me along to meetings. It is so important for crofters to be represented, and I hope to help make that happen.

*Fàilte Jonathan, from us all.*



## A new face at SCF HQ

*We are pleased to welcome our new admin assistant, Erin Matheson, who introduces herself here.*

**H**AVING MOVED up to the area from Midlothian some 20 years ago, I live in Badicaul, which is just a mile out of Kyle of Lochalsh. I have worked as an administrator in various roles since leaving school, but none as positive and interesting as working for SCF.

My husband, three children and I took over my in-law's bed and breakfast two years ago, which they had previously been running for 28 years.

In the short time that I have worked for SCF, I have been inspired to further develop the family croft, perhaps by planting some fruit trees and acquiring some hens. After all, eggs are in high demand when you run a B&B!

I am keen to learn more about crofting and hope that I can encourage my children to keep crofting in the future.



### STAY UP TO DATE

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

Follow us on Twitter @SCFHq



  
Scottish Crofting Federation  
for crofters for crofting

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