SCF EUROPEAN CONFERENCE

SCF – the Scottish Crofting Federation

The SCF is now legally recognised as the Scottish Crofting Federation, a change agreed by its members at the 2009 AGM and celebrated at a reception in Inverness on 18th November.

Neil MacLeod, chair of the SCF, set the background to the name change, a move brought about by the call to use a name that reflected the structure and mandate of the organisation more accurately. He pointed out that a federation is a number of independent bodies that come together under a common cause and central administration.

SCF areas have their own constitutions and need to be able to reflect their own circumstances whilst coming together under the common cause of fighting to safeguard and promote the rights, livelihoods and culture of crofters and their communities. Federation is also a more internationally recognised name for a representative body, fitting for the SCF – being the UK’s largest association of small-scale food producers.

Patrick Krause, the SCF’s chief executive, gave a presentation on the organisation’s vision for crofting. Based on the SCF programme

THE FIRST SCF conference exploring aspects of the European Common Agriculture Policy (CAP), under European Commission Agriculture funding for ‘Information Actions’ with match-funding from HIE, was held in Grantown on Spey in September.

The title of the conference was carefully chosen to explore how the small producer contributes to rural development, a purpose of the CAP.

Whilst crofting is, of course, a unique culture, it is important to place this culture within the wider context of Scottish, UK, European and global rural development and agricultural policy. Most of the rules that affect crofting and small-scale farming come from policy that is drawn up on the European scale, which is ultimately directed by global trade agreements.

Policies are sometimes criticised as being too wide in application, both geographically and in relation to scale of holding, not taking into account local conditions, or as being too focused on industrial-scale production whilst ignoring the small-producers’ situation.

The CAP is very controversial. It is the only policy funded totally from the EU budget and costs roughly 50 billion euros, just under half the total European budget.

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CROFTING REFORM: GOVERNMENT IS REACTING TO CROFTERS’ RESPONSE

AFTER SUSTAINED pressure from crofters and the support of MSPs, Minister for the Environment Roseanna Cunningham told the SCF at a recent meeting that she would drop the government suggestion of a housing burden.

The consultation on the draft Crofting Reform Bill had included the suggestion that houses built on de-crofted land should have a residency condition imposed on them. We argued in our response that using crofting to attempt to address the failure of rural housing policy is unacceptable and should not feature in this bill.

This has been listened to and subsequently the minister has assured us that this will not be in the bill put forward.

We are getting indications that our informing the government of crofters’ views is also affecting other parts of the draft bill. The proposal to have area committees has been abandoned, for example. In our response we said that our membership were not comfortable with this proposal and the minister has taken this on board. The suggestion we made of making the Crofting Commission more democratic and grass roots driven is also being enthusiastically taken up by Ms Cunningham.

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• SCF conference
• Crofting hero
• Crofting reform
• Crofting resources programme

And much more...
Message from the chair...

The gathering in Grantown on Spey was an unqualified success. Excellent speakers, lively debate, opportunities to meet old and new friends, interesting visits to a croft, viewing tourist developments in tandem with traditional crofting in a different environment than most of us are accustomed to (we don’t need a snowplough), a modern abattoir with cutting plant which serves the local community and sells nationwide.

It was also an opportunity to meet and buttermouth ministers and civil servants to press home the needs of crofting.

We are continually working towards what should be a fit-for-purpose Crofting Reform Bill. Numerous teleconferences, meetings with Roseanna Cunningham, Minister for the Environment, dialogue with MSPs, membership and the prime movers in rural affairs. It is incumbent on cross-party support to pass out legislation, as some parts of the bill are unlikely and unwanted by the majority while some parts can be of benefit to crofting. Few amounts is that young people can access crofts and achieve a fair return on their endeavours and not be bound up in a morass of legislation. Recently we had a Quality Meat Scotland meeting in Inverness and had inputs from Cathy Peebles and her team. We did tap up on salta, lamb selection, understanding grading and perceived markets for lambs.

The following evening we were able to back our judgement when the carcasses were displayed in the local abattoir.

A butchery demonstration rounded off a very lively and interesting workshop which was well-attended by both sexes.

Thanks are due to abattoir staff, vet and meat hygiene services inspector, where the importance of dressing was apparent with liver fluke the commonest complaint. Thanks also to the management for the use of the facility. We were fortunate to have a knowledgeable, entertaining butcher who expanded to us the lessons from the previous sessions that waste is expensive. It was also a first for me to hear about the ministerial joint! There has been much more buoyancy of late with good prices for cattle, sheep and pigs. Cereal prices are much better.

However, my tups with their different colours of raddle are getting restless and anxious for mating. It seems to me that what unites almost all parts of crofting is reducing the price of the ram. However, we are not alone as the livestock and meat farmers are also experiencing. It is heartening that the rural affairs minister in the UK has taken steps to address this. It is just short of 80%.

A small farm is defined as one that is owned and/or actively managed by one person who rents and works a small farm. And although lauded as such, in most cases it is not. There are many references to a register and can legally a croft may be defined with a small farm. And although lauded as such, in most cases it is not.

Furthermore, the small-scale is often small in area, of course, but is also small in scale. And although lauded as such, in most cases it is not.

It seems to me that what unites almost all parts of crofting and small-scale is that with whom they feel the strongest sense of belonging, is that they are small-scale and that they do not feel it is a part-time job. However, the question is important for small farmers bringing in less than a full-time income.

As a result, we proposed that this shows the similarity between the eastern and the western cultures, where the term “family” is considered to be the backbone of the society. We can then ask why has this occurred?

We have made a good case for why the fees for registering crofts are unfair and why the ‘trigger point’ concept is not the best way forward, being costly, bureaucratic and producing a regime which is robust, simple and easily understood.

We have suggested that the method used in many community development examples has been community mapping, where the community itself takes more ownership of the process than having it imposed upon them. This is what the crofting community does.

The second is that the small farm and small-scale are very similar to crofting. In the famous valley of the coalfied the land is poorly drained, the inbye often limited and large areas remain in common grazing. First impressions – the hedges and the maze of roads – hide deeper similarities and we should be making links there?

Having considered what small farmers are, we can now ask whether those characteristics are in any crofting at all, or part of its very essence? The question is important for SCF when it looks up from the uniqueness of the legal definition, which does this define? Are the same as crofters out there in the real world? What future trajectories for crofting are acceptable to SCF and which are to be resisted as inimicable to its very character?
Why are small farms important for the environment?

Linked to this question of course is the question of the delivery of public goods, or of environmental services, by crofting. How central are these not only to the image but to the reality of crofting?

Why should I, as someone interested in biodiversity and agriculture – in high nature value farmland – be interested in crofting? And if the answer to that is obvious, are the crofts that I am really interested in actually all economically small? Can crofters swallow that message? And so, what does this mean for the demands we make on policy?

What is the relationship between being economically small and high nature value farmland? To answer this we need to think more about why some farms produce low incomes. In the case of farms and crofts which extend to hundreds of hectares, the answer is simple. It’s a result of poor growing conditions due to soil, climate, slope or other physical handicaps. It’s a result of poor growing conditions due to soil, climate, slope or other physical handicaps. The consequence of these factors is that it has not been worthwhile to fertilise and drain the land to make it more productive. The vegetation has been influenced by agriculture, certainly, but it remains what is called semi-natural. This semi-natural vegetation, managed at almost subsistence, is the main characteristic of high nature value farms. So small large farms are almost by definition high nature value.

Small holdings are a different matter. Just as the farm structure tends to be a number of different factors – poor land, historical development, lack of capital – so these various influences can affect returns from agriculture.

A very small unit may be very intensive and still yield a small reward for all the work. However, these are the real additional costs for economically small crofts and farms, not the hassle of a week’s extra growth for the silage or an extra stock-free week for a field in the spring.

Crofters’ delivery of public goods in NW systems is intimately and directly linked to their lack of income!

That has two implications. The first speaks for itself – this is WRONG! The public should pay at least the minimum wage for the delivery of public goods, and this is directly linked to the lack of income!

The second thought is a bit of a sting in the tail for crofters. Because my logic, which I think is right enough, means that the natural thing for most farmers to do if they get more money is to try to climb up that production ladder – to get more intensive and in doing so to produce less of those same public goods.

That means that we need to be honest with farmers and crofters – we appreciate what you have delivered, and we’ll pay you for delivering it, but you can only deliver it at low intensity. It doesn’t mean you’re a park keeper – your production will be of value. But it’s not linked to public goods very nicely. If you want payment, we are asking you to change your mind about what you are about as far as your production is concerned, but we appreciate it and we’ll pay you for it. Property.

José Pedro Fragoso, President of the Portuguese Crofters’ Association, gave his talk on Portugal – a terminal disease?

The current version of the CAP is not helping much. Agri-environment payments, far from becoming more important, are down. Investment aids are more difficult to obtain. And overall farm income gets ever closer to the point at which it becomes so risky to carry on that just stopping farming becomes the easy option. Add to that the increasing administrative burden on farmers and things look very black.

Most of Europeans farm live on small farms like those in Bosnia whereas the wet winter is the problem time for us, for them the winter is the growing season and the dry summer is the time of stress for crops and livestock. As so often though, this huge superficial difference hides an underlying shared problem of marginal production conditions, and unquestioningly the Portuguese LFA covers a large portion of the country, from the harsh northern mountains to the dry southern lowlands. In these areas the average stocking density of 0.2-0.3 head/LUha is little higher than in north west Scotland.

As in Scotland, one side of the country – in their case the west coastal area, contains the largest markets and the most intensive farms. Unlike Scotland, where things are much more complex, this pattern is mirrored in population trends – the east is losing population and the west is gaining.

Returns to farming are very poor in the LFA. Just like here most farms return standard gross margins of less than €500 per year. But unlike here these farms, which have a part-time income, support the equivalent of 1-1.5 full time workers. Even in the south, with its large farms, the total income is only about €15,000 per farmer but there the density of farmers is very low.

Farmers are poor at organising themselves and find themselves at the mercy of the large supermarket chains. One of the big issues is that farmers are being used to ease their cash flow. Farmers have to pay at least five to four months for payment. So farming is important for rural development? Looking at their contribution to GDP, the answer is that it’s not linked to public goods very nicely. If you want payment, we are asking you to change your mind about what you are about as far as your production is concerned, but we appreciate it and we’ll pay you for it. Property.

The second is to recognise the diversity of Portuguese farms, and of course reminding us that the crofting. How central are these not only to the image but to the reality of crofting?

Why are small farms important for the environment?

Small farms in Portugal – a terminal disease?

What is the answer, according to José? There are three potential savours in the wings, he thinks. The first is the environment. Portuguese farmers are at least as good as crofters in delivering public goods – but that requires a change of heart by the government, which seems unwilling to pay them accordingly.

The second is to recognise the role of small farms in fixing rural population. Again this requires a new look at rural policy and while NHV farming is politically acceptable, the social case for small farms is a bit of a political football at EU level.

Last and by no means least, the opportunities for better marketing of quality products from Portugal’s small farms are legion but co-operating to deliver them...
 Friendly hosts in Finland

Mikaela Bergäll from south Finland talked about the activities on her family farm, Rejböle Gård in Uusimaa. For three generations Mikaela’s family have participated in a friendly hosts farm tourism scheme (a scheme like this should exist, Mikaela says, but unfortunately does not) offering farm stay accommodation. Three generations of Mikaela’s family live on the farm, all participating in being friendly hosts for farm stay guests.

Sheep and highland cattle are stocked, along with hens, rabbits, cats and dogs. In her handicraft workshop Mikaela makes bags for produce and interior products from linen and cuddly wee mice from sheep skins. These sell very successfully to visitors on the farm and also more widely through craft fairs and exhibitions, making a useful addition to the farm income – today over a third of the farm turnover.

The holding is made up of 35 ha of forest, 12 ha of hay fields and 15 ha of natural grazings. Its history goes back to the 16th century when it was part of an estate. The old traditional wooden estate buildings are now the farm house and barns; and the old farmhand’s house is now an attractive cottage for guests. Mikaela said her family was fortunate to have so many buildings, starting with 13 leaking roofs.

Traditional farming in Finland, as in other countries, relies on co-operation for its survival. The largest income from traditional farm activities is derived from participation in a biodiversity scheme. Being near densely populated areas encourages direct sales of produce, combined with the fact there are few active farmers, making Mikaela’s farm a unique place to visit. Consumers are becoming more aware of natural and local products and there is good co-operation between farmers in the area.

The challenges are significant. The small numbers of farmers, the many constantly-changing regulations, the limited powers and resources of farmers, the limited next steps in the produce chain with few butchers, etc plus the investment demands of winter survival in such a harsh climate make traditional small farming in Finland a demanding activity. Lambs must be kept inside for five months.

Farm tourism at Rejböle Gård is an important part of the farm income. Consumer trends favour the use of the old buildings on the farm. In 2008, 650 bed nights were filled at 38 euros per person for bed and breakfast, but the challenge is to fill the slow season.

Guests staying in the farmhand’s cottage can enjoy nature and the nearby lake, collect mushrooms and berries from the forests, baking in a traditional stone oven (at an additional cost) or participate in courses held for natural dyeing of wool yarns. Winter activities take place in the handicraft workshop where the best of natural raw materials are used to create many products for sale. A good network of nearby suppliers and handicraft producers ensures a viable resource and successful projects which add value to farm incomes.

The marketing networks depend on the energy of producers like Mikaela, who clearly love the work they do. She emphasised that this energy and commitment is one of the main challenges and benefits to preserving traditional farming in Finland.

Editor’s note: When I commented on the beauty of the snow scene in one of the photos, Mikaela replied: “Snow is nice in the winters it stays... most of the winters tend to be one to three weeks nice snow in January, October to March mainly rain, wind and snow-cain and mud... then ice and cold... frozen water pipes etc... but I must admit that once the snow comes and the sun is out for the few hours of daylight we have this time of the year, nothing can be more beautiful...”

Minister urges use of more schemes to avoid cuts being made

Minister urges use of more schemes to avoid cuts being made

KEYNOTE speaker, Environment Minister Roseanna Cunningham, said that the underspend in the Crotch Counties Agricultural Grants Scheme (CCAGS) was £700,000 last year and was likely to be same in the current financial period. She also confirmed widely leaked moves to amend the Crofting Reform Bill which the SNP administration still wants enacted by next summer. Its idea to impose an occupancy requirement on those building new homes on former croft land is being scrapped as is a proposal to set up area committees for the Crofters Commission.

Ms Cunningham said: “Cropping is part of the social, cultural and economic fabric of Scotland. It is a unique way of life that we must ensure has a sustainable, profitable future in the 21st century. That means tackling the problems of absenteeism, neglect and speculation.”

She admitted that most people who had responded to the consultation on the proposed legislation objected to the occupancy requirement, but she said “doing nothing is not an option if we want crofting to survive and thrive.”

She told the gathering the government had no plans to change either CCAGS or croft house grants.

While ruling out a return of house loans she said the government was looking at other ways of supporting crofters who wanted to borrow cash without having to de-mortgage.

Ms Cunningham appealed to crofters to seek funds from the grant schemes, both of which have been hit by poor agricultural returns and lack of confidence.

“Please ask for this money and do please spend it because it is budgeted for. If you do not spend it, someone will not use it. Crofters are not using it and it is being used and the CCAGS and croft house schemes have been made more user-friendly.”

Ms Cunningham stressed other ways would have to be used to and the speculative deals that have seen swathes of croft land taken out of the sector to its long-term detriment and the communities that rely on it.

She suggested strengthening the Commission’s powers to prevent inappropriate decrofting applications as well as redoubling of efforts to tackle croft absenteeism and neglect. She also hinted at possible direct elections to the Commission board to make it more democratic.

Ms Cunningham said the changes proved the government had listened to the concerns voiced on the proposal that any new house built on decrofted land is designated a main residence.

The legislative system must ensure that those who have the honour etc to call themselves crofters do live on the land, work the land and do not cash in many generations’ worth of work to make some immediate profit.”

She said the government was “looking into this and it is hoped a solution may be found.”

Commenting on the speech, SCF chief executive Patrick Kielty said, “We are very pleased that the minister has dropped the occupancy requirement which justifiably received little support among crofters. It was not the right way to proceed as the minister acknowledged today. However, she is absolutely right to say that doing nothing is not an option.

We are also pleased to hear her supporting the call for democratising the Crofters Commission. On the question of the CCAGS underspend, at least part of the problem is that the scheme has been made more difficult to access and applicants now have to pay out all the costs up-front. This can put crofters into debt or cash-flow problems that many will not contemplate in the current climate.”

Claire Nicolson
Ken Thomson, Professor of Agricultural Economics, University of Aberdeen

KEN Began his gathering address with a few caveats: this was not an official event, and four years is a long time, even in EU politics. Moreover, we are now approaching the third anniversary of the 2007-2013 programming period, in which the agricultural budget is largely fixed. There will be yet another Commission, and, for the first time, for 2013-2014. When (or if) the recent EU election campaign is over, the second part of the next (or now, present) Commission will be announced.

The CAP, as the European Commission, is not taking this period lightly. We can see this in the form of grazing.

The aims of agri-environment schemes – as of 2013, as the European Commission, the target of identifying all high value habitats, particularly in respect of the CAP, has been met, so that it is difficult to target LFA and other payments and other incentives such as organic farming. The CAP has made commitments on energy and biodiversity, and the role of agriculture and the CAP is yet even clearer, politically. Food security has never been so high, but there is an impending famine in the north-east of Africa, however unlikely that the millennium development goal will not be met. If the world hunger by 2015 will be met, despite G20 declarations and considerable EU funding. In any case, the proportion of the CAP is addressing this global – but not European – problem is hot debated. There are other perspectives on the CAP, of course. EU food products have contributed over $200 billion to the GDP of the countries in question. Even with the predominant interest in those countries, it is difficult to argue over. It is a movement that unites producers, landless men and women, and the small farmers, the latter of which is beyond our remit.

La Via Campesina was formed in 1993 and has rapidly become one of the most important movements on the international stage. Taking its presence known to small farmers, and its voice heard in defence of the rights of all small farmers. The number of smallholders has fallen from 150 organisations from 60 countries from Africa, North America, South America, East and Southeast Asia, South Asia, Latin America, Europe, and Central and Europe. The SCF works with the European organisation to join and represents the UK’s small-scale food producers.

The key point of public is small-scale food producers and linked with its remarkably high nature and values making works across to non-market goods in terms of its priority, is to emphasising the role of agriculture in including cultural landscapes.

A charter for common land is to address challenges with consultation and graziers and the like. The charter offers a common starting point for progress through recognition of the core principles of rights of the commons and communities of land.

In discussion on common land, Andrew observed, we hear many references to the farming industry, perhaps the word industry should be used more selectively – he suggested that agriculture is somewhat more holistic in its meaning. The culture in agriculture recognises the arts of husbandry, customary practices, and the ways of communities.

The above showed, that ancient associations of flora and fauna exist so much in the past. Deeside and crofters worldwide to have a voice. But they are fighting for a fairer deal for the people and the land – is one of the most important. That is the challenge that needs to be achieved, that needs to be sustained and provide a sense of purpose for future generations of farmers.
Adding value to small farms in Romania

Jim Turnbull of Fundatia ADEPT spoke about rural development and the delivery of local products in Transylvania.

The high value gifts

Cows coming home from communal grazing each evening during the summer.

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**SCF EUROPEAN CONFERENCE**

**Rothiemurchus farm shop visit**

A GROUP OF delegates visited the Rothiemurchus Centre where the estate has a farm and gift shop as well as the Ord Ban restaurant cafe.

The farm shop was established in 1985, selling both fresh and smoked trout caught on the estate. Gradually the product range extended due to consumer demand for more local products, to include venison and beef. Other products now on sale range from chutneys and jams to chocolates, truffles and honey, all produced on the Rothiemurchus estate.

The shop is a very good example of how successful the sale of local products can be, especially when they can be marketed to a large number of visitors. Prices are representative of the tourist market and so good returns are expected.

However, the gift shop now has a product range that includes many non-locally-produced items including cards and toiletries. Food items such as biscuits and chocolates are also sold in the farm shop and this detracts attention slightly from Rothiemurchus’s own products. From a local producer’s perspective you would question the reasons behind promoting these types of products.

What was taken away from this visit, however, was that with the right products on offer and appropriate promotion a project on this scale can succeed. A business which started with the sale of local produce to meet customer demand has gone from strength to strength.

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**Inchderyne croft**

Delegates enjoyed a visit to Marina Dennis’ croft at Inchderyne (once the bus driver found it) in the hills above Nethy Bridge.

Her family have been on the croft for 200 years, having been leased from the parish of Cromdale in Morayshire to the parish of Abernethy in Invernesshire, which was a fortunate move considering where the boundaries were drawn in 1886. Inchderyne lies at 650 feet above sea level and extends to 20 ha with a one fifth share in 373 ha common grazing.

The hill farm at 1200 ft extends to 207.47 ha with a two fifths share in 373 ha common grazing. The hill farm at 1200 ft extends to 207.47 ha with a two fifths share in 373 ha common grazing. The hill farm at 1200 ft extends to 207.47 ha with a two fifths share in 373 ha common grazing. The hill farm at 1200 ft extends to 207.47 ha with a two fifths share in 373 ha common grazing.

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**Dave Thompson**

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**Recipe for success – Scotland’s food and drink policy**

**Alistair Ferguson, David Brown and International.**

The Cairngorms – a park for all

**Mary Norton reports**

A GROUP OF North Uist crofters have been described as “heroes for all” after they did a good deed for blackland crofts. The Cairngorms – a park for all

**Alistair Ferguson, David Brown and International.**

Crofting Environment Improvement Association’s Blackland Project

**Mary Norton reports**

North Uist crofters have been described as “heroes for all” after they did a good deed for blackland crofts. The Cairngorms – a park for all

**Alistair Ferguson, David Brown and International.**

**The Crofter, November 2009**
CROFTING Connections is a three-year project to establish links between schools and their crofting heritage in the crofting counties of Argyll, Highland, Western Isles, Orkney and Shetland. CROFTING Connections was launched at the SCF gathering in Granton in September 2009. Our ‘ambassadors’ were teachers from the pilot project Planting to Plate, joined by Margaret Bennett, patron of CROFTING Connections, and Steve Carter from Lioncast High School in Benbecula, addressed the gathering of crofters, each describing the huge benefit to the schools of placing crofting at the centre of the study of science, social studies, food education, health and well-being, cultural and natural heritage, community languages and dialects and expressive arts.

CROFTING Connections is welcomed by many schools as an appropriate way of delivering the new Curriculum for Excellence, for pupils at each of the four levels from primary to junior high school.

The curriculum needs to include space for learning beyond subject boundaries, so that learners can make connections between different areas of learning. The programme of work is designed to deepen the links between schools and their crofting heritage. Our young people will learn in the context of their own natural, social and cultural environment.

CROFTING Connections was founded on collective working and kinship, originating from turbulent historical events and challenging environmental conditions, to create a rich natural and cultural heritage unique to each community. Much of the UK’s high value farmland is found in crofting areas.

The crofter has always worked closely with the natural environment, mostly using low-input, low-density agricultural and fishing practices, to produce food in a friendly and climate-friendly way with low greenhouse gas emissions in all aspects of our lives with the help of local Powerdown projects.

CROFTING Connections is a three-year project to establish links between schools and their crofting heritage. Our young people will learn in the context of their own natural, social and cultural environment. CROFTING Connections was founded on collective working and kinship, originating from turbulent historical events and challenging environmental conditions, to create a rich natural and cultural heritage unique to each community. Much of the UK’s high value farmland is found in crofting areas.

The agricultural and fishing ‘improvements’ of the 19th and 20th centuries have brought both benefits and challenges to the traditional crofting way of life. These are now being re-examined in the 21st century, where traditional crofting communities are helping to solve issues such as:

• an ageing population – by retaining and attracting young people to remote rural areas, with the creation of new crofts, provision of new entrants scheme and training for crofters through the SCF.

• living with and mitigating climate change – as we face the need to reduce dependence on fossil fuels and to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in all aspects of our lives with the help of local Powerdown projects.

• intensive farming and fishing – looking at less intensive, welfare-friendly and climate-friendly farming and fishing practices to lessen the impact of food production on methane emissions, environmental degradation and dwindling wild fish stocks.

• changing tastes – people are looking for a return to the distinctive local flavours from traditional food, such as Shelland and North Ronaldsay mutton, beneray herring, heritage potatoes, homestead apple, honey from bees kept in the community. He admitted that his main satisfaction for the boys was: “This house believes small farmers. They can not be ignored: fifty big farmer. There is greater social backbone to rural development. They know how to survive in crises. They know the land. The tide of opinion is turning their way and they provide the economic, cultural and social backbone to rural development. They can not be ignored: fifty small farmers. They can not be ignored: fifty big farmer. There is greater social backbone to rural development. They know how to survive in crises. They know the land. The tide of opinion is turning their way and they provide the economic, cultural and social backbone to rural development. They can not be ignored: fifty small farmers. 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Collaboration not rationalisation is required. This can destroy the cachet of local authenticity. Units because production rationalisation nevertheless remains as individual production ensure supply by banding together, they must deal with supermarkets with whom they must deal. Mountain producers and the strength of the mountain producers, to reduce the costs and compensate for the higher costs, to ensure the supply.

How should we delineate mountain areas? Should we adopt the Less Favoured Area definition which not only falls within DG Agri’s remit but has demonstrably been applied flexibly by them to suit not only slope but climate and latitude?

The problem is that successive Scottish administrations have refused to identify any part of Scotland – highland or lowland hills – as mountains, probably because of a perception that ‘only the Munros would qualify and every one knows that hill farming is conducted much above the valley floors for the very reason that the higher land is so bare, barren and inhospitable and without an appreciation of DG Agri’s willingness to take into full account these very real conditions and apply the definition in an appropriately flexible manner.

However, it is clear that throughout Europe the adoption of the Art 18 LFA mountain definition would not cover all the areas that would benefit from the DG Regio definition and vice versa – therefore some have suggested that an exercise should be undertaken to more nearly combine both areas within one new definition. This in policy and practical terms is effectively impossible.

It is also in pursuit of this exercise in administration to identify Scotland’s islands as areas of specific handicap under Art 20 of the LFA regulation as has been done most notably by Denmark and Estonia … and by Whitehall in respect of the Scilly Isles subject to the limitation that Art 20 designation cannot cover more than 10% of a member state’s entire LFA area. The Highlands and Islands have more islands (within the EU’s statistical boundaries) than any other single EU member state except Greece!

The next steps are a Commission ‘Road Map’, with the options of:

- status quo (no protection)
- reserved term (with simple control system)
- quality system with heavier certification process
- an impact study by end of 2009.
Going vegetarian to save the planet?

Sir

Livestock is a vital part of many people’s diets and livelihoods. Giving up meat is not the only solution — it would make only a marginal difference to greenhouse gas emissions.

We face the global challenge of feeding a growing world population using a fixed land resource with reducing access to water, fertilizer and fuel.

Meat is part of that balance.

Giving up meat is not the only solution. Giving up meat is not the only solution. Giving up meat is not the only solution.

The challenge is to produce meat more sustainably — which will require a range of changes, including a reduction in the amount of feed we use, and an increase in the efficiency of how we produce meat.

This letter first appeared in The Times on 15 June 2010.
THE CROFTER, NOVEMBER 2009

CROFTER'S WIFE COLUMN

With only one week to
mark each year for a
country family, there is
evertheless the danger that it becomes an anti-climax. You spend so long looking forward to it and building up to it that your expectations reach dangerously high levels!

Take two years ago as an example. Looking for something that would meet all our needs we were tempted into the world of Center Parcs. It looked spacious, comfortable and suitable for off-duty people. The fact that schools here in the Highlands get different October holidays helped too—the price was low, the place would be at low occupancy. I went into all the details, but I had never before felt imprisoned and I hope it’s the only holiday that I ever cry for home after two nights!

That never-again-to-be-repeated fiasco made us decide to play safe and last year The Crofter found us a holiday cottage in a converted pigsty on an Irish farm. It was far from perfect... and he was right. So right that a week’s farming life would be a week of fascination and anticipation. Four hundred and twenty miles later, celebrating the fact that we hadn’t got lost once, our arrival in Tobarpatrick was heralded by the usual cacophony of farmlife.

The Kinellas have farmed there for generations and, like crofters, have had to diversify in recent years—hence the five old-world-styled holiday cottages situated in the heart of the farm. It dawned on me that not everyone who holidays here will be as enamoured with the place as we are: not everyone will consider a relaxing holiday to indulge forty-odd dogs roaming freely, a cowshed housing a hundred beasts within a stone’s throw of the bedroom window, not to mention cats, hens, innumerable horses, mud and manure. For us it’s heaven and with an open invitation to wander at our will and help out as and when we wish, this is almost too good to be true: The Crofter’s dream!

For our twelve-year-old, the farm is a playground. With the farmer’s son leading the way they tear around on chunky, robust go-karts, play with kittens in the hayloft and ride the ponies. Each morning sees him follow the farmer around happily undertaking chores that he’d grumble bitterly at if asked to do them at home. As for our toddler, he had a terrific time surrounded by “moos” and “oofs” and tractors and one messy activity to another. An anti-climax: you spend so long planning to have a great time and end up having even more fun. So, after a very long and hectic mid-december, we set off for our twelve-year-old, the landlord.

ROB GIBSON

MSP for Highlands and Islands
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The fundamental ambition of the Urras Euraboil (Embo Trust) project centres on the creation of tenant-only no-right-to-buy woodland crofts.

The Highland Small Communities Housing Trust has assisted Urras Euraboil in retaining the services of Inverness solicitors Murchison Law to produce a definitive analysis of what can and cannot be done under current legislation. This has resulted in the very recent production of Murchison Law’s Commentary on Options to advise both trusts on the parameters of establishing housing on newly created bare-land crofts.

Three fundamental criteria were identified upon which the assessment was to be based: (a) the best method for accessing support funding; (b) occupancy of any house to be linked in perpetuity to the tenancy of the croft; (c) the tenancy of the croft to be, in perpetuity, under the control of the community landlord.

Six scenarios were considered in depth:

- Traditional individual self build
- Traditional build by Urras Euraboil for each crofter
- Off-croft RHOD self-build
- Off-croft rented accommodation
- Co-operative building for at least one-off or offs
- Shared equity sale with rural housing burden attached

The findings of the report provide Urras Euraboil with enough evidence to believe that its ambition to create a township of tenant-only no-right-to-buy woodland crofts is legally deliverable. The directors of the trust acknowledge the admirable expertise of Murchison Law in delivering this comprehensive and definitive piece of legal analysis in such a short time-scale, and await with a mixture of anticipation and trepidation the decision of the Big Lottery with regard to their funding application for their woodland croft project, this decision to be announced in mid-December.

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Simon Fraser is accredited by the Law Society of Scotland as a specialist in Crofting Law.
**CROFTING RESOURCES PROGRAMME**

**Food marketing for small producers**

**Taking stock**

With an ever-increasing number of crofters pursuing the direct marketing route, whether on their own account or through producer groups, the time seemed right to offer a number of one-day workshops on the theme of food marketing opportunities and challenges. These workshops were organised as part of the Crofting Resources Programme and were very ably delivered during August and September by Scottish Agricultural College’s food marketing specialists, David Lamb, Patrick Hughes and Paul Mayfield, a group of experts who take a very encouraging view of the food producing capabilities of crofters and the marketability of their produce.

The workshops took place in Stornoway, Benbecula, Dunbeath and Achnasheen and were attended by representatives of established crofter producer groups. The message from the SAC tutors was an upbeat one: in spite of the recession, demand for quality, local and niche food products continues to grow. The only exception is in the organic sector, where volumes are down, possibly due to negative publicity surrounding nutritional value, import of produce and one high-profile case of fraudulent misrepresentation by a wholesaler.

Lively discussion took place at all the venues and the materials raised will be followed up as the Crofting Resources Programme continues. These workshops included some tough questions such as “How do we get the super beef produced in Uist on to the market?” and “How do we get into the Southern European hill lamb trade?” We are already working with some of the industry’s leading experts to try and find answers.

Thanks to Siobhan MacDonald, SAC, for funding these workshops through the European Social Fund and to the event organisers, Lachna in Stornoway, Bencbecula, Nan Smith (SAC, Stornoway), Eric Larnach (Dunbeath) and Kristine MacKenzie (Achnasheen).

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**Far North Beef**

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**Scottish Crofting Produce at Cawdor**

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**An SCF Crofting resources project on stock clubs**

As part of the Crofting Resources Programme, SCF will shortly be undertaking a study of crofters’ stock clubs. These are the original crofter producer groups and have operated successfully for many years in certain, but not all, crofting areas.

The study will start by trying to find answers to the following questions:

- Where are the stock clubs?
- Why do they work in some areas but not others?
- Do they make money or at least break even?
- Have they been successful in keeping sheep/cattle on hill grazings?
- Do they have other social, economic and environmental benefits?
- How do they fit in with other activities such as hill grazing?
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A CHINTRAID IS A township of twenty one crofts and sixteen crofters, with an additional hill grazing, situated a few miles west of Lochcarron.

In 2005 four of the crofters entered the Rural Stewardship Scheme (RSS) option for hill grazing units, which involved introduction of native or traditional breed cattle – and Achintraid cattle club came into being. At the time only one crofter was making use of the hill grazing, for sheep and there had been no cattle on the hill for quite a few years. To make cattle keeping practical it was necessary to carry out some improvements to the common grazing. An access track was constructed to allow big-bale silage feeding and cattle pens and a crush were bought and installed. These works were funded by CAGAS.

To start off the herd, eight Highland x Shorthorn cows were purchased with calves at foot and already in calf to a Limousin bull. SFC helped to arrange basic training for the cattle keepers and this was delivered by Ian Cairns of SAG using European Social Fund resources. Although only four crofters are involved in the cattle club, the project has the support of the rest of the township and most of the other shareholders contributed generously to the construction of the track.

A beneficial spin-off has been the provision of a sports field for the village, achieved by combining the improvement works on the grazings into a project assisted by the sadly-lamented Crofting Community Development Scheme. The sports field is used for sports committees, as well as football by the young folk of the village. One of the cattle club members, John Parker, says that co-operation has been key to the success of the scheme. “We would not have

done it individually.”

A heading rota has been established amongst the members, with big bales taken out to the hill from November onwards. The silage is cut from a park in the township donated by the landlord as the small crofts are not suited to fodder production. Another important factor has been the selection of mature cows of hardy breeds that can assist whether on the hill or in the byre.

So the cattle club has unreservedly been a success. It has fostered co-operative working, improved the common grazing, brought cattle back to the hill with the associated environmental benefits and provided an important asset for the whole community. A cloud on the horizon is that RSS payments will end in 2010/11, and like many other crofters in a similar situation, Achintraid cattle club will have to go through the rigours of applying to Rural Priorities to access the funds necessary for further development.

Thanks to John Parker for assistance with this article.

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Field trials were carried out and the produce sold wholesale in Glasgow. In some ways the results were not encouraging, but very many lessons were learnt and the organisation, then called Skye and Lochalsh Horticultural Development Association, grew and members shared information.

Among the lessons were: shelter, varieties, planting times, labour-saving methods and getting a decent price for anything grown. Full records of the early work are still available to view on the website http://tinyurl.com/hortskl. Over the years, through advice from others, information to members at courses and meetings, through things out, we have worked out a whole range of adaptations to make success more likely. A recent project, called Skye and Lochalsh Horticultural Development Association, grew and members shared information.

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Local founders of the Scottish Crofters Union honoured

The Kyle of Sutherland Branch of the Scottish Crofting Federation held a ceilidh to recognise the work and dedication of some of the founding members of the east Sutherland branches of the Scottish Crofters Union. The ceilidh took place on 30th October in Ardgay, a mile and 115 years on from where the Land League marched in 1894 for its 11th annual meeting in Bonar Bridge.

Presentations of Country Images glassware were made by professor Jim Hunter of the UHI Centre for Highland History, who in 1985 was the first director of the Crofters Union. The assistance of the A’Chraobh project and the Year of Homecoming are very much appreciated in enabling this to happen.

After opening songs from the Lairg Gaelic choir and an introduction from Jim McGillivray, branch chairman, Jim Hunter recalled the founding of the union in 1985 and some of the characters who were instrumental in its beginnings. He then made presentations to Robin Ross and Jennie Betts (Ardgay), Donald Simmonds and Sandy Chisholm (Bonar Bridge), Alistair MacIver and John MacDonald (Rogart), Lesley Mackintosh and Mrs Sutherland on behalf of her late husband, George “Pipie” Sutherland (Brora) in honour of their past and continuing service to crofting and the wider community. Margot MacGregor and Alex Blance (Helmsdale), Billy Sutherland (Brora), John Angus Corbett and Calder Sutherland (Laing), Alasdair MacRae (Rosehall) and Ken MacKinnon (Bonar Bridge) were unable to attend.

Finally the Rogart ceilidh band lead the 100 or so people in some country dancing of great energy and no little skill, with a short break for supper.

This event will also be the springboard for a project involving local primary schools to chart and record the history and influence of the Land League and crofting movements in the area, to mark the significant contribution of the many individuals who have worked for the crofting cause.

Russell Smith

From the archives

SCF HQ has lots of old photos from the early days of the SCU. We would like your help to identify some of these with a view to putting together an album or display.

Have a look at the photo below, and if you remember the event and know some of the people, please get in touch with HQ. You’ll be helping to create an important historical archive.