

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

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And much more ...

SCF EUROPEAN CONFERENCE

Small farmers: backbone of rural development or barrier to efficiency?



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.

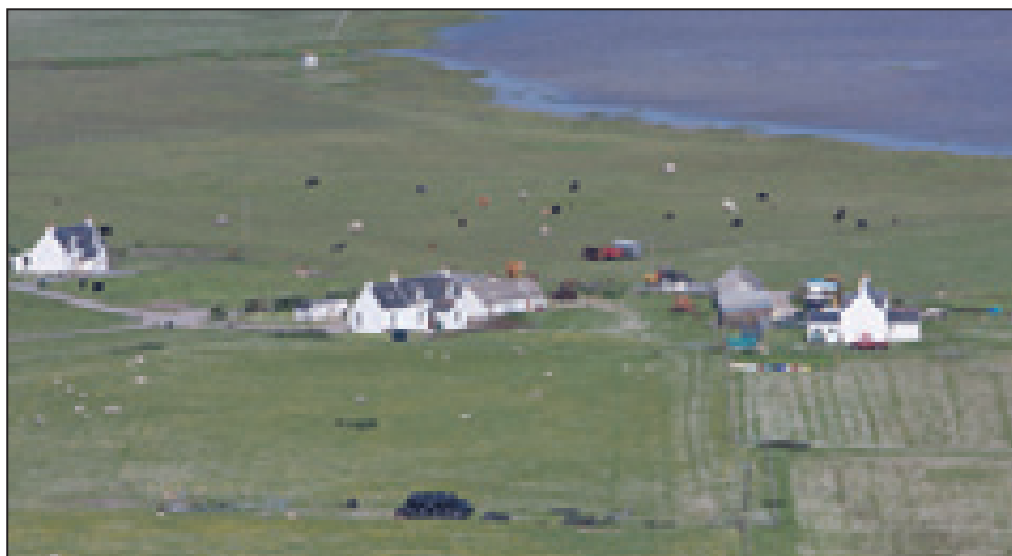
Policies are sometimes criticised as being too wide in application, both geographically and in relation to scale of holding, not taking into account local conditions, or as being too focused on industrial-scale production whilst ignoring the small-producers' situation.

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.

Critics argue that the CAP costs too much and benefits relatively few people – only about 5% of EU citizens work in agriculture. Supporters of the CAP say it guarantees the survival of rural communities – where more than half of EU citizens live. The recent focusing on climate change and food security has brought another angle to the argument for public spending on support to the custodians of the countryside.

But does that support go to the right people or enterprises? Most of the CAP money goes to the biggest farmers – large agribusinesses and hereditary

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Martin Benson

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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Message from the chair...



AS I PEN these notes I look out the window and see sheets of rain and strong winds. It is hardly a harbinger of the balmy autumn days we used to get. Climate change is obvious, warmer but much wetter.

This is usually an exciting time of year as we prepare the tups for the mating season: new purchases, new breeds, tried and tested favourites, endless debate with neighbours on the merits of which tups to run with certain ewes. All of this is tempered over us. Although I have personally been electronically recording for many years, I fully understand people's fears and frustrations at

what is an unnecessary intrusion, cost, more labour and paperwork. When the double tagging regime was robust, simple and easily understood, why enforce this against the vast majority of British stockmen?

There have been very well attended meetings throughout the crofting counties on the Crofters Commission bull hire review. Some innovative ideas were ventured. The group tasked with the review were not left in any doubt of the importance of the scheme, particularly in Lewis and Harris where cattle are on the increase; and the Uists and Skye where the scheme is used the most.

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 buttonhole 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 tease out legislation, as some parts of the bill are unpalatable and unwanted by the majority while some parts can be of benefit to crofting. Paramount 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 Stornoway mart, ably led by Cathy Peebles and her team. We did tup selection on traits, 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 on both evenings. Thanks are due to abattoir staff, vet and meat hygiene services inspector, where the importance of drenching was apparent with liver fluke the commonest complaint. Thanks also to the mart directors 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 ministers joint!

There has been much more buoyancy of late with good prices for cattle, sheep and pigs. Cereal prices are also more affordable.

However, my tups with their different colours of raddle are getting restless and anxious for female company. I have to go, I cannot keep them waiting!

CROFTING REFORM

Crofting reform: government is reacting to crofters' response

Continued from page 1

The area of the bill looking at support to croft housing is still being discussed.

The SCF has said that our members are opposed to the suggestion that a loan to build a croft house could be taken from a bank that would hold the entire croft as security and would have the power to sell this as free-hold land should it need to call in its loan. Somehow the words 'bank' and 'security' don't sit well together in the same sentence!

We want the re-instatement of the CBGLS, preferably – and there have been no plausible arguments put forward for why this could not happen. We have also made suggestions that other avenues must be explored, the formation of a credit union for example.

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, divisive and very slow. We have suggested that the method used in many community development examples has been community mapping, where the community itself take more ownership of the process rather than having it imposed upon them. This is being explored further.

Finally, the suggestion that the Crofting Commission be more responsible for dealing with absenteeism and neglect has been cautiously welcomed by the SCF, but we have made it clear that neglect is a consequence largely caused by crofting practices being unviable and that it is this that needs to be tackled.

By the time this issue reaches you the analysis of the consultation responses should

be published. A redrafting of the bill is taking place, taking into account the responses and the reactions gathered at the public meetings and should be presented before Christmas.

There then follows scrutiny by the Parliamentary Rural Affairs and Environment Committee who will take further evidence on the proposals – another chance for crofters to put forward their views.



Martin Benson

SCF EUROPEAN CONFERENCE

Small farmers: backbone of rural development or barrier to efficiency?



Continued from page 1

landowners. It has been calculated that 74% of the funds go to just 20% of EU farmers while at the other end of the scale 70% of farmers share just 8% of the funds.

There is a growing argument, on the one side the agribusinesses claiming that large scale industrial agriculture is the only efficient way to feed the growing population and on the other side the small-scale producer claiming that large-scale is unsustainable and that small-scale is more community and environmentally friendly.

The CAP was introduced to

increase agricultural productivity, to ensure fair living standards for the agricultural community, to stabilise markets, to ensure availability of food and to provide food at reasonable prices.

Have these objectives been reached? We have seen over-production and the creation of mountains and lakes of surplus food and drink; rural areas have depopulated as people leave agriculture (as agriculture industrialises); food prices are kept artificially high; sustainability is questioned. So a series of

reforms has taken place, the aim being to break the link between subsidies and production, to diversify the rural economy and to respond to consumer demands for safe food and, increasingly, high standards of animal welfare and environmental protection.

The CAP budget has been falling as a proportion of the total EU budget for many years. The addition of new member states, most of which have a much higher percentage of population still in agriculture, means that the pot has to go further and that

the money paid to farmers in older member states is declining. Furthermore, the reforms covering the period 2009-2013 will make farmers spend 10% of their EU support on projects to improve the countryside – double the current amount. More support will be transferred to rural development and conservation, further reducing the traditional EU incentives for farmers to produce. And so, in this context, we asked the question, "Small farmers: backbone of rural development or barrier to efficiency?"

Small farms – commoner than you think

Gwyn Jones explains

ACROFTER, according to one online dictionary is a person who rents and works a small farm. And although legally a croft may be defined with reference to a register and can extend to many hundreds of acres, there is no doubt that in crofters' minds, as in that of the general public, the link between crofting and small-scale food producers, to quote SCF's strategic framework, is inescapable.

But if the link between smallness and crofting is real and self-evident, defining smallness is not so easy.

Acreage is obvious, but only works until you think about it. The dairy farmers and market gardeners of the Netherlands are small, but highly profitable and very intensive in their methods.

Another approach is to think of small as meaning part-time.

Indeed, crofters are more or less unique in the British Isles in fully embracing their vocation as being part-time – many others promote the illusion (or is it delusion?) of the full-time family farm, when in fact they depend on their partner's income or the state

pension for their living.

However, this false picture of part-time farming being of marginal importance is so widely held that it is rather a surprise to find how common multiple sources of incomes are on farms. In the US, for example, two thirds of farms have a source of income besides agriculture – and that source is off-farm in the vast majority of cases.

So some part-time farms will be very similar to crofts and others are frankly not like crofts at all.

It seems to me that what unites almost all crofters and which defines the kind of fellow farmers with whom they feel the strongest community of interest, is a very low income from agriculture.

That is what makes a crofter more like a small hill farmer than a Dutch tomato grower.

Small farms are, of course, common in central and eastern Europe, but surprisingly make up a very large proportion of farmers in most western European states as well. In the UK, about two thirds of all registered holdings provide less than a full time wage.

Only in eight of the 27 EU member states are full-time

farmers in the majority. But the pattern in these countries is the one most like the Western Isles.

Farms providing low incomes are often small in area, of course, and the picture is very different if we consider the proportion of Europe's farmed land used by small farms.

Only in five member states do farms offering a full time income account for less than half the farmland. In the UK the proportion is just short of 80%.

However, regionally the picture is very variable indeed. There are at least 14 statistical areas in the UK which have over one third of the land in small income farms.

The first point to be made is that this shows the similarity between the Western Isles and places like Romania, Bulgaria, Latvia and Austria, where whole landscapes are dominated by small farms.

The second is that the small farm landscapes of south Wales are actually very similar to crofting areas. In the famous valleys of the coalfield the land is poorly drained, the inbye often limited and large areas remain in common grazings. First impressions – the hedges and the maze of roads – hide deeper similarities. Maybe crofters should be making links there?

Having considered what small farms are, we can then ask whether those characteristics are just an incidental of crofting or part of its very essence?

The question is important for SCF: when it looks up from the uniqueness of the legal definition, where does it seek allies? Who are the same as crofters out there in the rest of the UK, Europe and indeed the wider world? What future trajectories for crofting are

Percentage of farmland used by farms bringing in less than a full-time income.

acceptable to SCF and which are to be resisted as inimicable to its very character?

Eilean Siar (Western Isles)	83
Caitness and Sutherland and Ross and Cromarty	56
Outer London – South	42
Inverness and Nairn and Moray, Badenoch and Strathspey	40
Gwent Valleys	40
Lochaber, Skye and Lochalsh, Arran and Cumbrae and Argyll and Bute	39
Shetland Islands	37
Greater Manchester South	37
Swansea	36
Isle of Anglesey	36
Surrey	35
Central Valleys	34
Blackburn with Darwen	34
South West Wales	33
Greater Manchester North	33
Bradford	33

SCF EUROPEAN CONFERENCE

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 if 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.

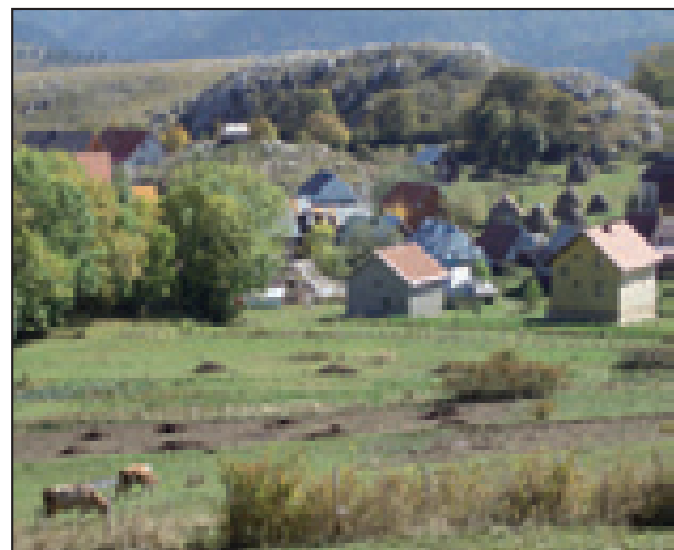
The consequence of these factors is that it has not been worthwhile to fertilise and drain the land to make it more productive. The vegetation has been influenced by agriculture, certainly, but it remains what is called semi-natural.

This semi-natural vegetation, managed at low-intensity, is the main characteristic of high nature value farmland, and so large small farms are almost by definition high nature value.

Smaller holdings are a different matter. Just as the farm structure can be due to 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,



Most of Europe's farmers live on small farms like these in Bosnia

while not all smallholdings are HNV, it is probably true that all HNV smallholdings yield very low incomes. For whatever reason, the land is not being worked hard and this is directly linked to the farmer's or crofter's income.

What does this mean for policy?

The link between farm income and nature value has always been clear to me, but the causal relationship is, I am embarrassed to confess, a new realisation.

It stands to reason when I think about it. Few farmers or crofters

wouldn't feel the same admiration as my mother when she sees a clean, green productive silage field. Crofts and farms which are not like that are – with some exceptions, I grant you – not the result of choice but one which

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 HNV 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 (if they are deemed desirable by government). When has this ever been even considered by our policy makers?

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 is linked to the nature value. But it's not linked to public goods willy nilly. If you want payment, we are asking you to change your mind about what you are about. It's a compromise on your part, but we appreciate it and we'll pay you for it. Properly.

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Delegates on a croft visit – see page13

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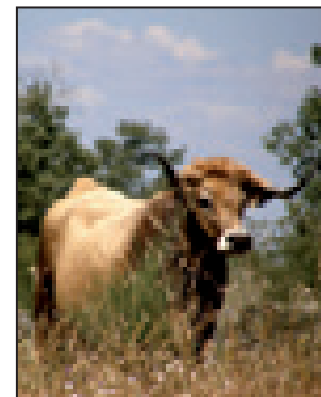
Small farms in Portugal – a terminal disease?

IF THERE WAS a prize for the best-prepared talk at Grantown, I would definitely award it to José Pedro Fragoso de Almeida, writes Gwyn Jones.

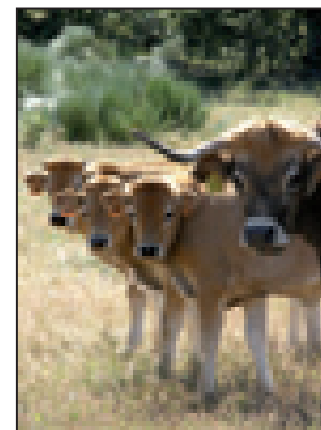
José has just finished a term as president of the agricultural association of Portalegre in the Alentejo region of south east Portugal and must have been one of the furthest travelled delegates.

His talk followed hot on the heels of the Portuguese elections and his dedication to his task was illustrated by his confession to me that he had written two versions of the talk – a 'green' rather more optimistic one and a gloomy 'black' one, with the choice depending on who won. It was the black, unfortunately!

He started by illustrating the diversity of Portuguese farms; and of course reminding us that



Late spring



Late spring

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 unsurprisingly 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 (0.2-0.3 LU/ha) 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 it.

Returns to farming are very poor in the LFA. Just like here, most farms return standard gross margins of less than £4000 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 issues – farmers have to wait up to four months for payment.

Are farms important for rural development? Looking at their contribution to GDP, the answer would seem to be no – only in the south east do they account for more than 5% of production.

However, José pointed out that this is a very narrow way of measuring things. About 84% of farmers' expenditure is spent locally, so that farmers' losses are local suppliers' gains.

Nevertheless the sector is in massive decline and the worry must be that in some areas this will prove to be terminal. The number of farmers has fallen by about two thirds in the last 20 years. This is undoubtedly to a large extent due to rationalisation – the number of livestock is fairly constant. But far from leading to higher incomes per farmer, the returns have also fallen, by between 5% and 25% between 2003 and 2007 alone. And again some of the worst figures come from the most marginal areas.

So while small farms – the main type in Portugal – have undoubted social and environmental value and have been all too efficient in siphoning government funds from the taxpayer to suppliers even in the remotest region, their future is gloomy. And the migration figures bear this out.

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.

role of small farms in fixing rural population. Again this requires a new look at rural policy and while HNV farmland 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



Winter

Politicians often press the competitiveness case. However, the recent history of Portuguese farming, says José, is one of a constant struggle to increase viability and of constant crises as new regulations or price adjustments by the buyers move the goalposts. This is a dead-end for Portugal's farms – literally.

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

The second is to recognise the

is poor. Awareness of Portuguese products (other than port and madeira) is low but the products themselves and the story behind them have undoubted attractions to the consumer. Getting there also requires the government to get involved.

A depressing tale indeed, but delivered by an inspiring and warm man. Crofters are not the only farmers with a good case whose government looks the other way.

Time for small farmers all over Europe to play the numbers game – they are the majority; time to make their voice heard!

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Late spring

SCF EUROPEAN CONFERENCE

Friendly hosts in Finland

MIKAELA BERGHÄLL from south Finland talked about the activities on her family farm, Rejböle Gård in Uusimaa.

For three generations Mikela's family have participated in a friendly hosts farm tourism scheme (a scheme like this should exist, Mikela says, but unfortunately does not) offering farm stay accommodation. Three generations of Mikela'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 13 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.

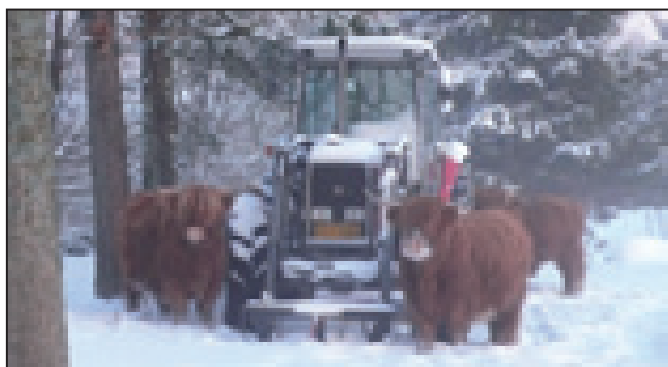
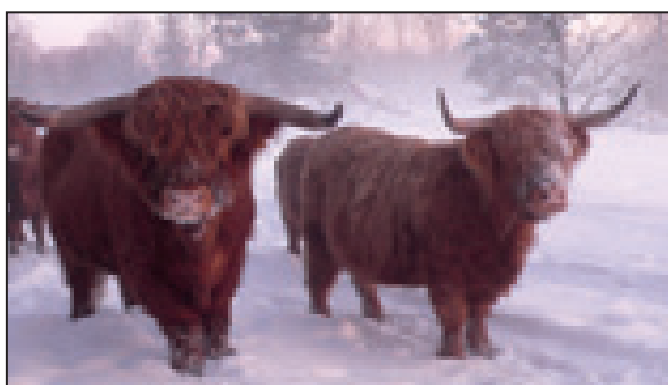
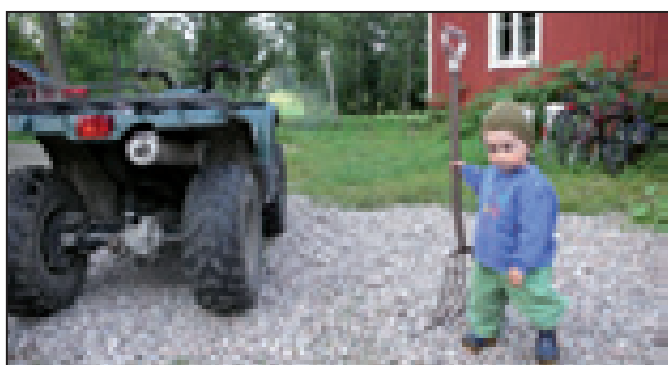
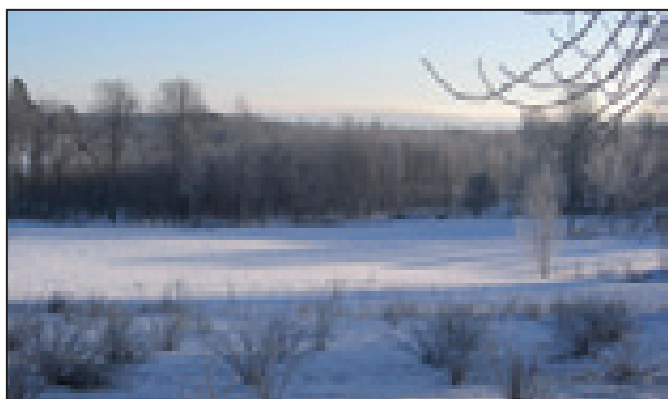
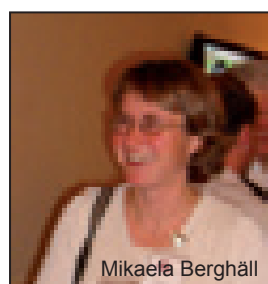
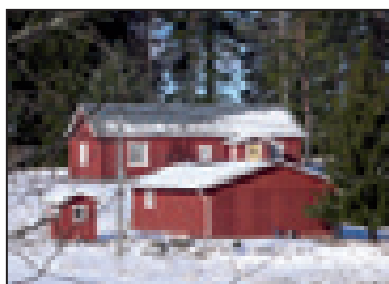
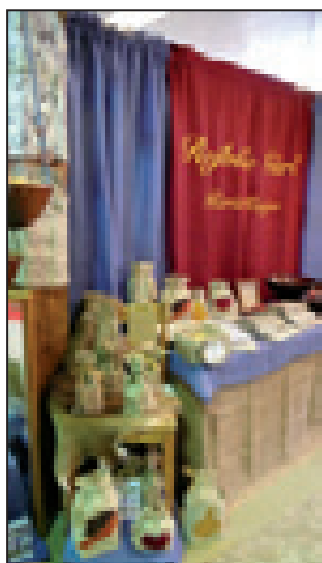
Farm tourism at Rejböle Gård

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 from 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, Mikela 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-rain 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..."



SCF EUROPEAN CONFERENCE

Minister urges more use of schemes to avoid cuts being made



KEYNOTE speaker, Environment Minister Roseanna Cunningham, said that the underspend in the Crofting 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: "Crofting 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."

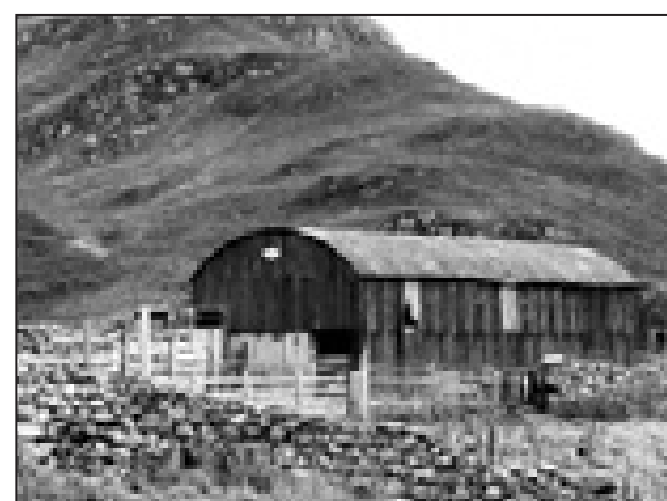
She admitted that most people who had responded to the consultation on the proposed legislation objected to the occupancy requirement, but she said "doing nothing is not an option if we want crofting to survive and thrive".

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 decroft.

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 at some point say crofters are not using it and it is then going to get cut. It isn't being cut now so make use of it."

Ms Cunningham stressed other ways would have to be used to end



Claire Nicolson



Pam Rodway chats to the minister

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 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."

Responding to a question from the floor, the minister acknowledged the problems with

existing provision of abattoirs and the resulting barriers to local production. Richard Lochhead is looking into this and it is hoped that a solution may be found.

Commenting on the speech, SCF chief executive Patrick Krause 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 to curb speculation 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 cause cash-flow problems that many will not contemplate in the current climate"

SCF EUROPEAN CONFERENCE

A possible European Commission perspective on the post-2013 CAP outlook

Ken Thomson, Professor of Agricultural Economics, University of Aberdeen

KEN BEGAN his gathering address with a few caveats: he is NOT a Commission official, and four years is a long time, even in EU politics! Moreover, though better than it was twelve months ago, the macroeconomic outlook is still uncertain, whether at global, EU or UK level.

We are currently, Ken explained, in the third year of the current EU 2007-2013 programming period, during which the EU and CAP budget is largely fixed. There will soon be a new Commission – and a new agricultural commissioner for 2010-2014. When (or if) the Lisbon treaty is put into effect, there will be more “co-decision-making” between the European Council of Ministers, the Commission and the Parliament over agricultural policy, although only at higher levels. Meanwhile, the CAP health check is past, though details still need ironing out, for example in Scotland, mainly in respect of

national aids under Article 68. LFA reform stutters on.

No-one’s breath is bated over the WTO Doha Round talks on international trade, but an agreement here could be important for further CAP reform. The outcome of the budget review from the Commission is expected by this autumn, but minds have been on other things over the last year. A new government has just been elected in Germany, and quite possibly a new one in the UK next year. The attitudes of these major member states are crucial to EU decision-making.

The budget review is wide-ranging: it is to cover all aspects of EU spending, including the CAP, and of resources, including the UK rebate. But the Commission will – as usual – only propose; actual decisions will be up to the Council, probably not until 2012-13. There will be the usual arguments about fairness, ability to pay, the need for policy change and the new (and old) purposes of the budget and indeed of the EU

as a whole. The CAP’s main Pillar 1 of income (and some remaining market) support is of crucial importance, especially to the new member states. Pillar 2 is less so, though the issue of co-financing (shared EU-national funding) will be argued over, as will EU added value and the proper size and purpose of structural funds.

Food security, Ken continued, has fast risen up the agenda since the 2008 price spike. World prices have now declined somewhat, but there is an impending famine in north-east Africa, and it seems unlikely that the millennium development goal of halving world hunger by 2015 will be met, despite G20 declarations and considerable EU funding. In any case, the proper role of the CAP in addressing this global – but not European – problem is hotly debated.

There are other perspectives on the CAP, of course. EU food consumers still have concerns over food safety and quality. In pursuing multi-functionality within

the European model of agriculture, the target of identifying all high nature value farmland has not been met, so that it is difficult to target LFA and other payments using this criterion. The EU has made commitments on energy and greenhouse gases, but again, the role of agriculture and the CAP is not yet clear. Politically, within the European Council, many of the 12 new member states are still accessing the CAP (eg single payments), and are unlikely to want to reform the CAP immediately, or even after 2013.

In summary, there are several hurdles – old, new, uncertain – to be crossed between now and 2013. In Ken Thomson’s view, there is little prospect of significant CAP reform before 2013, or indeed afterwards, without a major EU (or national) budget crisis. If such reform comes about, the main new features of interest will probably relate to climate change and energy and, possibly, renewed environmental and/or food concerns.

High nature value farming and the new CAP

Mark O’Brien and Katrina Marsden of the RSPB presented their organisation’s perspective.

RSPB SCOTLAND is concerned that without better support, many of the benefits produced by high nature value (HNV) systems will be lost. Unless CAP payments are better justified across Europe, they may be reduced significantly in the next funding period. Targeting funds to HNV systems could also benefit Scotland, since we have a high proportion of Europe’s HNV farmland and currently receive amongst the lowest levels of agricultural support.

Delivering added value is a key requirement for current land managers to continue to survive profitably. It might be delivered through breeding, nutrition and health or by delivering a species-rich and healthy countryside.

The distribution of rare bird species in the UK is skewed toward the north and west of Scotland, particularly the crofting areas. This is also the case with species known to be associated with active farm management in the form of grazing.

Current agri-environment schemes have been shown to

deliver benefits for some scarce and restricted-range species such as corncrakes. However, even here there is concern that the wider uptake associated with ESAs in the 1990s may have delivered more benefits than the current options available through SRDP. While these options deliver better benefits for corncrakes the uptake of these options is nowhere near as extensive as the uptake of ESAs.

For species that are more widespread, such as lapwings and curlews, targeted and competitive agri-environment schemes are unlikely to deliver benefits to more than a tiny proportion of the Scottish population and so are unable to turn around ongoing population declines.

Alternative approaches need to be considered. This includes an assessment of how HNV farming might favourably deliver benefits for the wildlife in our countryside.

Why is HNV threatened?

CAP had the objective of maximising food production and despite recent reforms, agricultural payments continue to reward the more intensively farmed areas with greater payments.

Is agri-environment the best means to protect HNV?

The aims of agri-environment

fit well with the benefits produced by HNV systems, but funding has tended to be focused on areas where restoration of damage is required, or where enhanced management is needed for species and habitats. The WTO-required formula for calculating payments – income forgone and additional cost – means that farmers and crofters cannot be paid to maintain existing systems, even if these produce impressive benefits. Changes would need to be made if agri-environment were to better reward for the provision of environmental goods by their true value.

Agri-environment makes up a small proportion of the funds.

Scotland also receives an extremely low allocation both in terms of SFP and RD funds compared to other European countries.

Greater support is needed to HNV areas. RSPB is calling for all rural payments to be directed on the basis of public money for public goods. If this philosophy were followed, HNV areas would be valued much more highly for the environmental goods they produce.

RSPB Scotland believes that HNV should be better targeted through all the main funding mechanisms and has been lobbying

for the following changes:

SFP – Article 68 to target payments;

– move away from historical basis of payments;

– better use of GAEC encourage appropriate activity for area;

SRDP – LFASS

– redefinition, better targeting to area;

– eligibility criteria – better targeting within area;

SRDP – Rural Development Contracts

– better definition of regional priorities;

– ease of access;

– upland LMOs.

Supporting HNV systems is a key part of RSPB’s vision for the future of rural subsidies.

Birdlife’s asks are as follows:

• keep similar levels of funding;

• basic payment to which all can apply with environmental management requirements;

• basic payment aimed specifically at HNV areas with eligibility criteria attached and environmental management requirements;

• higher level, targeted payments where specific larger changes in management are required to deliver public goods (agri-environment).

SCF EUROPEAN CONFERENCE

Deeside activity park

KEN HOWIE from Deeside outlined how he, as a small farmer, coped with the challenges facing agriculture and the need to diversify.

Coming from a farming family, Ken had always bred cattle and currently runs a herd of Aberdeen Angus. The farm income is supplemented by his wife’s salary and Ken also needs to have a job. Local farmers in his area all have other income sources.

Ken’s farm offers outdoor activities – shooting, fishing, quad biking and offroad 4x4 rides. In 2001 there were 12,000 visitors to the farm, then foot and mouth put a stop to the enterprise. Further diversification followed on a separate piece of land but planning difficulties arose.

When cattle prices dropped they produced their own meat but experienced difficulties with abattoir facilities.

The next venture was to build an activities centre, restaurant and farm shop. These attracted 40,000 visitors last year and provide employment for 32 full-time equivalents. This year customer spend is down.

Ken emphasised the need for a well-paid spouse to keep a farming venture going

Community of graziers

ANDREW HUMPHRIES, chair of the Foundation for Common Land, spoke after the conference dinner.

Andrew recognised the issues, challenges and aspirations faced by crofters as being akin to those that typify common graziers across Britain and beyond. The core purpose of the Foundation for Common Land is to identify, understand and use the experience of common graziers across Britain, to help them all to help themselves. That process must come from the grassroots.

Commons in the past were essentially a local matter, providing utilitarian products for the community – grazing, fuel, bracken and stone being examples. Management and accountability were local, having developed through custom and practice; what worked best in each situation based on experience and consensus, evolving a diversity that is the hallmark of common land. Each common is different.

Now circumstances have changed – common land is no longer just a local matter. Rights holders have been joined by third party interests with expectations that public goods are provided. Legislation through designations, agri-environmental agreements and access arrangements has changed the situation. The agenda is less focused on the aspirations of common graziers and the balance has moved

in favour of third party external interests. Their strong influence on policy and resource allocation has moved support from livestock products to so called non-market or public goods.

The unequal influence between rights holders and those interests primarily advocating public goods needs to be rebalanced; a task that Andrew felt will be challenging, but not beyond our shared capacity.

Words like sustainability, he continued, are among the most overused in the language but are not matched by words like sustainers. Common graziers are strategically in a strong position – or potentially so. Who else can provide an overview and understanding of the amazing diversity that common grazings represent? Progress is about making that potential contribution a reality. Our opportunity is to bring that experience to the table – to shape agendas, to influence change and to improve outcomes.

Regional bodies including SCF, Welsh Commons Forum, Cumbria and Yorkshire Federations, New Forest, Dean and the South West Partnership are fully and productively engaged with their business of working with and supporting local associations. The Foundation of Common Land must therefore concentrate on those matters that the federated groups find difficult or inappropriate, looking, for example, at opportunities for common graziers

at an EU Level.

The key importance of public goods linked to common land with its remarkably high nature and access values make working with third party stakeholders a priority, not least to emphasise other attributes including cultural landscape.

A charter for common land has been developed through consultation with graziers and organizations. The charter offers a common starting point for progress through recognition of six core principles, significant in sustaining commons and communities of common graziers.

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 art of husbandry, customary practice and the ways of communities.

Why is it, he asked, that ancient associations of flora and fauna excite so much care, attention and resources seemingly from all quarters? In contrast common grazing – an ancient association between people and the land – is virtually unrecognized. That is the challenge that needs to be achieved if common grazing is to be sustained and provide a sense of purpose for future generations of farmers.

SCF joins world movement for small producers

IN OCTOBER SCF attended the annual congress of the European Coordination for Via Campesina (ECVC) in Brussels and was accepted as a candidate member.

This organisation developed from the Coordination for European Peasant Farmers (CPE) when it joined the global peasant farmers representative organisation La Via Campesina.

La Via Campesina is an international movement of peasant farmers, small and medium-sized producers, landless men and women, indigenous people, rural youth and agricultural workers. It is a movement that unites organisations from around the world in defence of common objectives such as the rejection of the neo-liberal models of rural development, opposition to the industrialisation of agriculture that endangers the rights of

small farmers and the demand for inclusion in the process of developing agricultural policies. It also works relentlessly for the recognition of food sovereignty* as a right; and for the right of peasant farmers, small-holders and crofters worldwide to have a dignified life.

La Via Campesina was formed in 1993 and has rapidly become one of the most active social movements on the international scene, making its presence known and its voice heard in defence of the rights of all small farmers. The movement comprises more than 150 organisations from 60 countries from Africa, North America, South America, East and Southeast Asia, South Asia, Central America, Cuba and the Caribbean and Europe. The SCF is the 23rd European organisation to join and represents the UK’s small-scale food producers.

La Via Campesina promotes a model of peasant or family-farm agriculture based on sustainable production with local resources and in harmony with local culture and traditions. Peasant farmers rely on a long experience with their locally available resources. We are capable of producing the optimal quantity and quality of food with few external inputs. Our production is mainly for family consumption and domestic markets.

The current industrialised agribusiness model has been designed to dominate all agriculture activities. This model exploits workers, depopulates rural areas (clears) and concentrates economic and political power in the hands of the few. La Via Campesina advocates a decentralised model where production, processing, distribution and consumption are controlled by the people the communities themselves and not



by trans-national corporations.

In the preparation for a new European Common Agricultural Policy it is essential that SCF joins other European organisations that are fighting for a fairer deal for the small-scale food producer, for the crofter.

* Food sovereignty organises food production and consumption according to the needs of local communities, giving priority to production for local consumption. Food sovereignty includes the right to protect and regulate the national agricultural and livestock production and to shield the domestic market from the dumping of agricultural surpluses and low-price imports from other countries.

<http://www.eurovia.org/>

SCF EUROPEAN CONFERENCE

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 LANDSCAPE of southern Transylvania, Romania is perhaps the most extensive working high nature value farmed landscape in lowland Europe. It is of European and global importance.

The exceptional biodiversity of the area is due to its management by the Saxon community over 7-800 years and can only be preserved by continued traditional management. Romania joined the EU in 2007 and the derogations negotiated to help the farmers during transition come to an end this year. Four million people in Romania depend on traditional agriculture. Rural communities are under immediate economic threat and this is a social and economic problem of national importance. The mosaic high nature value farmed landscape could easily be destroyed within three to five years – either through abandonment or the intensification of agriculture. It was clearly important to save this landscape, but not by creating a museum, rather a vibrant community moving forward.

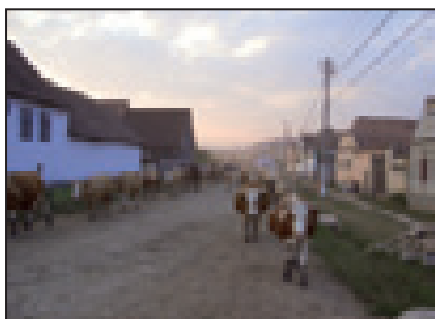
Fundatia ADEPT is carrying out an integrated programme linking economic and social benefits with biodiversity conservation and raising local capacity for good management in the future. The programme brings together Romanian and wider European expertise to carry out innovative nature conservation and rural development projects that are firmly rooted in local communities.

ADEPT helped establish the largest Natura 2000 area in continental Romania – 190 farmers (the only ones in Romania) were contracted into the pilot agri-environment scheme in 2007, receiving grassland management grants of €90/ha, with 2000 ha under agri-environment management protection. In 2008, this increased to 1,500 farmers signed up to the main agri-environment scheme in the area protecting 18,000 ha of grassland. In the project area raw milk sales are the main source of cash income, but many are self-sufficient, semi-subsistence farmers with little cash income. The number of milk cows has decreased from year 2007-2008 by almost 50% as a result of pressure to comply with EU regulations and downward pressure on farm gate prices caused by competition from imports.

The ADEPT approach has been to create demand for local products and services rather than first trying to increase production without having identified the route to market. Once communities realise that this demand is linked to their landscape they are more likely to listen to the scientists and support conservation measures. Although the area is of world significance in terms of biodiversity, local people were more concerned about their own economic survival than with conservation measures. For conservation to work, local people must have real economic benefit.

ADEPT identified that tourists visiting the area were looking for gift items other than Dracula-themed mugs and in collaboration with the Slow Food Foundation created a project to encourage local ladies to produce

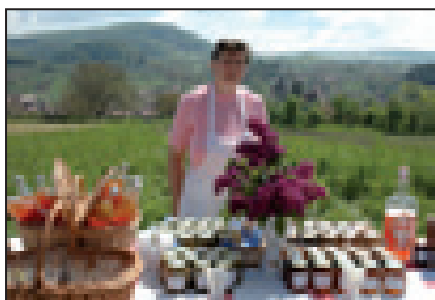
a range of high-fruit, low-sugar jams as high-value gift items rather than grocery products. Honey was also identified as symbolic of the landscape, a piece of which tourists wanted to take home. The honey was traditionally sold in



Cows coming home from communal grazing each evening during the summer



We offer tourists a meet the bee experience



High value gifts



Sheep are milked by hand three times per day

bulk for blending but now is bottled and sold to tourists with bee-keepers getting twice the price they got when selling in bulk plus they get income from a "meet the bees" experience. Solar driers made by a local carpenter were introduced and are now used to produce a range of dried herbs, fruits and vegetables.

Romania is not known for its cuisine, but local food products have outstanding flavour – as food used to be in the UK pre second world war – and this presented an opportunity for eco-tourism based on food, culture, biodiversity and landscape. The initial local perception was that the main opportunity was to develop B&B capacity so ADEPT developed its own training course to provide the necessary practical skills, but it soon emerged that lack of bed capacity was not the most immediate problem but activities to keep tourists in the area for longer and which encouraged them to spend money.

Promotion of activities started with food and culture, then a long-distance walking trail linking the villages of the eight communes. Mountain biking has recently been introduced. All of these activities help tourists meet local people, see local crafts and create demand for local food products. Tourist numbers are increasing and more are now spending several nights in the area.

In 2006, the area was not mentioned in any of the international travel guides so ADEPT published a guide book and the first tourist map of the area together with various brochures. New road signs showing tourism symbols were put up in one town and the number of tourists stopping almost doubled overnight. Similar road signs are now being planned for villages throughout the area. The area is now covered in several of the major travel guides and in August 2009 was highly recommended in the top 500 eco-destinations in the world.

Traditional local craft skills are also in danger of being lost and ADEPT established a community fund to promote activities such as dyeing wool using plant extracts, weaving, embroidery, hemp products and barrel making.

Many small producers had attempted to sell their products in the local street markets. They were competing with each other with the same seasonal produce and customers were price sensitive, as many had links back to the villages where family produce is free or at very low prices. In the cities traditional street markets are in decline and much of the produce now on sale is imported by traders. Few small producers comply with the regulations so cannot sell direct to hotels, restaurants or shops. Supermarkets have arrived in the last five years and become dominant in the larger cities, and much of their produce is imported. To assist small producers overcome this challenge, ADEPT helped establish a weekly farmers market in Bucharest which is creating demand for traditional food products from all over Romania. A monthly market has been established in Brasov and it is hoped to start markets in other towns soon. Having established that there is demand for local produce, the project has built a food barn, a micro-processing unit that will help producers increase their volume and efficiency of production, developing guidelines for best practice in small scale food production and quality control.

ADEPT is promoting market-led solutions in Transylvania for the delivery of local products. Creating demand and developing supply chains is key for sustainable development.

SCF EUROPEAN CONFERENCE

Bull scheme review

THOSE THAT attended the SCF gathering in Barra last year would have come away with the impression that the Crofters' Cattle Improvement Scheme, generally known as the bull scheme, was beyond saving.

The then minister, Michael Russell, appeared finally to close the door on the scheme that has served crofters well for many decades, but with the assurance that alternative, unspecified, arrangements would be made. As we now know, however, that was not the end of the matter.

Lobbying behind the scenes continued, an on-line petition was set up, and Norman Leask, our parliamentary spokesman, worked the corridors and tea rooms of Holyrood in his inimitable way. In one of his final acts before the ministerial reshuffle, and with no alternative arrangements in sight, Mr Russell announced that he was leaving the door open on the bull scheme. There was to be a review of the scheme and of future provision carried out by a powerful committee of experts under rural consultant and former Crofters Commissioner, Sarah Allen.

The review group has consulted extensively throughout the crofting counties, and we were fortunate to have Ms Allen give a presentation on her findings to date at the gathering at Grantown. Ms Allen first outlined the purpose of the review, which is: to investigate practical options to encourage crofters to work together to keep high health quality cattle; to identify who needs a scheme; to define what should it achieve; to consider how support should be structured and targeted; and to recommend practical and best value options to ministers by November.

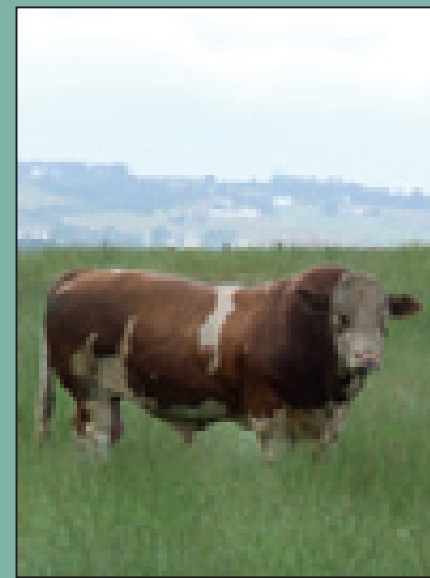
The objectives of the current scheme are: through support for livestock improvement measures, to retain livestock in remote areas in order to maintain and enhance the environmental benefits associated with undertaking grazing by cattle on natural pastures as well as to promote collaborative working in crofting communities; thereby helping to maintain population in these remote areas.

The greatest use of the scheme is made in the Western Isles and Skye, Ms Allen reported, and the vast majority of bulls are hired by crofters with fewer than twenty cows. The number of bulls hired has almost halved since 2003. The most highly valued aspects of the scheme for participants are the high level of health monitoring and the facility to return bulls for wintering. Total cost to the government is £400,000 a year, which includes replenishing the stud, overwintering costs, bull health programme and all stud farm and scheme management. Government accounting rules do not allow any sundry income to go back into the scheme and the facilities at the stud farms are in need of investment.

Turning to the question of state aids, Ms Allen said that the scheme was not in breach of EU rules. The average cost to a

group of crofters is £800 and the subsidy is a maximum of £3,400 per crofter over three years, which is permissible under *de minimis* rules. The review committee is examining a number of options ranging from no scheme at all, through AI schemes, purchase grants and private hire, to investment in the existing facilities or a decentralised service run by crofters.

At the time of writing the report of the review group is awaited. Sarah Allen and her committee are to be congratulated on the thoroughness of their work. They have certainly been left in no doubt about the importance of the scheme to the continuation of cattle rearing in some of the most remote and fragile areas. There has been considerable interest shown in some quarters in a crofting community-type buyout of the stud farms, which would allow the scheme to operate commercially, could employ the bulls in the winter and could extend the service outwith the crofting counties.



equipment. For most meat producers, selling through a producer group is a more practical option, for example the Lewis and Harris Sheep Producers' contract with the Co-op in Stornoway.

SCF's Crofting Resources Programme is committed to assisting innovative crofter producers and producer groups with their marketing efforts and welcomes enquiries by phone to SCF Head Office 01599 566365 or email donald@crofting.org.



Crofters' produce promoted outside the Co-op supermarket in Stornoway

Direct marketing options for crofters

ALTHOUGH STORE livestock accounts for the vast majority of output from crofts, and will continue to do so, an ever increasing number of crofters are becoming involved in direct marketing of their produce," said Donald Murdie, project co-ordinator for SCF's Crofting Resources Programme in a presentation to the gathering at Grantown.

Scottish government food policy now sees a stronger role for small-scale local producers and market research indicates that, despite the recession, demand for quality, local and niche food products continues to grow. The exception is in the organic sector where demand is down, due in part to negative, possibly malicious, media coverage. Demand for fresh produce in most parts of the Highlands and Islands continues to exceed supply.

Direct marketing will inevitably appeal to a minority of crofters, especially as long as store livestock prices continue to improve, but for those who go down that route, there is no shortage of opportunities. Farmers' markets now take place throughout the crofting counties. One such has recently started up in the car park of Tesco in the Inverness Retail Park!

Box schemes, where customers are supplied with a weekly box of produce, usually vegetables, are another direct selling method. Farm shop or farm gate sales are also a possibility. This need not involve big investment – a simple honesty box can be sufficient for eggs or vegetables, for example. Hotels and restaurants, especially those at the quality end of the market, are usually keen to have local produce on the menu and innovative chefs are often happy to deal with short-season produce and even one-off deliveries. Internet selling is another option, especially for producers of meat, smoked products and other high-value items.

In the meat sector, direct selling is particularly relevant to breeders of slow-maturing native breeds that are not much favoured in the store sale ring, but direct meat sales can involve substantial investment in such facilities as chill rooms, premises for butchering and vacuum packing, refrigerated transport and point of sale

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SAC Consulting provides leading edge, independent and impartial advice throughout the crofting counties. Our consultants combine local knowledge with extensive experience and are supported by our teams of renowned specialists.

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Crofting is a vital element in the economic, environmental, social and cultural structure of our rural communities.

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Bord na Gaidhlig Award

The newspaper of the land, the language, the people

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 café.

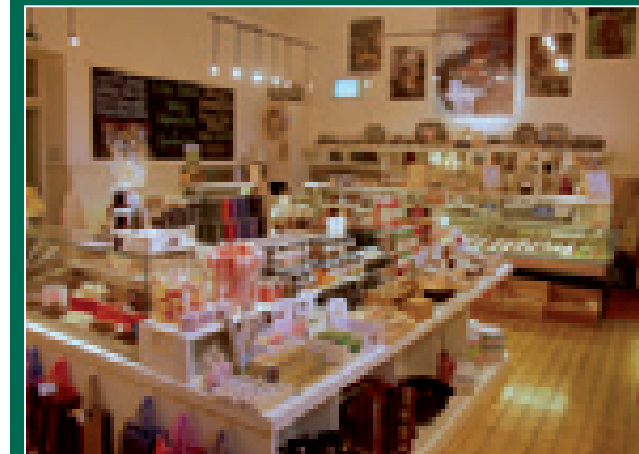
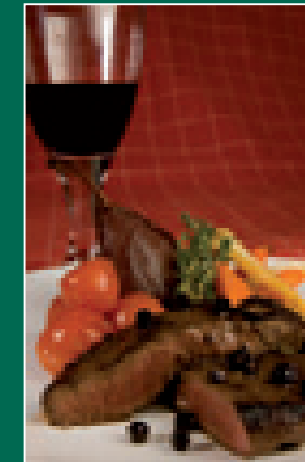
The farm shop was established in 1985, selling both fresh and smoked trout caught on the estate. Gradually the product range extended due to consumer demand for more local products, to include venison and beef. Other products now on sale range from chutneys and jams to chocolate truffles and honey, all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



A cheese press in the wall of the old croft house

Inchdryne croft

DELEGATES ENJOYED a visit to Marina Dennis' croft at Inchdryne (once the bus driver found it!), in the hills above Nethy Bridge.

Her family have been on the croft for 200 years, having been cleared from the parish of Cromdale in Morayshire to the parish of Abernethy in Inverness shire, which was a fortunate move considering where the boundaries were drawn in 1886. Inchdryne lies at 850 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 a different common grazing of 278 ha. The stock carried is 10 Shorthorn/Aberdeen Angus Xs running with an Aberdeen Angus bull (owned) and a flock of 70 hill blackface sheep. All winter feed is made at home.

Marina showed us green fields of longish grass that to crofters from the harsh west coast and islands looked luxurious. However, the reality of deep

snow and temperatures of -25° in the winter (and once -30C), necessitating a snow-plough attachment for the tractor, gave a different perspective.

The focus of the visit was croft tourism. Marina rents out the old croft house, a traditional building, plus a newer eco-house. The eco-house is an environmentally sensitive wooden building with an open plan layout and extensive glazed areas to make the most of the beautiful wooded setting. Using Highland-sourced materials and skills, the building is highly insulated, airtight and healthy using only natural materials and finishes. This diversification makes an important contribution to the croft income.

Delegates found the contrast between crofting in the Cairngorms and their own holdings fascinating. For Mikela from Finland and Jose from Portugal it was a real eye-opener on crofting and its challenges, though probably less strange to Mikela than to Jose.

SCF EUROPEAN CONFERENCE

Recipe for success – Scotland's national food and drink policy

UNTIL RECENTLY, UK food policy was basically that free trade and global markets would keep Britain supplied with food come what may. Self-sufficiency had dropped to 50% of consumption, but that was not seen as a problem.

It was against this background that consultation on Scotland's first national food policy, under the banner Choosing the Right Ingredients, began early in 2008. Scottish Crofting Federation was a contributor to the policy discussion. The result of that process is Scotland's National Food and Drink Policy – Recipe for Success. Alistair Prior from the Scottish government's food and drink industry division came to the gathering at Grantown to present the policy, whose aim is to promote Scotland's sustainable economic growth by ensuring that the Scottish government's focus in relation to food and drink addresses quality, health and wellbeing and environmental sustainability, recognising the need for access and affordability.

Alistair described the process whereby the policy had been arrived at. Following the consultation process, a leadership forum of experts and academics met during 2008/9 and identified the challenges – supporting the food and drink industry; meeting the health and diet-related disease challenge; making environmental efficiency work; and delivering economic, community and society and environmental sustainability. Their work formed the framework of the national food policy:

- supporting the growth of our food and drink industry;
- healthier, sustainable choices;
- building on our reputation as a land of food and drink;
- sustainable food procurement in the public sector;
- secure and resilient food systems;
- ensuring food is available and affordable to all;
- food education: learning about our food from plough to plate;
- underpins our future work through research;
- proposes monitoring and

scrutiny of policy delivery.

Alistair outlined how these objectives would be achieved. Working with the industry on sustainable economic growth, skills development and innovation with health, environment, food safety, carbon reduction integral to policy delivery.

The policy will build upon Scotland's excellent reputation for food and drink, through better consumer knowledge of what Scotland has to offer in areas such as provenance and quality. It is anticipated that local producers will reap the rewards through efforts to enhance the visitor experiences in tourism destinations and through work on easing access to public sector procurement contracts for SMEs.

Alistair pointed out the need to address Scotland's poor record on dietary health and on availability and affordability of healthy food. Grow your own will be promoted, with greater priority given to food education in schools.

What is the relevance of this to crofters? We are already contributing to Scottish government policy goals in a

number of ways. Crofters' store and breeding sheep and cattle are well recognised for their quality, hardiness and health status and are an important supply to the mainstream industry. We are in a position to supply fresh, healthy food in some of the country's most remote areas. This is a great opportunity for crofters to assert themselves in the local food economy and make a real difference to what we eat in our homes and hotels.

And why? Crofting practices maintain some of our most valued landscapes and habitats, fitting with and adding to the food tourism experience. Crofters supply trade-marked regional specialities such as Shetland lamb. Crofters and SCF are already involved in education projects on food and environment, such as at Sgoil Lionacleite in the Western Isles and through the inspirational Crofting Connections project.

So we should welcome Recipe for Success. It can only be good for crofting and we look forward to playing our part in its delivery.

The Cairngorms – a park for all

SPeAKING at the gathering, David Green, convenor of the Cairngorm National Park, described the land as a park for all.

Small farmers were key components in the park, their agricultural methods contributing to low carbon management. The park authority was committed to encouraging the promotion of local produce and to assisting with marketing costs.

Cairngorm National Park is involved in Food for Life and Crofting Connections and employs two land managers/support officers to help make the most of the park's

resources. There is a farmers' forum where farmers and crofters come together for mutual benefit.

The areas is soon to come under crofting legislation.

At a question and answer session Mr Green admitted that the Cairngorm National Park had had not responded to the Scottish government's present consultation process on the draft Crofting Reform Bill.

He said: "We didn't actually respond to the consultation process. There were a lot of consultation processes ongoing at that time and we couldn't respond to all of them. We have to be selective about which

consultations we respond to."

He added: "As a non-departmental public body we are working closely with government and so it is not always appropriate to respond to a consultation."

Marina Dennis, SCF vice chair



David Green

and Crofters Commission assessor, who crofts near Nethy Bridge in the national park, said: "As a crofter living in the park I find it disappointing that the park chose not to convey the views of the national park authority to government given that they were aware of crofters' views."

I don't understand why David said that it wasn't appropriate for the national park to participate in the consultation process just because they are working closely with government.

"He had just been emphasising how they are seeking to promote the cultural and environmental diversity of the landscape within the park and the centrality of crofters and small farmers to that. This is the park's vision. Had they responded to the consultation it would have been an opportunity to articulate that vision."

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The Crofting Environment Improvement Association's Blackland Project

Mary Norton reports

A GROUP OF North Uist crofters have come together to discover what could be done to improve their blackland crofts.

Blackland refers to the wet, peaty, acidic soils that are characteristic of much of the west of Scotland. At one time, up until perhaps the 1960s, these were productive, populated areas, where generations of crofters raised livestock, fodder, and families. Small fields produced hay, corn, barley, potatoes, kale and other crops, as well as the famous biodiversity of traditional crofting agriculture. Blackland requires continual attention to drainage and fertility if it is to remain productive. It was back-breaking work, but this was before electricity, roads, telephone, mechanised equipment or silage reached the crofting areas. Modernisation elsewhere and smaller families caused people to leave the blacklands, and they were gradually abandoned. Today, many such crofts are waterlogged, full of rushes in parts and over-grazed in the drier areas. Most people keeping stock on them buy in a large proportion of feed, which is not only expensive but has bio-security risks.

The Crofting Environment Improvement Association (CEIA) was formed to try to find some answers. CEIA members' crofts include 78 ha of blackland in four townships of North

Uist. With the goal of growing more of their own feed and making better use of their land, they began the Blackland Project. The project aims to develop a body of useful, practical information through a combination of science, traditional knowledge and action; and to share it as widely as possible.

In the summer of 2009, three scientists from the Macaulay Land Use Research Institute kindly gave time and energy to begin the Blackland Project, visiting North Uist for several days each, walking the crofts and giving talks to interested crofters. The work of the Macaulay is aimed at evaluating the effects of agriculture and other land management on the environment. Biodiversity – key to sustainability in land use – is one way of measuring this. It is well-known that there has been a steep decline in species and habitat in Britain since WWII, which correlates with the intensification of agriculture – if you



use too much fertiliser and manage the land too hard, you lose species. Interestingly, this also happens through under-use of land. Very high productivity reduces biodiversity, but very low productivity also produces less species richness. The greatest diversity occurs in the middle of the range. Moderate management – such as traditional crofting – produces the best results.

Soils research at the Macaulay looks at the interaction of soils and crops and how trace elements and soil organisms contribute to maintaining fertility.

ESAs were intended to increase biodiversity through management changes. Surprisingly, reduction in grazing did not necessarily produce species-richness, but in fact sometimes reduced it.

The Blackland Project is being taken forward by CEIA in cooperation with the charitable trust Talamh which is establishing a study centre on Grimsay, North Uist, on a large, diverse, formerly productive but neglected croft. Its purpose is not only to improve the CEIA crofts, but eventually to be useful to other crofters seeking to recover the lost productivity of blackland. Further, as national attention turns to carbon footprint and overuse of petro-chemicals, blackland can join in producing high-quality foodstuffs – whether meat, dairy or vegetable – much nearer home.

CEIA, 5 Scotvein, Grimsay, North Uist HS6 5HY 01870-602954

CROFTING HERO

AGNES LEASK from Cott, in Weisdale, Shetland, is a passionate advocate of all that is best in Shetland crofting.

She is not only devoted to its cause, but also acts as a precious living archive with facts and figures, past and present, delivered effortlessly in her concise and colourful native tongue.

She will discuss the unimaginable harshness of the crofting existence under the grasping tyranny of 17th-19th century lairds, succeeded by the continued struggle for survival, even after the 1886 Crofting Act created a degree of security for crofting families. Agnes was reluctant to observe that during these uncertain times the dependence on their kye was such that the loss of a coo was actually far more of a general family tragedy than the loss of a child because they provided the vital nutrition plus associated by-products.

Dependent upon income from a good fishing season or other sources, if spare cash was available to pay the rent the calf would be kept on through the winter, but otherwise sold at the autumn roup along with any unproductive kye. Exchanges were bonded by word, even though a better offer might have subsequently been



received, and new ownership was frequently marked on the spot either by clipping the new owner's initial into the coat or the more sophisticated etching of the horns.

In the late 1930s her father and a neighbour earned a small wage by "dregin yoags" (dredging horse mussels) which were used for baiting lines for fishing in the Burra Haaf (fishing grounds). These boats came from Burra once a week to collect and pay for the yoags. This right to access the voe was established in udal law, a topic in itself with regard to crofting practice.

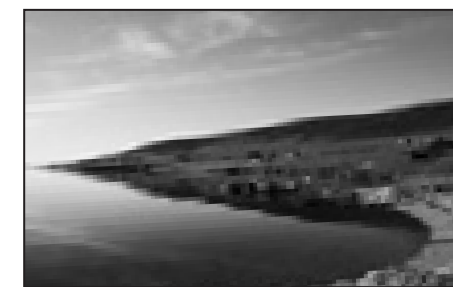
Agnes has had a long association with the SCU and SCF, having served as the SCU Shetland area president for a number of years and travelling frequently off the islands for meetings, always by boat. She is presently joint president of the Shetland area along with

Peter Dodge. Agnes, over the many years of involvement, has helped all who have needed her and is still doing so. Her role as assessor has led her many places as she vigorously tried to solve the problems put before her.

Agnes' hobby is her dogs. Not only does she train the dogs but helps others to realise their hope of having a dog that can caa sheep. Her training is done on her flock of traditionally-coloured Shetland sheep among which she has horned ewes and four horned rams. She believes that there are very few stupid dogs, just trainers who can't put it across. She shows her dogs every year and is definitely the competitor who everyone wants to beat.

Agnes says: "After the impact of 60 years of post-war changes, crofting as a way of life has evolved into an imperative juggling of subsidies, as food production has been transformed from a family enterprise into a marketable commodity. Crofting will continue, but less red tape, less paperwork and a bigger concentration on production for the local consumption will ensure its continuation for the foreseeable future."

You can "hear" Agnes speak in her native tongue on page 21.



Looking south from sound, Weisdale

Irene Gray

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SCF EUROPEAN CONFERENCE

The launch of Crofting Connections

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 Grantown in September 2009. Our four 'ambassador' head teachers from the pilot project Planting to Plate, joined by Margaret Bennett, patron of Crofting Connections, and Steve Carter from Lionacleit High School in Benbecula, addressed the gathering of crofters. Each described 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.

Through interdisciplinary activities of this kind, young people can develop their organisational skills, creativity, teamwork and the ability to apply their learning in new and challenging contexts.

A Curriculum for Excellence: Progress and Proposals

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 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 nature 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 provide food, shelter, energy and clothing for the family and the local community.

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 taste – people are looking for a return to the distinctive local flavours from traditional food, such as Shetland and North Ronaldsay mutton, beremeal bannocks, heritage tatties, hand-made cheese and honey from heather and machair, as reflected in the launch of the SCF Crofting Produce Mark;

- re-localising solutions – with the establishment of local community groups and development trusts seeking more local and ecological solutions to the provision of food, housing and energy.

Schools in each area will be supported by a local group with expertise in education, crofting, community building, cultural heritage and the natural environment.

The collective outcome of the project over three years will be a varied and complex picture of crofting past, present and future throughout the Highlands and Islands from the point of view of the younger generation in over fifty communities. It will be presented through harvest feasts and written work, video and audio recordings, film and drama, painting and photography, powerpoint presentations and a project website, in a celebration of the talent and enthusiasm of these young people.

The legacy of the project will be an informed younger generation which will contribute to shaping a vibrant and resilient future for these crofting communities appropriate to the needs of the 21st century.

"Our vision is of growing, prosperous, inclusive and sustainable crofting communities which enjoy the capacity and the power to develop their own strategic plans and to pursue these with vigour subject to legitimate national interests. Crofters will be flexible and adaptable to change, building on their heritage to seize new opportunities, but essentially forward looking."

Committee of Inquiry on Crofting, final report, 2008

Pam Rodway, project co-ordinator



SCF EUROPEAN CONFERENCE

The crofting connection

ONE OF THE highlights of the Dingwall gathering a couple of years ago was the enthusiasm and satisfaction of school children who participated in Planting to Plate.

A good many of us could look back on schooldays when the boys got gardening (while the girls sewed garments nobody dared wear) and it occurred to me that the main lesson learned was that the schoolmaster had the best-kept garden in the community. He alone tasted the harvest and the main satisfaction for the boys was escaping their school desks for an hour. Fortunately our crofting connections made sure we could still enjoy the unforgettable taste of new potatoes we had helped to plant, hoe and lift.

Back then, we took for granted the traditions of our own people

– the year-round planting and harvesting, the oral traditions of song, music and storytelling, not to mention the healthy approach to nutrition that was our way of life. The words 'organic' and 'additives' hadn't yet been invented and there were no discussions on avoidance of waste. It's no use, however, just to look back with nostalgia while the world around us tries to wrap everything we eat in plastic and make us talk to each other via computers. Something has to happen to give our young people a more hopeful way of becoming healthier and more responsible adults.

The Planting to Plate pilot project opened up a world of opportunity for school children to develop a way of life that will be infinitely healthier for future

generations. I was privileged to join a discussion with a group of teachers from six schools taking part in the pilot and it was utterly inspiring to discover their total commitment and the sheer joy reflected as each gave a report of their involvement.

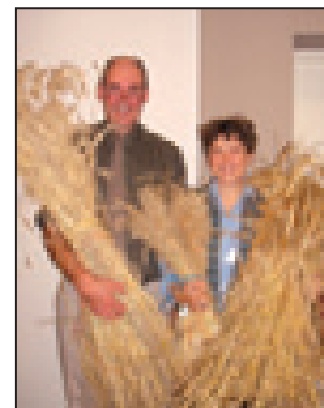
Such imagination and creativity, with photos and films of youngsters preparing ground, discussing their plans, planting and tending their crops with a sense of care and anticipation of a harvest that would not simply feed them for a day but could be shared among many. Best of all, there was a real sense that this immensely enjoyable project offered the key to a way of life that could make a real difference in a world that threatens their generation with diabetes and obesity.

I can smile now as I look back

on school days where nobody ever discovered what happened to that bean sprouting behind a piece of blotting paper in a beaker – one of those science teachers told me that they were all thrown in the bin! Well, at least we know. But best of all, Crofting Connections gives some assurance that today's children can enjoy the most important lessons of their school days in a project that gives them the satisfaction of growing food that does not cheat them of the good health and nutrition. At the same time, they can also enjoy surrounding traditions of songs, stories, tunes and dances that are all part of that way of life. We can be truly proud of the team who laid the groundwork and delivered the Crofting Connections project.

Margaret Bennett

Crofting Connections patron



Margaret Bennett (3rd left) and Pam Rodway (2nd right) with a group of teachers and Maria Scholten, researcher



Angus MacRae memorial debate

THE THIRD debate in memory of the late Angus MacRae MBE took place on 28th September at the SCF gathering at Grantown on Spey. These debates have been a lively and welcome part of the conference program since their inception in 2007.

The motion on this occasion was: "This house believes small farmers are the backbone of rural development."

For the motion was Paul Nicholson of Via Campesina Europa, a staunch defender of family farming. Paul let it be known to a few before the debate that not only had he not participated in debating before but that it was something that was entirely unfamiliar to him. His surname may have originated on the Isle of Lewis many years ago but he is from the Basque country and debating, it seems, is not a popular pastime there.

Undaunted Paul set out his case for the motion with clarity and vision. Small farmers are the solution not the problem. It is better to have 30 small crofters than one big farmer. There is greater social equity and through tradition and culture they have the knowledge 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 percent of the world population are small farmers.

Maitland Mackie CBE of Mackie's of Scotland opposed the motion. He may have been invited into the 'lion's den' but he was not prepared to accept the motion as it stood. The scope of rural development was wider than agriculture and, as commonly defined, agriculture was no longer the dominant part of the rural economy. But even within

agriculture it had to be modern, well capitalised and capable of providing a high standard of living. Small-scale production did not provide that, he argued, and ably supported his case with contrasting figures for large and small scale farming.

The chair, professor Ken Thomson, opened the debate to spirited interventions from the floor which, as one might expect, were in the main to support the motion. Maitland lost to Paul by 15 votes to 30 with a few abstentions.

Thanks go to them both for a stimulating and entertaining evening and for taking time to prepare their respective cases.

This was the last in the series of three Angus MacRae memorial debates. They have been regarded as an excellent tribute to a man who, as its president, took the Scottish Crofters Union on a steady course to provide a sure foundation for those of us who had

the privilege to succeed him. The high standard of debate provided by the participants and directed from the chair on each occasion has been greatly appreciated.

Angus was distinguished by his courteous manner, a hallmark that shaped the character of the crofting body he represented and gained it enormous respect. Whether in discussion or negotiation he was firm in stating his position but listened carefully and respectfully to the views of others.

His polite and often quick-witted responses were one of his defining and memorable qualities. It is fitting therefore that we should have chosen to hold in his memory these three debates and to commemorate his contribution to the life of the Scottish Crofters Union and its successor the Scottish Crofting Federation in this way.

SCF EUROPEAN CONFERENCE

The European charter for mountain quality food products

Frank Gaskell of Euromontana gave a presentation on this charter, which was launched in December 2005 and currently has 69 signatories from 12 countries and three governments – the culmination of six years of European Commission-funded work by Euromontana.

THE REQUIREMENTS of mountain quality food products (MQFP) are:

- raw materials from a mountain region;
- processing in a mountain region;
- production to respect sustainable development;
- production to maintain the biodiversity and heritage of mountain regions;
- producers able to guarantee at all times the transparency of information to consumers.

Funded by the 6th Framework R&D Programme, the aim was to test the perception of European consumers and retailers of mountain quality food products to identify strategies to enhance the value of these products. The exercise had been provoked by the prevalence of misrepresentation of industrial farmed and other food products as 'mountain' in continental supermarket chains.

The results of a comprehensive three-year study show that consumers have an idealistic view of mountains but nevertheless make serious demands in terms of hygiene and safety.

The study also reminds us that there is a local market among local people to exploit as well as a tourist market – in other words local quality products can keep wealth from leaking out of the community as well as attracting revenue into the area.

MQFP (with exceptions) can be sold at a premium, but some prices must remain low according to the type of client. Improvements would be gained by more collaboration between producers, to reduce the costs and to ensure the supply.

However, those who challenged the notion of mountain products having the capacity to attract premium prices included Scottish responders. This is thought to be for two reasons – they did not relate mountain products to Highland products; and those who did felt that to sell to the local mountain population, who are typically of modest income, local products had to retain a low price.

In France, mountain cheese can be cheaper than cheese from other topography because of the typical weakness of individual mountain producers and the strength of the supermarkets with whom they must deal.

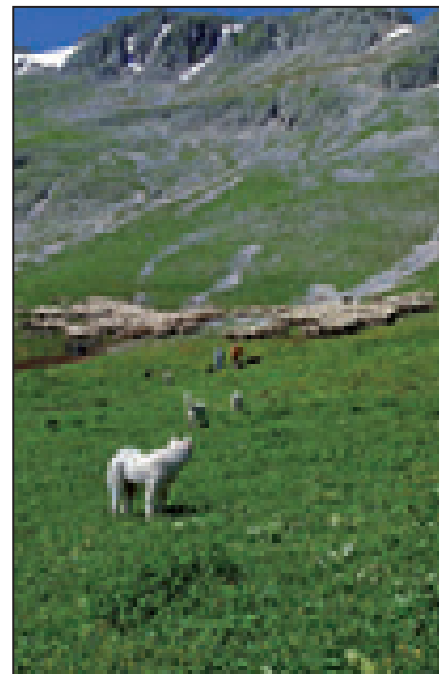
Although producers can reduce costs and ensure supply by banding together, they must nevertheless remain as individual production units because production rationalisation can destroy the cachet of local authenticity. Collaboration not rationalisation is required.

In the production chain, the balance is

between the importance of mountain origin for the producers/processors versus the importance of local origin for the distributors, between small-scale production and the guarantee of quality. A label would only survive if it is well defined, with permanent criteria to confer value on quality.

According to analysis, the idea of an MQFP label arouses interest but its content is not seen in the same way by all. We must give clear European definitions to key marketing terms such as 'mountain', 'farm product', 'local' and 'regional'. We must also develop European guides for regional labels and use regional labels and systems linked to sustainable production (national parks, biosphere reserves, organic label ...)

The issue of a mountain designation had been recognised in the Commission's green paper on quality products published in October 2008 and was followed up more specifically in the Commission's subsequent communication on quality labeling which introduced the prospect of mountain products being allocated a reserved term in just the same way that the terms 'barn' or 'free range' are defined and protected for eggs



and likewise 'virgin' and 'extra virgin' for olive oil. This was not quite as comprehensive as a specific mountain quality label which remains Euromontana's long-term aim, but the reserved term route had the advantage of clarity and reasonable simplicity for the consumer. However, whether the final solution is a reserved term or a specific label the need to designate geographically the extent of the mountain area benefiting remains.

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 little 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.

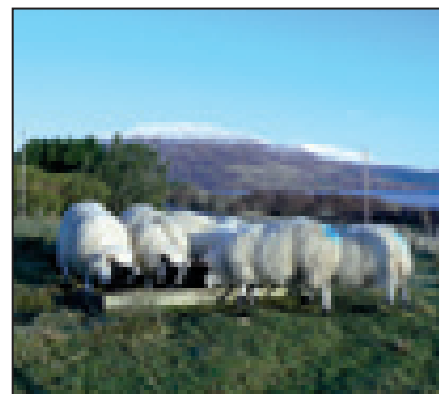
It is also open to the Scottish administration to identify Scotland's islands as areas of specific handicap under Art 20 of the LFA regulation as has been done most notably by Denmark and Estonia ... and by Whitehall in respect of the Scilly Isles subject to the limitation that Art 20 designation cannot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

The next steps

A mountain term needs to be simple to put in place, with limited costs and protection against the fraudulent use of the term 'mountain', with transparency for the consumer.

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.



Claire Nicolson

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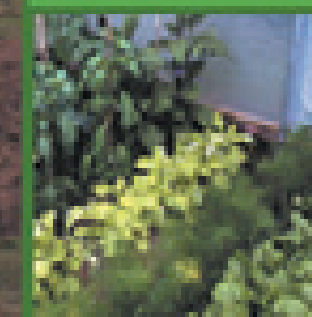
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Pàigheadh airson geòidh a reamhrachadh

THA GEÒIDH air a bhi ri miasdadh anns na h-eileanan air taobh an iar Alba airson moran bhliadhnachan. Tha iad a' saltairt feur agus fochann agus a' salach an talamh los nach ith beathaichean am beagan a bhios air fhàgail.

Tha e coltach gu bheil cùisean mar an ceudna anns an h-eileanan anns a' cheann a-tuath. Ann an Arcaibh, thairis air an deich bliadhna mu dheireadh, tha àireamh nan eun air eirigh gu cunnartach Tha feadhainn de na geòidh a'fuireach fad na bliadhna agus tha barrachd is barrachd a bhiodh ri imrich cuain a stad agus a' fantail, nuair a chì iad an càirdean a tha air an dachaidh a dheanamh anns na h-eileanan

.B'abhaist dhaibh, nuair a thigeadh iad, aig toiseach an fhoghair, cron a dheanamh air an arbhar. Sgiolaidh ealtainn dhiubh iomaire de choirce neo de eòrna ann an tiotan.agus le an spògan- snàmhaidh, pronnaidh iad an talamh agus gach nì a tha a'fàs air.

An dràsta tha uiread dhiubh ann fad na bliadhna agus gu bheil iad ag ithe feur òg a dh'fhàsas anns an Earrach agus air am bu chòir crodh agus caoraich a bhith ag ionaltadh anns an t-samhradh.Thuirt Adrian Miller a tha ri àiteachas ann an Stronsaidh, "Tha e a' cur dragh agus àmhghar oirn nuair a phàigheas sinn suas ri coig cheud nota son tunna de thodhar Gallda a chuireas am feur òg gu fàs ach

ann am beagan mhionaidean thig treud de dh'geòidh agus cha bhi bileag air fhàgail. Am beagan a dh'fhàsas anns an fhoghar cha bhi e ach truagh, tana agus an sin nì iad diol air a-rithist. Is e gnothach gu math tàmailteach a tha ann a bhith a'cur a-mach airgiod airson geòidh a reamhrachadh, an àite crodh agus caoraich".Tha Domhnall Tormod Domhnallach, a Clachan Shannda an Uibhist a-Tuath ag aithris gur ann mar sin a tha cùisean anns na h-Eileannan an Iar. Thuirt e, "Tha sinne a'pàigheadh airson eòin a' reamhrachadh."

Tha treud dhiubh, anns a bheil e air amas a tha eadar coig agus sia ceud, a-nis a' fuireach fad na bliadhna, air eilean Stronsaidh.

Anns an Earrach chithear brat tiugh de na h-eòin oga air an locha agus iad a' toiseachadh air snàmh.

Thar nam bliadhnachan tha e ri fhaicinn mar a tha na geòidh ag atharrachadh.oir tha iad a-sior fhàs soitheamh agus a' gluasad nas fhaisge air taighean agus air daoine Chan fhada a bhios eagal aca ro neach sam bith agus.chaneil e furasta an cur gu teicheadh. Bhiodh na bodaich ag ràdh gun ith sia geòidh uiread de dh'fheur ri gamhainn.. Ma chumas iad air briodachadh anns na h-eileanan chan fhada gus nach bi gamhainn air fhàgail ann an Uibhist neo ann an Arcaibh.

Tormod Domhnallach

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 solution — it would make only a marginal difference to greenhouse gas emissions (GHGs).

We face the global challenge of feeding a growing world population using a fixed land resource while reducing inputs such as water, fertiliser and fuel and limiting greenhouse gases. Meat is part of that balance.

All agriculture depends on the land resource and climate conditions prevailing at the time to be successful. About 60 per cent of UK farmland is best suited to growing grass. Ploughing grassland to grow crops would result in loss of carbon sequestered in soil. Grazing animals — cows or sheep — are the best way to use this land resource to produce a food suitable for people. This is repeated worldwide, where there are large tracts of marginal land that are best used to support grassland and livestock production. If we did away with all livestock we could not utilise this for resource-use efficient food production.

A significant proportion of animal diets are also made from co-products produced during the manufacture of human plant foods. Maize and rapeseed meal are co-products of oil production, citrus pulp is a co-product of juice production and sugar-beet feed is a co-product of sugar production

— all the products would be waste if they were not used as animal feeds. Livestock makes use of a resource that could not otherwise contribute to the human food supply.

The challenge is to produce meat more sustainably — which is already happening in countries such as the UK, which is leading global thinking in this area. High-quality research has led to great strides in the improvement of productivity of farmed livestock and one consequence of this is a reduction in GHG per kg of meat produced. That work continues. Genetic selection of animals that produce less methane is starting to happen and selection methods are improving as molecular genetic techniques are applied. Improving grass and clover varieties through genetic selection makes them a feed for ruminants that has a lower GHG cost of production. Simple things like managing grass height at the time of grazing can improve feed quality and so reduce the GHG cost of a kg of milk or meat.

Livestock and meat production has an important role in feeding the world in the decades ahead; it is not logical to suggest otherwise. Lord Stern's main point, and I agree with him, is that we all need to reassess the way we live our lives.

*Professor Ian Crute
Chief Scientist, Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board*

This letter first appeared in The Times

2010 SCF crofting induction courses

ARE YOU interested in running and organising a crofting induction course in your area?

It's that time of year again when SCF HQ is looking for people to organise and run its highly successful and popular induction courses, especially (but not necessarily) in those areas where courses have not previously been delivered. Funding is presently being sought for six to eight courses to take place in the coming winter months at various locations throughout the Highlands and Islands and it is necessary first of all to identify suitable people who can be contracted, under short-term contracts, for this work.

Candidates will need to devote some three hours per week over a period of about 16 weeks during late December to May to organising and running these courses and there is an opportunity for extra hours, and payment, to facilitate

the courses. We are looking for self-employed, motivated people with a track record of office administration skills and who have access to office facilities, telephone and computer with internet connection. If you feel that this position might suit you then contact Calina MacDonald, training co-ordinator, by phone — 01478 640276 — or email calina@cgmeynort.fsbusiness.co.uk for further details.

Once funding has been secured, successful candidates will be informed without delay and contracts completed. The 2010 round of crofting induction courses will be in their twelfth year since inception and these courses have already led to hundreds of students successfully completing this fundamental but very important introduction to crofting.

With your help we can keep this going for many years to come.

Seaweed study

CROFTER 73 described a research project being undertaken to investigate concerns raised about the presence of radioactivity in seaweed being used as fertiliser or as an animal feed.

The Health Protection Agency with joint funding from the Food Standards Agency and the Scottish Environment Protection Agency has now finished the study and

has assessed the potential radiation exposures.

The results of the study give no cause for concern. The report can be downloaded from the HPA web site (<http://www.hpa.org.uk/HPA/Publications/Radiation/HPARPDSeriesReports>).

A fuller article will be available in the next issue of the Crofter

A Pictorial Daander Trowe Shetland's Crofting Culture

Evelyn Leask explains hoo it cam about

ELEANOR ARTHUR, Clare Abernethy, Sheena Anderson and myself were instructed to investigate and proceed with the possibility of putting together a booklet to celebrate the centenary of the Shetland Cattle Herd Book Society (SCHBS).

Eleanor (one of the directors of SCF) was elected project leader. Clare and I set about seeing how we could raise funding to launch this project. Our template was the 2008 Shetland pony stud book magazine — a soft-bound, A4, 178-page journal. After many hours of totally mind-blowing form filling followed by a long wait, we went into hysterics when the letter arrived from the lottery offering us the much-needed incentive and a completion date.

365 days is not a long time. Clare organised a group meeting for more ideas and to gather photographs — but much more

importantly to inform everyone that each member needed to donate some kopek for working capital. Cheques came thick and fast. Thank you.

We advertised in Landwise in the *Shetland Times* for photographs. The response was not too good so we just asked people personally for their help and explained the end result. Photos being Sheena's particular forte, she arrived with images galore from herself and others. Speaking of photos, we commissioned Irene Gray and Jane Johnson with specific tasks which they carried out magnificently.

All the mundane typing and scanning finished, we set about merging images with articles to produce completed features. These items were sent to Shetland Litho who were extremely patient and helpful. Whilst we had been unsure in the first instance how we would be able to fill 178 pages, we now had material filling 232 pages. Our initial expectations

were far exceeded with a foreword by Prince Charles being the icing on the cake.

Title and cover needed a lot of thought so I sent Eleanor off to work with the former while I put together six templates. One Saturday I got Kaila and Tori (my Saturday girls at Anderson and Co) to survey 50 customers. The result was overwhelming. Litho tweaked it and now you see it.

Agnes Leask (a dedicated-to-crofting SCF member, whom many of you will know) came along and I gave her a book to look at. This is her comments: "Weel Evelyn it is really good to see da book, an whit a beautiful book it is. Whin I saa da price ida paper I windered whit kind o book it wid be, but I never dreamt it wis gainn to be as gòod as dis. Really gòod value. Photos ir most amazing — baith auld an new — an whit a quantity o dem."

Then Rhoda added: "I doot money còodna buy whit in

yunder."

I have thoroughly enjoyed all that has been involved with this book, the best bits being meeting the folk and opening envelopes and boxes and finding such magnificent material for the book.

I personally wish to say a special thank you to all of you who have taken the time to phone, find, deliver or come along the shop and a special thank you to the 'A team' (the staff at Anderson and Co) who have had to endure it all.

The Shetland Cattle from Shetland Breeders Group are organising a four-day celebration (11th to 14th August, 2010) and if anyone reading this is interested please e-mail Clare at fogrigarth@yahoo.co.uk or telephone me on 01595683714 for itinerary and costs.

The book is available by using the above contacts and the cost is 25 including first class postage.

The Shetland cow — a breed from the past with a place in the future

*A review by
McIntosh, C
Ecology*

THIS BC with its foreword by that wise farmer and good friend of crofting, Prince Charles, is a compilation of articles and stunning photographs that celebrate the Shetland cow as the keystone in the islands' agrarian culture.

As well as documenting the history and role of a rare breed, the book also carries articles — both in standard English and in glorious Shetland dialect — on the keepers of the cow, their social interactions including music and art, their traditional housing with its integral byre and crop production including turnips, oats, kael and bere — the ancient barley.

What distinguishes Shetland cattle is their small stature, their supreme utility for both beef and milk production, and their historically evolved adaptation to a demanding environment where crofting has been the mainstay of subsistence.

The cow's small statue makes for easy handling. This is useful, for example, when you want to put them out for grazing on tiny islands. At first it would be necessary when doing this to pull them by a halter until, when out of their depth, they'd start to swim.

But once the cows had learned what good grass they were being taken to, they'd swim fast. And in time, some would even swim by themselves, no longer needing any halter to heft them to their summer holiday homes.

This book presents the work of a great diversity of authors, both past and present. The gold thread that links them all is the sheer love that these people clearly had, and still have, for their breed of cow in the past this was fed in with sheer survival. The cow was second in importance only to the people. Today, people still describe their cows as being a part of the family, even though survival is not the main motivation for having them.

In article after article in this book it is clear that the primary motivation of the breeders is not economic exploitation, but values deeper than that. Indeed, the economics are challenging because there is no abattoir on the island licensed to slaughter cattle. This means that local production of meat and milk can be for personal consumption, but not for sale. In consequence surplus cattle have to be exported live from Shetland to Aberdeen.

What, then, drives the keeping of a breed that's out of step with modern market demands? The answer is that people sense their

intrinsic value — the value that the unique breed of a region has "for itself".

The Shetland cow has been through the machinations of development experts. One article in the collection tells how, in order to make the breed more marketable, breeders in the 1950s were encouraged to standardise the cow's appearance to black, or black with white.

Today's breeders value both the genetic diversity and the beauty of how their kye used to look. The birth of throwbacks has successfully enabled the reintroduction of every shade, including brown, dun, red, grey, and such patternings as flecked, grimet, marlet, rigget, sholmet and vandet. I'll leave the reader to buy the book to sort out the subtle distinctions in that giddy array!

This inspirational book written by a community draws from a rich agrarian past. It demonstrates that there remains in Shetland a vibrant community for whom the Shetland kye is a practical symbol of resilience. And it points towards important lessons for a future when oil, and oil-based fertilisers, will no longer be cheap.

I commend this work to all who wish to rebuild connections to their food and the land, wherever they might live.



Scottish Crofting Federation

Our mission is to safeguard and promote the rights, livelihoods and culture of crofters and their communities

Crofter's wife column

WITH ONLY one week earmarked each year for a family holiday, there is always 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 out-of-doors 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 won't go 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!!



Claire Nicolson

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: reasoning that a week's farming life would be perfect... and he was right. So right that we had re-booked the same week for this year almost before we were home!

So, after a very long and hectic year, we set off full of excitement and anticipation. Four hundred and twenty miles later, celebrating the

fact that we hadn't got lost once, our arrival in Toberpatrick was heralded by the usual cacophony of farmlife.

The Kinsellas 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 include 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 terribly 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 spent most of the week as filthy as a street urchin as he lurched from one messy activity to another.

As for The Crofter and I, we enjoyed the usual holiday freedoms – no phones or computers to answer to, and actually getting to spend some time together. But most of all we enjoy immersing ourselves in the County Wicklow culture: the annual vintage tractor rally in Tinahely, the opening day of the jump season at Punchestown racecourse, the Tinahely point to point festival. We're regulars at these events now! We may never achieve full-scale farming status as seen at the Kinsellas' but we can see the day when the residents of Toberpatrick say, "Look out! The Crofters are back again!"

ROB GIBSON MSP

for Highlands and Islands

Welcomes All Enquiries

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Murchison Report

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 provide 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 RHOG self-build
- Off-croft rented accommodation.
- Co-operative building for rent either on- or off-croft.
- 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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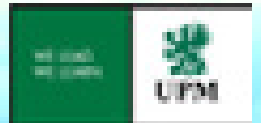
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Simon Fraser is accredited by the Law Society of Scotland as a specialist in Crofting Law.

CROFTING RESOURCES PROGRAMME

Food marketing for small producers

FARM SHOP

Claire Nicolson

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 for small producers.

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 our produce.

The workshops took place in Stornoway, Benbecula, Dunbeath and Achnasheen and were attended by a variety of actual and aspiring producers of beef, lamb, pork,

cheese, smoked products and vegetables, including 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 matters raised will be followed up as the Crofting Resources Programme continues. These included some tough questions such as "How do we get the superb beef produced in Uist on to the market?" and "How do we get into the Southern European light 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, Lachina MacVicar (SAC, Benbecula), Nan Smith (SAC, Stornoway), Eric Larnach (Dunbeath) and Kristine MacKenzie (Achnasheen).



Claire Nicolson

Taking stock



Claire Nicolson

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 grazings regulations and other crofting regulation?
- Is it possible to start a stock club today, in view of SFP etc?

The study will be carried out by SCF's Crofting Resources Programme fieldworkers and by Karen Campbell at SCF head office.

We are looking for stock clubs and townships willing to take part in this exercise. Involvement will consist of a representative of the stock club completing a questionnaire and taking part in a short interview with a project worker. All information gathered will be in strict confidence and no stock club will be identified without the consent of its members.

Would any stock club interested please contact karen@crofting.org or phone 01599 566365.

CROFTING RESOURCES PROGRAMME

Far North Beef

NORTH WEST Cattle Producers Association held a very successful open day at Lairg in September, hosted by the Hale Nook Simmental herd at Achnairn.

The event was opened by Rob Gibson MSP and was attended by about eighty crofters and farmers from Sutherland and Wester Ross. Three workshops were held covering animal health, breed selection and nutrition and environmental stewardship.

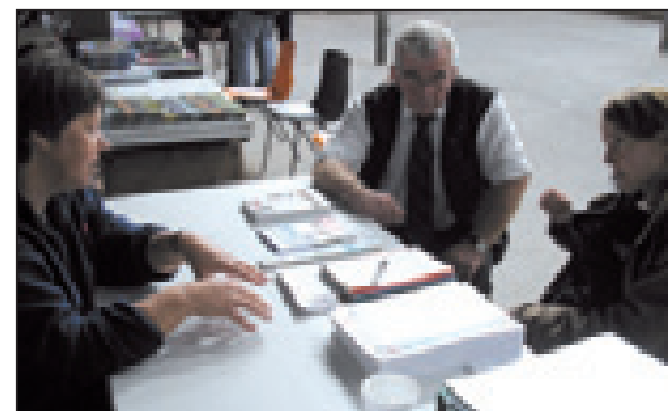
Sarah Allen, chair of the Scottish government's bull scheme review attended the event to speak about the progress of the review and to hear from some of those most affected by the future of the scheme. Perthshire farmer Tom Gray spoke on why he buys his replacement stock in the north-west and what he looks for.

The day concluded with a butchery demonstration provided

by Quality Meat Scotland and delivered in imitable fashion by Gordon Gibb. There were a good number of trade and information stalls including Scottish Crofting Federation; and North West Sutherland Food Link had a stall of fresh local produce.

Conclusions of the event? We were yet again told by the experts that crofters are producing excellent stock, both stores and replacement heifers and the future is bright so long as we can maintain high health status; SNH and RSPB were left in no doubt that reintroduced species were causing substantial financial loss in certain areas and that SRDP Rural Priorities must be made more accessible if it is to be relevant to small units.

Congratulations to the association for organising such an excellent event, which should be a boost to the confidence of the area's cattle breeders.



Discussion of the bull scheme at the SCF stand at Lairg – r-l Sarah Allen, Black Isle farmer Rod McKenzie and Kathy Peebles of QMS.



Scottish Crofting Produce at Cawdor

SCOTTISH CROFTING PRODUCE was given a boost at the Living Food event held at Cawdor Castle at the end of September.

This high-profile and up-market event is now well established in the Highlands food calendar and brings together some of the region's best food producers, with the emphasis on local, ethical, natural and organic.

Thanks to Pam Rodway, our good friend in the Soil Association, SCF was invited to attend. Scottish crofting produce was represented by Robin and Penny Calvert of Rogart with lamb, mutton, vegetables and croft-smoked salmon and by Alasdair

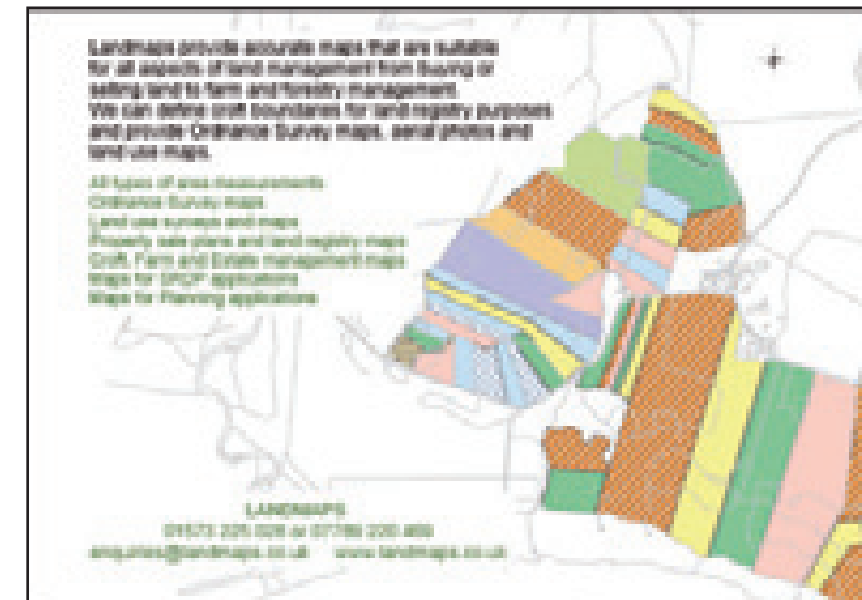
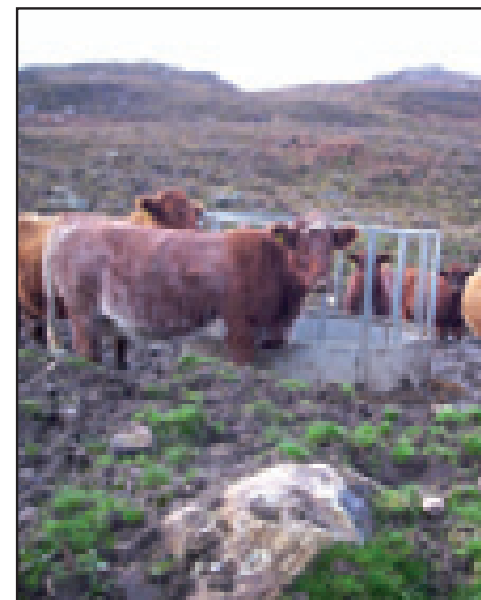
Marshall of Saval, Lairg with pies made with his croft-reared free-range pork and chicken.

The event was very well attended throughout the day and our producers reported excellent sales.

There was also a keen demand for SCF woolen merchandise – crofter tartan rugs and scarves supplied by Anderson and Co of Lerwick and knitting wool from Nickie May in Orkney.

Visitors to the stand were interested to find out more about crofting and crofting produce; and a large quantity of SCF literature was distributed, including leaflets on the ground-breaking Crofting Connections project.

www.crofting.org



CROFTING RESOURCES PROGRAMME

Achintraid cattle club a catalyst for township improvement

ACHINTRAID IS A township of twenty one crofts and sixteen crofters, with about 600 acres of hill grazing, situated a few miles west of Lochcarron.

In 2005 four of the crofters entered the Rural Stewardship Scheme (RSS) option for small 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 CCAGS.

To start off the herd, eight Highland x Shorthorn cows were purchased with calves at foot and already in calf to a Limousin bull. SCF helped to arrange basic training for the cattle keepers and this was delivered by Ian Cairns of SAC 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 shinty and 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 feeding 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 landowner as the small crofts are not suited to fodder production. Another important factor has been the selection of mature cows of hardy breeds that calve unassisted whether on the hill or inbye.

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.

Horticultural development in Skye and Lochalsh

THE SKYE AND LOCHALSH horticulture community interest company has been working for the last fifteen years.

Nearly all food was imported into the area and we have been working since then to improve the situation. As the weather and ground offer us few advantages it has meant looking again at how individual gardeners, crofters and small farmers can grow crops and how they can sell with some profit. People grew in the past for their own consumption and for some sales, but the market has changed and a new look was needed.

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 conferences and courses and members trying things out, we have worked out a whole range of adaptations to make success more likely. A recent project, local food for local schools – pre-Jamie Oliver – has left as part of its legacy a book prepared to help schools get growing, which is really just as suitable for more experienced growers. It deals with all the basics of adapting to the typical soils and climates and gives the current best information as to planting times and, critically, the best varieties for a chance of success (available on our website).

It is all very well to grow, but to make a living

the crop has to be sold. We run a producers' and farmers' market. Local producers can rent stalls with no bureaucracy. Stallholders can benefit from our seasonal talks to members on food and sales rules. The stalls suit some and others find out what sells and start direct sales.

For example, EarlyBird Enterprises, selling boar, venison and other meats found their sales very quickly grew to a point where direct sales to restaurants etc covered most of their sales needs. The Isle of Skye Bakery Company finds the market accounts for a great part of the sales of their delicious bakery products. Our members, past and present, sell direct to hotels and restaurants and from their own retail setups. They grow garden plants, trees, fungi, outdoor and polytunnel vegetables, and fruit. The scale is generally small, but there are now a number of businesses making a living from full time growing.

We work alongside members to make sure things go well. In the last couple of years we have been concentrating on reviewing and supplying what the membership wants in the way of support and information. We have found that talks from fantastic speakers have not been as well attended as we would have anticipated and so this year have looked at developments for our own members also working with our local Foodlink group (which runs a distribution van circuit too) and with the local SCF.

One of the many popular ideas is the setting up of grower groups. Growers from an area meet on a few occasions a year to help and learn from each other at their own crofts and gardens. The Crofting Resources Programme will bring in experts to help with trickier problems.

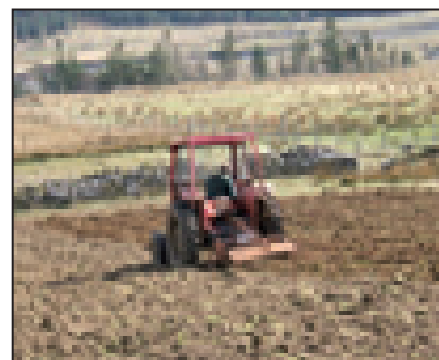
Another plan which has found many volunteers stepping forward is to help new allotment holders with advice and help so that

they make an encouraging start at the Portree new allotments. A longer term plan is to group with Foodlink to set up a box scheme supplying vegetables to households on a regular basis.

We are continuing our winter bulk buying of potatoes and of composts and for this year invite local members of SCF to join in with the bulk buys – contact via the website or by phoning.

We have loads more planned and ongoing and look forward to another year with the same great weather as last!

Ian Brown, chair, SLHCIC, tel 01470 582462



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SCF – the Scottish Crofting Federation

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submission for the crofting reform process, the vision focuses on five key areas – protected heritable tenure; viability; new entrants; protection of the arable in-bye and defined boundaries. He pointed out that emphasis is being placed on regulatory matters such as absenteeism and neglect when these are effects rather than causes. He posed the question “Would there be so much neglected croft land if the market were providing good returns for production and the public were paying fairly for provision of non-market goods?”

Former president of the Scottish Crofters Union (SCU), Alistair MacIver, set the context of the name-change with a reflection on the history of crofters' representation from the area-based unions which came together as the Federation of Crofters Unions, which became the SCU, which became the Foundation and which has once again become a federation, the Scottish Crofting Federation.

He concluded that it is the responsibility of every individual, crofter or not, to contribute to the well-being of rural Highlands and Islands and that if crofters are to have a voice in Scottish, UK, European and world policy making they have to stand together by joining the SCF – the only member-led organisation dedicated to promoting crofting.

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 (Lairg), 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.




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