

Crofting reform

THERE IS A heated debate going on in the crofting reform process about how to regulate crofting democratically, how to compile a register of crofts and whether crofts should be mapped. The following report is based on contributions from all SCF areas.

Assessors, Commission and the register – the three-legged stool of crofting regulation.

Assessors

Assessors are by and large trusted and recognised in their communities but all must be elected by their communities to have democratic acceptability. In the past nominations were sought from grazings committees/clerks and a civil servant selected from these nominations. The SCF was involved in a reform of the network and now assessors are elected, but the selection process still goes on in some instances. It is vital that assessors are elected on a parish or area basis by registered crofters or a nominee (resident within the registered crofter's household) on their behalf, this to be set out in detail to our satisfaction prior to implementation.

The present situation where information to assessors is filtered by a civil servant 'gate-keeper' must stop. Assessors will report directly to the Commission and will be the township-level advisors to the Commission. Their role and responsibilities should be

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Scottish land use strategy – is crofting to be ignored again?

Land use strategy is the next big idea.

THE CLIMATE CHANGE (Scotland) Act 2009 required that a land use strategy be put before the Scottish parliament by the end of March 2011. The Scottish government has commissioned various pieces of research and a land use summit took place in Inverness last November.

The government website contains a huge amount of material both on the research and on the summit and it's all worth a look if you have the time. If this information is intended to inform future debate on the subject then it's fine as far as it goes, but most of the stuff comprises bland statements of the obvious.

There are also major omissions, such as the fact that the crofting counties cover nearly half the land mass of Scotland and account for 25 per cent of the agricultural land within that area. Yet only one

paragraph within all the reams of documents relates to crofting. Land is classified within the discussion as prime, intermediate or upland, using a small-scale Macaulay-style classification map that takes no account of crofters' efforts over hundreds of years to create good soil out of bog and rock – the same basic error as in the Pack report.

There's quite a lot about the need to conserve soil carbon, Scotland having most of the UK's carbon-rich soils and of course most of these soils are in the crofting areas. What is the main threat to these huge carbon reserves?

We are all aware of the loss of stock numbers and consequent loss of traditional land management practice such as extensive upland grazing. Ungrazed moor and hill is at risk of fire which in turn leads to shrinkage and erosion of peatlands and release of carbon to the atmosphere. The loss of this extensive grazing practice is

a consequence of Scottish and European agricultural policy, so any land use strategy must take more than a passing glance at crofting, as well as employing a bit of joined-up thinking.

The summit discussed things like tension between production and environmental goals, provision for security in food and energy, integrated and multi-functional land management, sustainable rural communities and the need to increase woodland cover. Crofting, especially where combined with community ownership and asset-based township development, has the potential to deliver all these things within the vast area of land we have responsibility for.

So what we have to do is raise the profile of crofting in the formulation of the land use strategy and educate the policy-makers about what goes on out in the north and west.



The picture shows very bad land use practice on a Sutherland estate – severe erosion of organic soil caused by misuse of all-terrain vehicles

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Message from the chair...

Neil MacLeod



THE BEGINNING of April is normally ushered in by birdsong, the harbinger of spring.

This year the only birds I see and hear on my frequent visits to my lambing duties are geese competing for the sparse grass on fields which I have rarely seen so bare along with carrion crow, blackback gulls, ravens, maulauding deer all virtually starving after the excesses of winter except for the geese

who are the bane of crofters lives. But who cares? Although it has been a stressful time for crofters it pales into insignificance when I speak to colleagues east and south; they refer to a salvage job not a lambing, huge losses, stock in poor condition and not a vestige of grass to be seen. The repercussions for the autumn sales are a real concern.

Reform is the bye-word at present – CAP, SFP, Lyon report, Pack report, redistribution of the budget which is under extreme pressure from so many fronts. SCF has a major work to maintain the status quo. Board members have arranged to meet with Brian Pack later this month at Inverurie to make a compelling case for crofting and its place in the equation.

As I near the completion of my time as chairman of SCF I would like to thank so many people for their unstinting encouragement, friendship and advice. I am very privileged to have had the opportunity to lead the Federation through a period of change when we now have a time of stability.

We have had many successes. I feel the

new board of directors are getting involved at a juncture when a lot of endeavour and hard work by fellow directors, chief executive, staff and council members has made SCF respected by politicians and public agencies who seek our viewpoint, engaging in dialogue knowing that there is a tier of knowledge there to make the case for crofting fit for purpose. Please support the incoming directors who will no doubt bring fresh impetus to the task.

I remain absolutely convinced that crofting will sustain, never more so than when speaking at the completion of the crofting induction course recently held in Stornoway. Fifteen aspirants are so encouraging with their ideas of how to advance crofting to another level. Some of their plans were very exciting. I wish them well.

With a glimmer of sun breaking through and the wind decreasing maybe things will get better; if nothing else crofters are eternal optimists.

Thank you all for your forbearance over the years from when I first became a director of SCF, from its days as a union.

A month in the life of an SCF director

Marina Dennis shares her busy schedule

IN A MONTH, here in Strathspey, the temperature has gone from -23C to +20C, which it is today.

But between the jigs and the reels, as an old friend from Kilkenny was fond of saying, we had 2 feet of level snow with six foot drifts on April 1st. Mind you, we have had plenty of practice in dealing with extreme weather here so it was backs to the wall with a huge amount of stoicism.

One morning, earlier in the month, I had entertained my old crofting neighbour to tea but nothing to eat as he had forgotten his teeth yet again. This spring will see his 76th lambing – he has 90 blackface ewes. He is sharp as a tack, lippy and a joy to listen to. He is a traditional, hard working crofter, has known the climatic extremes we get here, but knows almost nothing about the new Crofting Reform Bill and I suspect he is not very interested. But he is passionate about crofting, its culture and what it produces for biodiversity. Of course, and I agree with him, the environment was much more diverse and sustaining when there were cropping grants and crofts had to be worked to support and feed families. But what all this brought home to me was that there must be 100s if not 1000s of crofters in the same boat as my neighbour who rely on other people, such as SCF, to oversee and scrutinize what is happening at a legislative and administrative level within government. SCF, its directors and council have a huge duty of care and responsibility to all our members as well as those hard-working, silent crofters.

Because of the difficulties of travel during the last month there have been fewer than usual meetings. I am a member of the steering group of Crofting Connections within the Cairngorm national park and we had an enthusiastic meeting in Grantown where the breadth of knowledge and commitment for the crofting project was nothing less than exciting and I look forward to being involved with the local schools once we can get a spade in the ground.

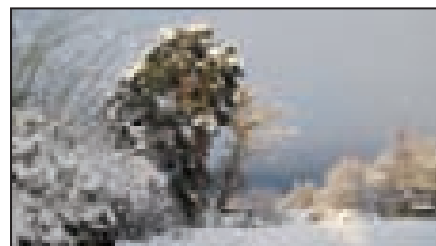
The limiting weather has meant extra

teleconferences with SCF directors about the Crofting Reform Bill and we work away diligently at assessing and commenting on government responses and also those of other organisations. Many SCF directors give up much time in the evenings talking to those with an interest in the bill or listening to irate crofters berating Brian Pack and his difficult proposals. SCF directors are to meet with Brian Pack in Inverurie in mid-April to ensure he clearly understands crofters' concerns.

I have been in Edinburgh twice in the last 10 days as a director of RSABI, having been specifically appointed to explain and support crofting. As a charity our main objective is to help financially those who have worked on the land but have hit hard times. But from May/June we will be offering a professional listening service, called Gatepost, which will allow those with worries or problems to talk to somebody in confidence who understands their situation. We aim to help people at an early stage without any connotations attached – it is not church based, not associated with mental health or suicide issues. It will be an independent, professional, listening service for people who live and work on the land.

I am also a member of the Cairngorm national park Leader action group and have just evaluated 15 applications for funding. These are in-depth applications with a huge amount of information on finance and background. I specifically represent crofting on that group while others come from very diverse sectors. Without a presence on the group crofting would be misunderstood and neglected.

An SCF working group on membership has had some tortuous meetings about addressing the issue but I now feel we have a good strategy in place and we look forward to the results of the SCF questionnaire sent to all members. Please encourage everyone to send it back and we will consider all comments with interest and respect.



Membership survey

IN THE PREVIOUS edition of *The Crofter* we sent out membership surveys to gather the views of members and non-members to make sure that we are working to address the current issues that concern you.

We have had 315 replies to date, an impressive figure. If you have not had a chance to complete your questionnaire there is still time as the full analysis will be published in the next edition of *The Crofter*.

We have had good mix of results coming in and there have been many suggestions that the SCF will take on board.

One of the main things that you feel we can improve on is at a branch level with more meetings and improved communications. We will be looking at ways that we can improve this for our members, and so that more people are encouraged to join. One method of communication that we intend to work on will be via email. If you are not already receiving updates on press releases then please let us know on hq@crofting.org. Please include your membership number or area so we can allocate you to the correct mailing list.

Thank you to all those who have sent their surveys back. Your opinions are important to the development of the SCF.

Crofting reform

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defined and enshrined in the bill in an enabling, not a prescriptive, way. Their relationship with the Commission and their responsibilities to their communities should be clear – as they are an integral part of the governance of crofting. Assessors should also be trained as mediators, a very important and useful role for them in their communities.

We suggested a model whereby the elected assessors could nominate persons from within their number to stand as commissioners. However, the minister is insistent that commissioners should be direct elected by crofters and we have no objection to this

(though assessor nomination could be a valid stop-gap until the voting system and election of commissioners has been established). But the aim for direct election is accepted and our further assertions are therefore based on this.

Crofting Commission

Elected commissioners should be area specific and elected by area – ie nominations and votes for a commissioner should be in and by their defined area.

We agree that the election should be based on the register of crofts and that it is therefore essential to complete the current register (which would be the only register of crofts). However, we suggest that nominations to stand, and voting, should be by

one member of the registered croft's household, not just the registered crofter. This would help address the gender equality question raised by the rural affairs and environment committee. There should be one vote per crofting household regardless of the number of crofts held.

Commissioners will be advised by their assessors who will also be elected by their community on the same basis.

The convenor of the Commission must be elected from and by commissioners. The argument put forward by the minister – that the relationship between the minister and the convenor should dictate that the convenor is appointed – is weak; the relationship between the convenor and the commissioners

is more important and therefore the case for the commissioners electing their convenor is the stronger.

Commissioners need a better time balance – the present apportionment of time between the commissioners and the convenor does not work well, commissioners not having enough time to do their job and the convenor having too much say in the affairs that all the commissioners should be dealing with. This is something for the Commission to decide upon when it is formed, but the power for them to do this needs to be in legislation.

The Crofting Commission must continue to have the power of tribunal in order to protect commissioners from possible legal action against them as individuals.



Claire Nicolson

The Register of Crofts

The logic is that if the Crofting Commission is to be directly elected by crofters then there must be a complete register of crofts, which can be used for the basis of an electoral role. The Crofters Commission holds a register of crofts and this should be completed. It should be brought up to date, by landlord and crofter returns, on a rolling parish-by-parish basis by a fixed date. It will be the basis of an electoral role and will be the definitive register of crofts. As a previous government proposal (to make it possible for banks to become croft tenants and maximally exploit their holdings) has been withdrawn, there is no need for any other register of crofts. Current Commission administration must be resourced to complete this task with the utmost urgency as this is vital to any democratic process of election of commissioners and assessors. This register is enough as a minimum and is all that has been asked for by crofters. Expectations of the Crofting

Commission regarding the register must be clearly laid out in the bill.

Mapping of crofts is a different issue. The whole concept of compulsory maps, directed by the Registers of Scotland (RoS) under a trigger points system, is poorly conceived. The architects have not fully thought through the implications of their plan, presumably through not understanding the crofting situation. They seem oblivious to how much conflict this could cause (though it is interesting to note in a Scottish government official's letter to the committee that he defends against the suggestion that disputes could arise in the government mapping of the common grazings by saying that it will be mitigated by the use of participation – something left out of the mapping of crofts by trigger point proposal).

We do agree that mapping of crofts has validity in the right context, but should be done as a community development exercise by those communities who wish to. Assessors would be involved as knowledgeable contributors

and mediators. Mapping of crofting townships is a development issue which should come under the HIE township development plans initiative and this should be resourced and supported.

The information gathered under such an exercise is the property of the community and of the individuals in that community. It should be entered on to the register of crofts only if this is requested by the community or individual and this bill should make it the duty of the Crofting Commission to do this, should they be given the information. There were some mapping exercises carried out; the Commission had the information; but as far as we know it has never been recorded on the register.

The right to not be mapped must be upheld – some communities will not wish to participate in a community mapping initiative and it is their right to not do so. Many crofting communities are happy enough with their knowledge of boundaries and the passing on of this information in an informal, but

no less valid, way.

When asked 'Why Registers of Scotland?' the government response has been the level of expertise. This is not good reasoning in a time when community development and capacity building is advocated. There has been no good reason put forward for why RoS would need to keep a register of crofts. The Crofting Commission is the only agency with an interest in this process and there is no requirement for RoS to be involved.

Conclusion

Our previously stated and well-rehearsed concerns about croft viability, the lack of investment in crofting, the questionable competence of the Crofters Commission and the general weakness of the Crofting Reform Bill aside, we believe that the points raised above could, if taken together as an integrated approach, enable the bill to do some good to crofting. If ignored, the bill will on balance surely be damaging to crofting.

A productive agricultural sector essential

SCF comments on the inquiry into future support for agriculture in Scotland

An inquiry chaired by Brian Pack, looking at future support to agriculture in Scotland, released an interim report on their findings and went out to consultation recently. The following is a summary of the SCF response.

AN INTERIM REPORT is very useful and informative and we appreciate that public meetings have been held to inform producers of the inquiry's thoughts to date.

Comments received from our advisors are on the whole negative – in fact they cover the range from being uncomfortable with, to being extremely hostile to, the suggestions given by the inquiry committee, with the mode tending to the latter.

We agree that there is a need to change the way support is delivered to agriculture, food production, land management and rural development and that it should be sooner rather than later. We should not wait until 2014 to instigate change. However, the model suggested in the interim report is not the way forward.

The report starts well with a good background into wider issues and how Scotland's policies have to address these issues – such as food security, water management, energy production, biodiversity protection, climate change and so on. Rural population retention is mentioned also. The report then seems to ignore most of the background and policy drivers and addresses only the underlying purpose of economic growth. We do not include the word 'sustainable' (as in the Scottish government principle aim) as we do not feel that the suggested model addresses sustainability. Indeed, we find the proposal that "it may be that we cannot increase food production without some sort of environmental degradation" completely unacceptable.

We agree that it is essential to maintain a productive agricultural sector in Scotland – so that we maintain our capacity to respond to issues of food security – food production should therefore include crops/livestock at present unsupported, eg pigs, goats, potatoes, vegetables, soft fruit, glasshouses/polytunnels.

What about the other securities that we need to address, such as carbon sequestration? Food is of primary importance but agriculture is not just about food. "European agriculture is multi-functional," says the report, but then appears

to ignore that in the Scottish context. The approach needs to be more holistic with support directed at activity that will bring about desired outcomes such as support for sustainable food production, support for carbon management, support for population maintenance and so on.

"For whoever has, to him shall more be given; and whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him." Mark 4:25. The whole argument of paying more to those with the highest ability to produce for the market is weak. This simplistic model is highly inequitable and will not lead to the objectives we should be seeking for Scottish agriculture. There is no justification for providing unfettered support at the highest rates to those with the most advantage to earn a fair wage from the market.

We think that it is not going to be acceptable to the public that those with the best quality land and therefore the best ability to operate in the market receive the highest support from the public purse regardless of how their practices driven by wealth creation impact on the public heritage, whilst those managing huge areas of some of Scotland's finest landscape and biggest carbon deposits in a sustainable manner are supported the least.

It should be recognised in the context of sustainable economic growth that tourism brings in more revenue to the Scottish economy than meat exports do and it is landscapes such as those managed by crofters that tourists come to see. It is therefore apparent that support to extensive grazing in the Highland and Islands should be given a higher degree of importance.

But food production isn't driven just by economic growth, as the report correctly observes, though the many facets of agriculture that provide the rationale for support are not reflected in the position taken in the recommendations.

Our principal objections to the suggested model are therefore twofold: 1, that it is not placed in, and does not pay account to, the wider context of carbon sequestration, environmental protection, animal welfare, rural population well-being... and 2, that it protracts the unacceptable and fundamental inequity of basing levels of public support on quality of land regardless of the level of public goods produced.

In the wider Scottish legislation context, this support reform should be used as the opportunity to complement the Crofting Reform

Bill, proposed legislation that increases regulation but relies on other policy mechanisms to provide the incentives to croft.

Support should be tailored to Scotland's diverse agricultural sectors and should recognise the differences. We have said before and will keep on saying that 'one size does not fit all'. Crofting is not farming, it is a land-based culture that manages a vast area of some of Scotland's remotest and most ecologically fragile landscape.

Crofting has kept people in these areas and if crofting goes so will the many support ancillary industries which help communities to survive; so populations will decline further. We believe that the loss of stock from crofting areas is close to, or has reached the tipping point, beyond which it will take generations to recover. It is therefore imperative that action to stop the decline is taken immediately.

Land management practices are crucial to the well-being of rural Scotland and we would like to see this reflected in support. For example, it would make sense to have the number of people engaged in land management recognised, not just the area, otherwise this accelerates the loss of farming, crofting people and encourages low-populated monocultures, consequential soil degradation and loss of biodiversity.

We also suggest a component which directs support on the basis of how much organic matter, and therefore carbon, the land contains ie public support paying for carbon sequestration, a vital public benefit.

We would also advocate support for environmentally beneficial management practices such as diversity of cropping and the use of native breeds of livestock on fragile ground.

The Macaulay LCA system could be a very useful tool, though there is no indication that it can be adapted for use at the level required. However, assuming it can be, this is not the whole story – if support is to be given for the delivery of public goods then we need not only land capability for agriculture to be known but also land capability for carbon sequestration and land capability for bio-diversity.

We agree that support should be used to mitigate the disadvantage experienced by Scottish agriculture – 85% of the land is classed as LFA. But there is LFA and LFA. As other inquiries such as the RSE Hills and Islands inquiry and the Shucksmith inquiry

both found, there are very different levels of disadvantage and the way Scotland uses the LFASS mechanism is completely contrary to the spirit of mitigating natural disadvantage.

We question the need for log up funds – there is no clear evidence presented supporting this idea. If the support schemes are set up properly why would there be a need for a TUF? If we want farmers and crofters to achieve transformational change in the industry with support linked to the adoption of certain practices to enhance competitiveness and sustainability, then design the support schemes to do this. And of course we find unacceptable the notion that TUFs might be directed at individual claimants in proportion to their direct area payment, based on the continuation of payments being allocated on a "whoever has (good land), to him shall more (support) be given" basis. Perhaps it is just that it isn't explained clearly enough, but the TUF idea seems to be either a bit of a bodge or a means to prolong the inequitable and unsustainable support regime that exists now.

We agree that all agriculturally usable area should be included but disagree with the stocking density. There is land that does benefit from grazing at lower stocking densities and, because it delivers outcomes that satisfy some of the wider objectives, should qualify for support. This land is part of Scotland's natural heritage and to suggest that we should pretend some of it doesn't exist is ludicrous.

Livestock units need to take into account native breeds which are generally smaller and have a more beneficial grazing pattern and so deliver beneficial land management in marginal areas.

We agree that support is needed to help the industry to adapt and improve – the industry needs to continually improve its competitiveness and its adoption of new practices; this may include returning to practices that were sustainable before inappropriate policy drivers distorted them. The crofting sector should not be penalised for having, on the whole, maintained good practice.

The analogy of the most productive areas being an engine house is indicative of this whole concept missing the point of the rationale for support. There are other far-reaching objectives being missed other than the economic growth model.

CROFTING RESOURCES PROGRAMME

SCF conference highlights meat marketing opportunities for crofters

MARKETING MEAT from the Croft, a conference organised by SCF as part of the Crofting Resources Programme, took place in Inverness at the beginning of March.

The purpose of the event was to bring together crofters and crofting producer groups with some of Scotland's top meat industry experts, highlighting the opportunities and constraints in marketing beef, lamb and pork from the croft. Conference organiser Donald Murdie, co-ordinator of the Crofting Resources Programme, said, "The great majority of output from crofts is store livestock, but the direct selling route is a way that individual crofters and producer groups can cut out the middle-man and add value to their produce, especially for those with traditional and native breeds which are slow to grow to maturity. SCF's 'Scottish Crofting Produce' trade mark is available as an additional marketing tool."

An excellent panel of speakers brought a wide range of expertise to the conference. Sutherland lamb producer Robin Calvert described how he has brought his flock of Cheviots into profit by directly marketing his lamb, hogget and mutton. This required a big investment of money and effort. The individual seller needs to keep the product in a chilled environment from leaving the abattoir to point of sale, which means specialised premises, vehicles and sales equipment. The quality of the end product is much affected by stress levels in the animals – hence the importance of short journeys to the abattoir – and Robin does not use a dog on the sheep prior to transport. Farmers' markets have been important in Robin's business development, and he is a founder member of the Highland Farmers' Market that takes place outside the main Tesco store in Inverness.

Well-known Skye restaurateur Shirley Spear, of the famous Three Chimneys, is a long term supporter of the best of local produce and she spoke of the importance to her business of produce from local crofts. Meat is supplied via George MacRae's Portree butchery business and is sourced from Skye producers, including lamb from Skye and Lochalsh Meat Supply Group. The restaurant trade is usually only able to make use of the higher value cuts, hence this particular supply route, and this is a challenge for crofter producers.



Alaistar Nicolson, Borve, Isle of Skye

How can the whole animal be marketed economically?

Our good friends from Quality Meat Scotland, Kathy Peebles and Laurent Vernet, gave us a rundown on technical issues of production and exporting. Kathy emphasised the need to maintain quality in any direct marketing operation and this was a theme which emerged throughout the event. Laurent gave a comprehensive analysis of current export trends. Alas, the export market which was formerly of great importance to crofters, the southern Europe light lamb trade, has more or less dried up, which makes it more important to find new outlets within the UK for the excellent quality, but small, lambs from places like Shetland and Lewis which are still not much favoured in the store trade. Right on cue, Shetland farmer and Crofters Commissioner Ronnie Eunson described his own direct selling operation for his light lambs, which has involved building relationships with specialised butchers as far away as London.

Cumbrian farmer and butcher Andrew Sharp discussed the mutton renaissance campaign which aims to bring this once-popular meat back into mainstream cuisine. Surely this is a way forward in the hill and island environment where finishing lambs are not always a practical proposition. Clearly there is an education job to be done with retailers and consumers. After all, mutton is low-input, healthy, natural product that has a wholly beneficial environmental impact.

There was quite a bit of debate on how mutton should be defined. Andrew's view is that mutton

should be five years old with good fat cover and should be hung for at least two weeks. Ewes need to be brought into condition by good nutrition. Quality is as important in mutton as in any other meat – it's not just any old sheep.

The advantages of co-operative marketing were addressed by Alaistar Nicolson of Skye and Lochalsh Meat Supply Group. Alaistar described how the group has closed the production and marketing circle by making local lamb available to butchers and restaurants in the area and ensuring a fair price to the producer. This has been achieved despite of the lack of a local abattoir. Lambs have to be transported to Dingwall but it is hoped that, by building the business, a case can be made to re-establish an abattoir in Skye.

The abattoir issue was also taken up by Ronnie Eunson, who told us of the work of Shetland Livestock Marketing Group to provide new slaughtering facilities in the islands to replace existing inadequate plant. Ronnie's explanation of the complex process involved in bringing this to reality was a fine example of the sort of lateral thinking that so often overcomes the difficulties of Shetland's remoteness from markets.

Leading animal nutritionist Professor Bob Orskov of the Macaulay Institute gave us a thought-provoking talk on the marketing virtues of natural production methods drawing on his experiences from around the world. Small producers, he said, should be encouraged to work co-operatively to assist in development of infrastructure to take product

to market, reduce risk and avoid exploitation by middle men. On technical issues, Bob addressed aspects of livestock in their natural interaction with soil, plants and people. He pointed out the potential in Scotland for grazing combined with trees which, if correctly managed, is good for animals, soil and carbon sequestration, and for total resource management to eliminate waste.

SCF project worker Yvonne Richardson gave a concise briefing on the food safety and certification schemes that are relevant to crofters and summarised the legal aspects of direct selling. SCF chairman Neil MacLeod spoke on internet marketing. This approach by a group of Lewis crofters has resulted in Lewis lamb being on the menu for offshore oil workers in the North Sea.

What were the main conclusions of the conference? There are viable alternatives to store sales that can increase crofters' incomes. Co-operative marketing will give the best results for most people, but individuals can succeed if they are prepared to invest time and money. Quality is of paramount importance; one bad experience is enough to put the consumer off permanently.

Donald Murdie concluded, "The conference was a great success. We managed to bring together a group of speakers with a breadth of experience of the meat industry and they engaged in lively and stimulating debate with a forward-looking and innovative collection of crofters. This was all about what crofting can and should be – supplying high-quality local produce as well as first-class store livestock."

CROFTING RESOURCES PROGRAMME

Crofters' produce on Great British Menu

HEADING-UP a great cast of top British chefs, Michael Smith, head chef at Skye's legendary Three Chimneys Restaurant, appeared in the fifth series of BBC2's Great British Menu in April.

The competition to represent Scotland at a royal banquet hosted by Prince Charles in June was fierce, in what the BBC described as its toughest contest yet.

Each chef was assigned to a National Trust estate, with the remit to source all of the ingredients for the menus from local farmers, crofters, fishermen and growers. The Balmacara estate was

selected for Michael, from where he created an amazing menu. As Balmacara is the only National Trust property associated with crofting, Michael was determined that his menu should reflect the traditions of this unique way of life.

The programme highlighted Michael's visits to the local producers in the Balmacara area. Beef came from well-known Duirinish crofter Morag MacKenzie, Hebridean lamb from Carol Anne and David Stewart at Balmacara; and Alex and Lennis Townsend supplied eggs, vegetables and soft fruit from their croft in

Plockton. Mussels came from Peter MacAskill, Drumfearn and dairy products from the West Highland Dairy, Achmore. Michael was also determined to showcase Scotland's culinary heritage by incorporating some modern takes on old ideas. Not only did he feature his version of a Scotch pie, but also included tattie scones, neeps, barley and handmade lamb's haggis, the most delicate shortbread and green ginger jelly, pickled winkles and wild leaves.

Michael said, "Some of our most widely-known dishes deserve to be celebrated as part of our rich food culture. I wanted to take this opportunity to bring them to the widest possible audience and take pride in proving the genuine provenance of the delicious food that is available for Scottish chefs like me, to cook and serve in our restaurants. We are blessed with the most wonderful, natural larder here on our doorstep in Skye and Lochalsh and The Three Chimneys has built its reputation upon sourcing local ingredients and taking pride in Scottish cooking over many years."

As we went to press we heard that Michael did not go through to represent Scotland in the Great British Menu. The result was a travesty as his opponent used only 50 per cent local produce as against Michael's 90 per cent. The judges, a panel of London restaurant luvvies, obviously missed the whole point. However, we congratulate Michael Smith for presenting such wonderful food using the best of crofters' produce.



Michael Smith with Morag MacKenzie

Driving the bull out

Alan Bush reminisces

HERE IS a bad photo of me driving the Department bull out in 1971.

We used to winter the bulls in those days and they were hardy enough to survive such a life. They were much smaller than modern ones too.

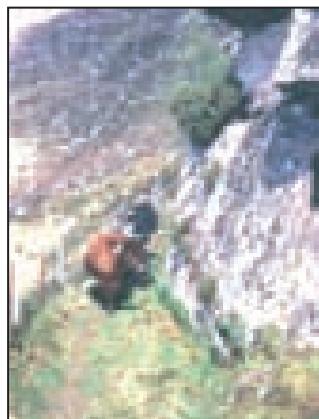
Neither was it the fashion to buy in much feed in those days and the stock was really fed from the croft – not as now just on the croft with bought and brought-in feed.

Times change, but I doubt if

they are likely to change back until transport breaks down a bit more.

There was an old man in Badluachrach who told me of some of his experiences droving to Dingwall, and back sometimes if his boss the factor in Gruinard happened to fancy there was a bob or two to be made on a couple of pens of sheep. I don't remember him speaking of cattle.

Incidentally we used to drove both the sheep and cattle to Dundonnell or Eilean Darroch for the sales into the 1980s.



The peats

Donald Murdie confesses to one of his favourite occupations

SINCE AROUND the New Year, whenever we drive over the hill road I've been saying to my wife, "It'll soon be time to turf the peats."

She responds with a sigh as the prospect of a day off recedes further into the distance. I admit it, I'm a bit weird. I actually enjoy the peats. I enjoy cutting them, lifting them, carrying them to the road, taking them home and, above all, burning them. I'll soon be getting the tarasgeir out of the shed (where it hangs next to the scythe!) and sharpening and oiling it. The turfing spade will be sharpened too, and on the first decent day I'll be out on the bank, mobile phone turned off, listening to the skylarks.

Like a lot of crofting activity, the peats are associated with backbreaking work and a desperate need to survive which thankfully has passed. In certain areas such as north Lewis folk spent the whole summer, as soon as lambing was over and potatoes were planted, doing the peats. They worked round the whole township in co-operative reciprocal labour, ensuring a supply for the elderly and infirm as well as the active. In true Hebridean tradition, the technical work on the peat iron was done by the men, while the women performed the dirty and more physically demanding job of 'throwing', somehow managing to remain immaculate in skirt, apron, wellies and rubber gloves.

The minister's peats would be cut by the congregation, even if the cleric was able bodied and with a young family. So peat cutting became a drudge that most people were glad to see the back of. In the last couple of years, though, there have been signs of revival. Unprecedented oil prices have led to a stream of orders for peat irons being placed with the legendary Stornoway blacksmith, Calum Stallag. The secret of modern peat cutting is to take it in easy stages. The whole bank doesn't have to be cut in one go. What's been cut one weekend can often be lifted the next given half-decent weather, then some more cut,

CROFTING RESOURCES PROGRAMME

Visit to Reidchalmai

Alan Boulton reports

IN EARLY MARCH, just after the worst of the snow had thawed in the north and west, the Crofting Resources Programme project organised an open day hosted by Robin and Penny Calvert on their croft at Rogart.

The idea for the day had been born much earlier in a meeting with the townships around Kinlochbervie where I had given a talk on opportunities within the SRDP. Discussion had taken place about the possibility of building a cutting room which would enable crofters to make best use of their meat either after home kill or on return from the slaughterhouse. Similar ambitions existed in Skye, with a common factor being the John Muir Trust as landlord both there and at Sandwood. With the trust's assistance a group was invited from both areas to visit Robin's home-built cutting room.

Reidchalmai is a 44ha croft consisting mostly of rough heather moorland and woodland with some limited small arable fields. On a walk around the croft Robin was able to demonstrate his own ways of maximising the resources available to him and gave the group a potted history of his time at Reidchalmai. Environmentally the croft is very diverse and Robin demonstrated how he has used the Rural Stewardship Scheme and will now use his newly approved Rural Priorities Scheme to manage various habitats and species. The schemes have contributed significantly to the fencing of the croft and have assisted sheep management as well as managing areas such as a water margin and aspen regeneration in the woodland.

The new scheme will bring two major new developments to the croft; a new woodland plantation and cattle. A little-used area of moorland has been earmarked for a mixed conifer and broadleaf plantation which will be planted this spring. Robin described how the choice of species is designed to create a resource for the croft in future years. Hardwoods will create a future fuel source and the larch, pine and douglas fir will produce useable timber. The scheme will also subsidise the introduction of cattle and Robin and Penny are planning to acquire two highland heifers this autumn. This will add a new dimension to the croft and Robin hopes to capitalise on that valuable by-product, dung.

In using his croft resources, Robin explained his philosophy

of self sufficiency and how the croft is self sustaining in meat and fuel through judicious use of the woodland, his peat bank and the croft livestock. To generate maximum income from the croft's sheep, poultry and game Robin and Penny have long been advocates of farmers' markets and have built up the equipment required to attend regular shows and markets. The latest development in this enterprise is the home-built cutting room which has just passed all its licensing requirements to operate commercially. Robin showed the group round this impressive,

newly-finished facility with its built-in chiller where he can now hang, cut, slice and pack all the meat he markets.

The visit was rounded off with a lunch of home-produced meats including hot-smoked lamb straight from the smoker and the group were offered considerably more than just food for thought. Even with all this achieved there are plans for new products, internet sales, cutting and packing services and much more. The group were left in no doubt that nothing stands still for long at Reidchalmai.



and so on. An old crofter of my acquaintance used to say that if they were cut by the first week in July, you'd get them dry, and most years he was right.

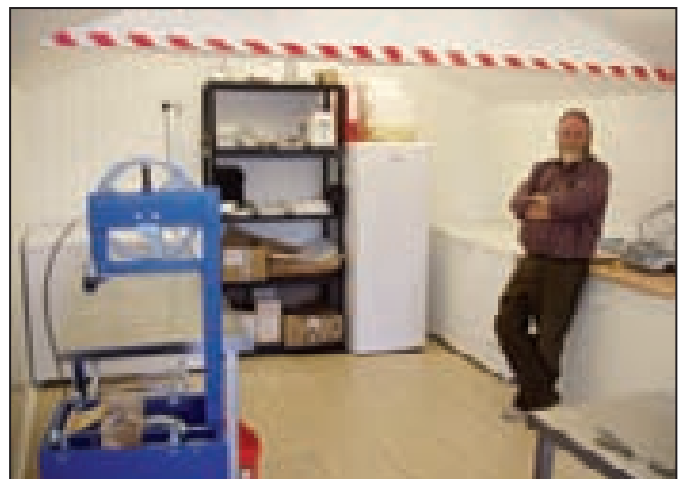
I hasten to point out as well that, at least in this modern crofting household, 'throwing' is the job of the man and both of us get well covered in the peculiarly oily mud of a peat bog. Throwing becomes less of an Olympic sport if a graip (fork) is used to spread the peats out for drying on top of the bank. (In Islay, I'm told, they have a special, long-handled, three-pronged tool for this part of the process.)

So, should we, in these days of carbon-consciousness, still be taking fuel from a carbon sink of global importance? I would argue that manual peat extraction for domestic use is more than ever an environmentally sustainable activity, even if crofters returned en masse to peat as an energy source. Local fuel, like local food, minimises transport requirements. Domestic coal may possibly still come from Scotland, but it's far more likely to have been shipped from Poland, South America, or even Australia.

Finally, here's a word of warning for those new to the peats business. Lots of people are waiting to take the mickey. A couple who had recently arrived in Harris couldn't understand why their peat stack was all stuck together and more than a little wet. It was because they'd cut it and stacked it the same day. I also knew a man who was mystified when his peats virtually disappeared into the heather. He'd seen dry peats and he knew what size they were supposed to be. So that was the size he cut them, as nobody had told him that, when they come out of the ground, they're 70 per cent water!



Robin Calvert at his new cutting room



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CROFTING RESOURCES PROGRAMME

Shelter planting and wood fuel workshops

SHELTER PLANTING and wood fuel may appear as very different reasons to plant trees, but both are of ever-increasing importance in times of climate change and this is recognised in the support available from government.

As part of the Crofting Resources Programme, SCF organised training and information days in Portree and Stornoway at the end of March aimed at crofters, growers and other small landholders interested in growing trees for shelter and as fuel. Around fifty people attended between the two venues.

Eleanor Garty of Woodland Trust Scotland spoke on techniques and species for successful woodland establishment and also covered the grant assistance available. The most accessible scheme for crofters is Option 18 of Land Managers' Options, which supports planting of up to two hectares of native woodland per year, making it very suitable for creating shelter belts on the croft.

Larger schemes may be funded by Rural Priorities. Neil Harrison, Scottish Agricultural College's wood fuel specialist, described the opportunities in the rapidly expanding wood energy business. Very generous government

support is becoming available for wood heating, from small domestic installations to area heating schemes and even power stations. Growing willow as an energy crop on a township scale may become a viable option for crofters.

At the Portree meeting John Bannister gave a talk on growing native trees from seed and Donald Murdie discussed techniques and species for exposed conditions and poor soils. In Stornoway, local forestry consultant Boyd MacKenzie spoke on woodland establishment in the challenging conditions of the Outer Hebrides.

Site visits were an important part of both events. In Skye we saw woodlands at three stages of establishment. The first visit was to Anthony Hovey's new plantation of native species on an apportionment at Totaig. This was followed by Alastair Danter's ten-year-old shelter belts at Edinbane and finally Ian Brown's well-established plantation providing good shelter for his successful soft fruit enterprise. In Lewis, Brendon Harty and Liz Middlemiss hosted a visit to their tree nursery business on their croft at Leurbost. There was also a visit to the short-rotation coppice

plantation at Laxay township. This is one of three trials of biomass for energy in the Western Isles.

The main conclusions of the events: –

- Trees will grow in some very challenging conditions given the right choice of species and good aftercare.
- Shelter planting provides earlier grass growth, shelter for lambing and crops, and better soil condition.
- It is well worth looking at modern wood-fired heating systems and the grants available to install them.
- Growing native trees for sale can be a viable croft diversification.
- Growing biomass for energy could be worthwhile at a township level.

The shelter planting and wood fuel workshops were part-funded by Scottish Agricultural College through the European Social Fund. The Crofting Resources Programme offers advice on township development, including forestry. Contact SCF head office or email donald@crofting.org. If any branch, area or other group of crofters would like a similar event, please let us know.



Shelter belt protecting polytunnels on a croft in Lewis

New laws on snaring

THE LAW in Scotland affecting the setting of snares changed on 11th March 2010.

These changes will have major implications for anyone setting snares from that date onwards. Under the Snares (Scotland) Order 2010, it is now an offence to set snares on posts, planks over watercourses or under fences. They can, however, be set parallel to fences but must be far enough away from the fence so that any animal caught in them is unable to reach the fence or cross it.

A requirement of this order is that snares have to be checked at least once every 24 hours and the ID of the snare recorded as well as any details of any species caught in it.

Any target animal caught has to be humanely destroyed whilst any non-target animal caught must be released. Snares must be set either secured by a strong peg and supported by a teal or some other immovable anchor. Training courses on the correct procedures to be followed for the setting of snares are being held throughout the country and it is anticipated that one will take

place in most of the crofting areas. Details will be published as they come to hand.

The penalties for not conforming to this code of conduct are a criminal record with fines of up to £5,000 and/or six months in jail. For persistent offenders there is also the danger of losing Single Farm Payment. It is in SCF members' interests to avail themselves of the publication "Snaring in Scotland – A Practitioners Guide". Copies are available from the SCF Office at Auchtertyre.

Donald Macdonald, SCF Director

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CROFTING RESOURCES PROGRAMME

Conservation varieties – options and limitations

THE MARCH issue of *The Crofter* gave an outline of the new EC Directives - 2008/62/EC and 2009/145/EC – on conservation varieties for agriculture and horticulture.

In essence they form a derogation on existing seed regulations for local varieties.

It is an implicit recognition of the existence of two markets for seed: a global market for industrial-scale varieties and a smaller market for small-scale, often local, production. This is the first time conservation considerations have been included in seed legislation.

Bere

Of the corn landraces (bere, small oat, rye) and Shetland kale, only bere has been mentioned as candidate conservation variety. Once registered, bere seed can be marketed on the condition that a seed test has been done and the seed

is appropriately labelled. Commercial interest in bere has lead already to distilling of bere whisky (Islay) and brewing of bere ale (Shetland). Traditionally, bere was of course used for bread and bannocks. Bere is nowadays milled at two mills, one on Orkney and one on the mainland. The international food conservation movement Slow Food has included beremeal on its list of threatened food ingredients – the Ark of Taste – and beremeal will be promoted at Slow Food events. Hopefully Slow Food will also continue its interest in Shetland cabbage as an ingredient of traditional Shetland mutton stew.

Orkney has been very active in marketing beremeal products, but elsewhere, for example on the Western Isles, the flour is very hard to find. Bere bannocks are not marketed. Within the Crofting Resources Program this is one



action point looking at both the production side: how many crofters are interested in growing bere for milling – and the demand side: how can bere products and local markets (tourists included) be further developed?

Heritage potatoes and heritage vegetables

Heritage seed potatoes are also included in the new directives. Heritage potato companies may see a chance to register some local specialities. Here the limitations of the new directive become visible: for very threatened local potatoes such as Shetland Black and Lewis Black additional support (for growers) will be required because of serious blight problems in both potatoes. Registering as Shetland Black potato would in principle restrict the area of marketing of seed potatoes to Shetland. Derogation is possible under specific conditions and the prevalence of blight on Shetland could be a valid one. Defining an area of origin is a form of protection – but at the same time it limits the size of the market and economic viability.

Chances for seed companies

All in all, the new directives will open opportunities for already existing seed companies aiming at marketing older, traditional or heritage varieties. For individual small growers the costs may be too high to be worth going through the registration process of registering or seed testing. The most threatened local varieties, Shetland cabbage, Shetland Black potato, Lewis Black potato, will therefore require more support.

Involvement of crofters

The known diversity of Scottish landraces has attracted interest from plant breeders and growers elsewhere because of the high latitudes and hardiness of Scottish material. It is easy to exploit these local assets outside the crofting areas without any returns to the crofting communities which maintained the plants. In this context another element in the directive is of interest. Seed legislation expert Louwaars sees the opening of the decision-making process on seed legislation to farmers' organisations as very important and an interesting novelty. "It could be a way to take into account the work done by seed networks in each country and also to implement (...) the (International) Treaty, which says that farmers should be involved in the political decisions related to plant genetic resources."

For this reason I have requested that SCF be included in the public consultation on the implementation in Scotland of the new directive.

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RENEWABLE ENERGY

Wind power possibilities

An outline by Nickie May

UNSURPRISINGLY, renewable energy in Orkney equals wind, with Orkney possessing one of the best wind resources within the UK.

The topography of Orkney makes for clean wind – a relatively open landscape ensures less turbulence and more harvestable wind. Harvesting the wind in Orkney began in the 1980s and there are several small-scale (c 5 turbines) commercial wind farms which have been in existence for a number of years. More recently domestic wind turbines have started to appear – there are two here on Shapinsay – and even more recently, six of the smaller Orkney islands are rolling out community-owned wind turbine projects.

Before moving on to the community-owned wind turbine projects I would just like to offer a few details of one of the small turbines here on the island, as it was actually a successful SRDP application. One of the farms has diversified into small-scale jam and preserves manufacture. A 6 kW turbine now supplies the electricity to the converted bothy – an ABDS/marketing grant – where the jam is produced.

Communities can benefit from a wind turbine in their midst in a number of ways. It is standard practice for commercial developments to offer £10-20,000 to an appropriate community organisation to distribute to suitable causes within that community. The island of Sanday has a similar arrangement with Scottish and Southern Electricity (SSE) who have a commercial

development on that island. There are plans for the Sanday Development Trust and SSE to have joint ownership over a new turbine being added to the site. The form of community ownership currently evolving here on the smaller islands is where the developer is the island development trust, run by democratically elected members of the island community.

Another alternative as to how a community of individuals can benefit from a turbine development is the co-operative model. Either a handful of folk get together to invest – one of the turbines here on mainland Orkney, described as a community-owned wind turbine is such an arrangement – or there are larger scale co-operatives as pulled together by Energy4All.

Basically the plans are to install a 900 kW turbine which, on some of the islands, will create an annual income for the community's use of approx £100,000 for the next 20 years. Indeed, this dream has become a reality for Westray with the trust on that island installing its turbine last autumn; Tiree, in the west, is at a similar stage. The recently-announced feed-in tariff rates make these projects look even more attractive although community projects of this type do look for grant funding where possible and the interaction between the tariffs and grants has yet to be clarified.

Before you all get enthusiastic and start clamouring for one, here come the health warnings. The projects are vastly complicated, consume inordinate amounts of time and can create an awful lot of conflict within a small community.

Look seriously at the capacity within the community. Are there enough folk with relevant skills with the time to throw at the project or with the time and the willingness to be outwith their comfort zones to acquire the skills? It's essential to establish that the community does indeed support such a project. A postal vote of the entire community, independently verified, is the most transparent way to go about this. Getting a clear mandate from the community can seriously help smooth the path of the project.

A brief run through the challenges these projects face. Find a wind turbine manufacturer willing to supply to your area – it took Westray two years. Find a suitable site; close to three phase electricity and 10 times the blade diameter from the nearest house and be mindful of any resident bird populations. Planning: expensive, as an environmental impact assessment (a weighty tome) is required and two-stage projects receiving local approval then have to go to the Scottish government. Watch out for the conditions attached. Negotiate with the department who told planning to put the condition in if it is likely to be onerous for the project to comply with it.

Securing agreements over the land and access to the site – lease or freehold? If leasehold, watch how the rental payments are defined, compare them to the cash flow predictions and see if the formula comes up with the sort of money you are expecting to pay. Make sure that the leases are for longer than 20 years and that there is no ability for the developer to end or break

the lease if commercial finance is needed for the project. Grid connection: discuss capacity on the grid in your area, although SSE would not confirm the capacity that is actually available until they made the offer of a grid connection. Restricted capacity equals restricted earnings. With all these things, establish likely timescales for delivery and payment dates etc but remember that milestones in these projects are incredibly fluid.

Now the really scary stuff. These projects face a complex interaction of company, charity and tax law so it is essential that the community group is protected by limited liability – the general legal format is that it is a company limited by guarantee or a community interest company. Check that the objects clauses within the memorandum and articles of association for the company (its constitution) allow the group to run a turbine. If the group has charitable status then it is not allowed to run a commercial business and must set up another company (a trading subsidiary) to run the turbine business to make sure that the charity is isolated from the risk associated with the business of running a turbine. Take out directors' personal liability cover as there are situations in which the protection given by the limited liability status can be lifted and the directors face personal liability. And then when you have done all that, go and negotiate a commercial bank loan for ooh at least a cool £1 million, depending on the capital costs of the project and the amount of grant secured. Good luck!

Skye Renewables Co-operative Ltd

Chairman Donald MacGregor reports

THE 572 MEMBERS who subscribed for shares in Skye Renewables Co-operative Ltd in December 2007 became shareholders in the Ben Aketil wind farm – the first commercial wind farm on the Isle of Skye.

The landowners, MacLeod Estates and the tenants, Feorlig crofting township, granted permission for the construction and operation of the Ben Aketil wind farm to a subsidiary of

Falck Renewables. Planning permission was obtained on 7th September 2006.

The wind farm consists of 10 x 23MW Enercon turbines. Planning permission has now been granted to extend the site by a further 2 x 23MW Enercon turbines.

The site has now been operational for two full years and, apart from the satisfactory return being achieved by members of the co-op, a substantial community benefit fund is also administered by Dunvegan Community Trust.



RENEWABLE ENERGY

Making a contribution to carbon reduction

Carola Bell reports

URRAS OIGHREACHD Ghabhsainn, or the Urras as it is known locally, is the community trust that was set up to undertake the community buyout of the Galson Estate and manage the land for the benefit of the community and wider environment.

The estate covers 55,000 acres of land at the north end of the Isle of Lewis and has a population of just under 2,000, living in 22 crofting townships, with 627 crofts. The area stretches along the north-west coast from Upper Barvas to Port of Ness and down the north-east coast to the boundary with Tolsta. About 4,000 acres is inbye, mainly along the coastline to the west and north, with the rest of the land the moorland common grazings. Almost all the land is under crofting tenure and the estate

has no buildings or major assets.

When the community were first considering the possibility of a buyout, options for future development were discussed and initial feasibility studies undertaken. Opportunities to assist carbon reduction, provide cheaper sources of power and create income from the natural resources of the estate all figured strongly in the community's priorities. The estate is windy, mainly low-lying and with a coastline that has some of the best waves in the world!

In March 2008 the directors of the Urras installed a wind monitoring mast. They decided to do this themselves to save on costs and also to better understand the wind resource they all lived with, but had never accurately measured. With a lot of help from the local township, concrete mast



Board and township working on the energy project

bases were made and positioned and, in partnership with Lews Castle College, the wind mast was erected and data collected. The data proved the excellent wind resource; high average speed and very low turbulence. At the same time the Urras progressed an application for planning permission for up to three turbines (total of 2.7MW), all this work being done with continual support and advice from Community Energy Scotland.

Initial studies into the local wave resource had shown it also to be excellent, but even a very small-scale project would have required large elements of research and development capital and the Urras has no assets to invest in such ideas, however exciting they may be. But at the same time, the

wave resource had come to the attention of npower renewables and Wavegen (Voith). Whilst the Urras wind development is very much aimed at a development by the community, with all the financial benefit returning to the community, the wave project (4MW) proposed for Siadar is a huge multi-million pound research project. The main benefits here would be in the advancement of the technology of harnessing the wave resource. The Urras has a key role to play as the landowner and is working with the developer and the local townships to help the project progress.

The wind project gained planning permission in May 2009 and since then the emphasis has been on gaining a grid connection and arranging funding. Initially it had been a serious concern that no turbine manufacturer would supply a machine to the site, due to the high wind speeds and the distance from any service base. There are several similar-sized community wind energy projects moving forwards in the Western Isles and they work together on such issues. Following a successful arrangement in Orkney, with ongoing support and co-ordination from Community Energy Scotland, Enercon is now keen to supply very suitable turbines to the groups. As the final pieces of the project planning come into place, the community of Galson Estate look forward to a regular income as well as the satisfaction of making a contribution to carbon reduction.

The income stream will make the community self reliant and provide development funding for the foreseeable future.



Board and township working on the energy project



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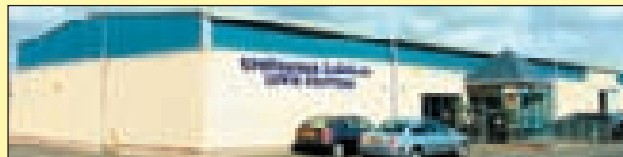
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Argyll Area Meeting Evening of 28th May, Port Appin Hall

Further detail to follow

If you are interested in attending please contact HQ
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RENEWABLE ENERGY

Assynt Hydro

John MacKenzie, founding member of the Assynt Crofters' Trust, outlines the background to their scheme.

THE CURRENT enthusiasm for energy conservation, and in particular the commitment on the part of the Scottish government to increase the proportion of energy generation from renewables, offers significant opportunities for the crofting community.

As well as being the undoubted role model for community-owned estates, Assynt Crofters' Trust also led the way in harnessing renewable energy as a means of producing an income stream. Some members of the original steering group realised very quickly that successful running of a community estate would almost inevitably depend upon a means of finding a core revenue generating activity; the challenge at that early stage of our endeavour was to identify such an activity.

While the media campaign for raising public awareness of the Assynt crofters' aspirations was at a very early stage, a Scottish company of consulting civil engineers telephoned to discuss with a member of our steering group the potential for hydro power on the estate. Having agreed that there was indeed such a possibility it was decided to delay detailed examination of this until after the success, or otherwise, of our bid to buy the estate became known.

The success of Assynt Crofters' Trust is now a matter of history and title to the land of our fathers was taken on 1 February 1993. Shortly afterwards, we kept our promise of renewing our contact with the civil engineers who had originally raised the possibility of hydro generation and a feasibility study was inaugurated. Not long afterwards the first Scottish Renewables Obligation was announced by the then Scottish Secretary of State, Mr Ian Lang and an application was submitted on behalf of the trust for inclusion in the bidding process. Again, after a period of frantic draft design and financial calculation on the part of the trust's consulting engineers and our accountant, a successful bid was submitted and a contract was awarded for a grid connected micro hydro scheme having a maximum output of 220kW. That was the easy part, however.

Severe opposition was faced from the usual suspects in terms of the conservation bodies as well as other more obscure such organisations of whom we knew nothing prior to news being widely splashed of the contract being awarded to us.

Interestingly, when our planning application was formally submitted we were opposed tooth and nail by SNH, SWT and RSPB, while at the same time WWF took the much more enlightened attitude of lodging a formal letter of support with Highland Council. They took the view that a reduction in world greenhouse gas emissions was a more realistic approach to conservation in contrast to the single species preservation policy adopted by the other organisations.

One of our main difficulties stemmed from the fact that an individual, who had been a member of the original crofters' trust board, but who was now a member of the north board of SNH, sought to create doubts in the minds of the authorities about our ability to cope with the financial and organisational challenges of completing an engineering development of the scale envisaged. In the event Highland Council's planning committee gave the scheme their unanimous approval and the project was ultimately finally able to deliver power into the grid in September 2000.

There is no doubt that communities and individuals in Scotland face enormous challenges in bringing such projects to completion in terms of finance and the complex environmental issues that often arise, but the rewards can be great. This is especially true in view of the announcement of the new Feed In Tariffs (FITs) which came into effect on 1 April this year. A developer bringing a scheme into operation in the aftermath of this announcement can expect to receive three times the amount in revenue that we receive as part of the SRO programme. Various bands of payment are now available for the range of generation opportunities that renewable energy technologies can offer a prospective developer. How times have changed in 10 years.

The board of Assynt Crofters' Trust are currently considering a proposal to install a 6kW wind generator in conjunction with a new office development. The expected FIT is approximately 26p/kW with the potential of generating an income of around £10,000 per annum. The anticipated payback time is expected to be of the order of six years. Today renewable energy generation does indeed offer an exciting and realistic development opportunity for energetic and visionary inhabitants of our crofting communities.



The turbine (shaft coupling has been removed for clarity)



The dam



The generator shed

RENEWABLE ENERGY

Wind harvest

THE INTRODUCTION of the new Feed In Tariffs this month has made the implementation of small and medium sized renewable energy projects financially viable.

The new tariffs support various types of renewable technologies, with different payment rates depending on the technology and the size of the plant.

Scotland has one of the best wind resources in Europe and there are many situations where wind is the most appropriate source of renewable energy project. Anyone considering installing a wind turbine on their land might initially be thinking of a small 15kW turbine which they would finance themselves. However in suitable locations thinking bigger may be less risky and offer better returns.

The Enercon E33 wind turbine, rated at 330kW, is the leading medium-sized turbine on the market and offers performance and reliability guarantees that cannot be matched by smaller machines. Over a lifetime everyone involved in the project can be confident that the turbine will deliver. For a reasonably windy site the turbine would generate over 1GWh per year, enough to power three hundred houses on average, so plenty for the croft or for heavy electrical usage such as a dairy unit.

Wind Harvest is able to offer a full development package for an E33 turbine at no cost to the landowner. This includes installation of wind data collection equipment, securing a grid connection, obtaining planning permission and running the procurement and construction process. In return for hosting a turbine on his or her land the crofter receives an income based on a percentage of the gross revenue generated by the turbine. In addition Wind Harvest offers crofters the option of investing in the project and receiving additional income through dividend payments.

Renewable energy grants

THE NATURESAVE Trust, which was set up in 1995 to fund specific environmental and conservation projects throughout the UK and to encourage the greater adoption of sustainable development, especially within the small and medium-sized business community, has announced that it now provides start-up seed corn grants for community renewable energy projects.

The trust is keen to help communities, in particular, that do not have the initial start-up capital to undertake all the preliminary work to get to the planning stage and most importantly for the community to retain as much control as possible over the operating income once the project has been successful.

Recently-funded projects by the trust include: Pilling St John's Primary School, which received funding towards the installation of a wind turbine at the school, providing energy

Environmental Heating Solution Energy Savers slash heating bills

ENVIRONMENTAL Heating Solutions Ltd (EHS) is bringing a warm feeling to a number of properties across the western Highlands and north eastern Scotland.

Units have been installed for housing associations, private houses, offices and retail stores in Oban, Fort William, Isle of Skye and many other locations. Some buildings are well insulated but others are not. One interesting example is a croft house in Achnasheen about one hour west of Inverness. The house was impossible to heat before the unit was fitted, but is now comfortably warm – at minimum cost.

EHS was invited by both West Highland and Lochaber Housing Associations for long-term tests in typical two-storey three-bedroom tenant properties, starting in the summer of 2009. The results are that the tenants' energy bills have been slashed by more than £1,000 per year. The total consumption for

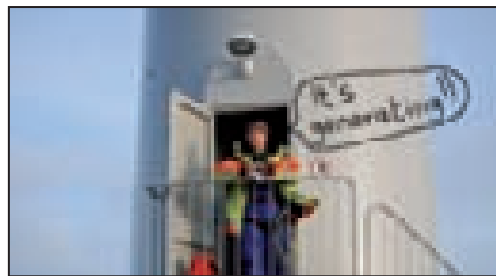
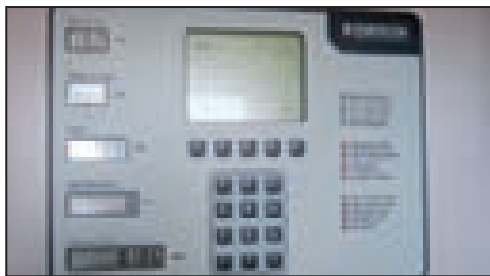
the year was proven to be less than 2,000 kWh, which only costs £120 for THTC consumers.

The EHS Energy Saver was also proven to work without interruption during the coldest winter 2009/10 for 30 years with temperatures as low as minus 20° C.

The Energy Saver uses heat pump technology, but does not need large ground works as it relies on the air. Installed in a day, it causes minimum disruption to your property. The total cost including installation is less than £ 3,000.

Please contact Bill Hall on bill.hall@eheatgroup.com or 01470 422000 for further information.

We also have a website www.eheatgroup.com with lots of additional information. We would be happy to survey your property at no cost. We can also offer to demonstrate the Energy Saver at our show site on the Isle of Skye or alternatively at other locations closer to you.



Tiree turbine and meter showing that the turbine is generating

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RENEWABLE ENERGY



Community Energy Scotland
Cumhachd Chomhunnachd na h-Alba

COMMUNITY Energy Scotland is Scotland's only national body dedicated wholly to supporting Scotland's community-based and voluntary organisations to benefit from renewable energy.

Our aim is to build confidence, resilience and wealth at community level in Scotland through sustainable energy development. A fundamental aim behind the founding of Community Energy Scotland (CES) as a social enterprise and charitable body and a large part of the current work we do is aimed at using sustainable energy development to enable communities to be more confident, resilient and help themselves. We achieve our charitable aims through our service agreements with the Scottish government and Highlands and Islands Enterprise.

Community Energy Scotland provides support and administers the Scottish government Community and Renewable Energy Scheme (CARES), the Highlands and Islands Communities Renewable Energy Support Programme (CRESP), and the Big Lottery's Growing Community Assets (GCA) funds to assist properly constituted qualifying community groups. However we also work directly as the central part of a wider community and network, working from the ground up to make a real difference.

One key way in which we believe that we, our members and partner communities have led in trying to achieve this is by evolving the concept and achieving the practicalities of communities developing their own community-owned larger scale revenue generating renewable projects. Originally pioneered by the HIE's Community Energy Unit, later when we became the Highland and Islands Community Energy Company, and now further supported through our role as Community Energy Scotland, the principle is that it is possible for any local not-for-profit community group (such as a development trust or local community partnership) to combine local voluntary effort with support and advice from

ourselves and wider specialists to let the community itself lever in grant funding and combine this with commercial finance to maximise and retain the ownership of the project within the community.

This was first shown to work on the Isle of Gigha with the 3 x 225KW Dancing Ladies community wind project. Since then, Westray and Tiree have successfully installing their wholly community-owned single 900KW turbine machines and approximately another 30 are also in progress and working with Community Energy Scotland throughout Scotland. Five of these are in Orkney, including the Shapinsay project described in Nickie May's article in this edition. Nickie provides some wise words on the challenges facing any community considering getting involved in any significant renewable revenue generation project. It is a serious, often frustrating, long-term undertaking. In our experience, it is essential that the community clearly do, and can be shown to, want the project and the responsibility as well as all the benefits. But the benefits can be huge. These projects can provide a truly independent revenue stream for some of our most fragile communities and build a long-term fund usually in excess of £2M for a typical 900KW wind turbine installation. The projects can create industry and employment in the community and also allow the community to develop wider skills, confidence and competence of their own for further enterprise and activity as a result of taking these projects forward.



Tiree

The Camuscross and Duisdale Initiative, also included in this issue, has received ongoing support from us and funding towards the hydro scheme they are seeking to develop. Rab Lees, Community Energy Scotland's area manager for West Highland has advised the groups on visits to the potential site for the hydro. Community Energy Scotland's north highland team are supporting the Assynt Crofters' Trust with their current plans to install a small 6kW wind turbine and helping Applecross Community

Company who have set up a renewables working group to look into their options for woodfuel and hydro. Western Isles staff have also helped Urras Oighreachd Ghabhsainn crofting estate on the Isle of Lewis over several years with their larger-scale community wind turbine plans.

Our staff can offer support and advice from a very early stage, can fund feasibility studies to look at the options for your group, guide you through the planning and grid application process and take you all the way through to full installation.

We would encourage any community group or crofting community wanting to consider getting involved in renewable energy projects to contact Community Energy Scotland on 01349 860120, email info@communityenergyscotland.org.uk or visit the website www.communityenergyscotland.org.uk where you will find details of your local Community Energy Scotland development officer.

If you want to join us and become a member of Community Energy Scotland, please call Marion O'Hara on 01349 860122 or email marion.ohara@communityenergyscotland.org.uk.



Gigha turbines looking out towards Jura

RENEWABLE ENERGY

Allt Duisdale reservoir

THE COMMUNITY of Camuscross and Duisdale in south Skye will soon become the proud owners of Allt Duisdale reservoir, only the eighth community in Scotland to purchase land under the Land Reform (Scotland) Act.

They plan to develop the reservoir as a micro-hydro scheme and hope to work with the local grazings committee to find a site for the generator shed.

The project started in February 2009 when Camuscross and Duisdale Initiative (CDI) became aware that the small, redundant Scottish Water reservoir had been offered for sale by auction in Glasgow. With only thirteen days to go, they immediately contacted the community assets branch of the Scottish government to see if they could use the Land Reform Act to stop the asset from being sold on the open market. Working with Sleat Community Trust, they successfully persuaded Scottish Water to withdraw the reservoir from auction, which gave CDI time to put in a "registration of interest in land" under the land reform act.

The registration of interest in land process is not one which community companies can enter lightly – the initial complicated application form was just the start of the process. Once the application had been accepted by the Scottish government, there were a number of other procedures to get through, all with very strict deadlines. At any of these hurdles, the project

could have been stopped in its tracks.

It was only when CDI received the letter from Awards for All in February 2010, to say that the application for £6,457 to purchase the reservoir had been successful, that the community company knew that all the months of hard work had paid off. HIE's Community Land Unit is also assisting the project by funding the conveyancing costs of the purchase.

Once the reservoir is in community ownership, the next step will be to conduct a more detailed study into the design, plan and economics of the hydro scheme, prior to getting the funding to develop the project; and begin to implement a biodiversity plan for the reservoir and small strip of land around it.

CDI hopes to use the existence of the rights given to crofting communities under the Land Reform Act to negotiate the purchase of land from the landlord for the generator shed for the hydro scheme. Although most people know about the large community buy-outs, such as those in the Western Isles which have been made possible because of the existence of this legislation, the possibility of using the act to negotiate purchase of small pieces of land, currently under crofting tenure, for example for renewable energy projects, seems to have been little explored.

The community company has an excellent relationship with Camuscross grazings committee, whose forward-thinking attitude means that CDI is able to consider a number



Student group visit

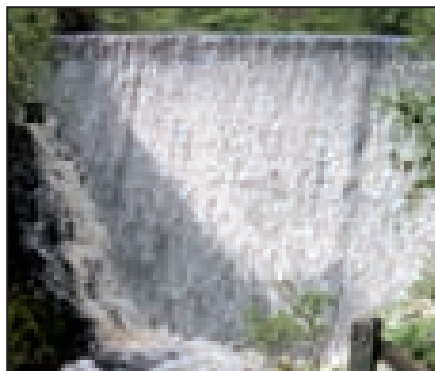
of partnership projects involving common grazings land – including affordable house sites, footpaths and heritage projects. The aim is that these projects will bring both wide community benefit and also some revenue for the grazings committee to reinvest in crofting activities and infrastructure. The grazings committee is particularly to be commended for being willing to consider releasing land for community projects, as it has one of the tiniest hill grazings around – with only approximately 350 acres and 37 shareholders!

As the number of community companies and trusts grows each year, there are many exciting possibilities in the crofting counties for community trusts to work actively with crofters and grazings committees on projects which could bring both agricultural and wider community benefit. Perhaps just as importantly, such joint projects have the potential to increase goodwill towards crofters and increase the value and status placed on the crofting system by the community.

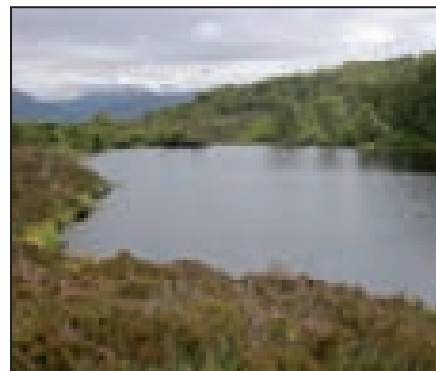
Our thanks to Susan Walker for this report



One of many visits to Allt Duisdale Reservoir - L to R, Yvonne Davidson and Colin Grey (Community Assets branch of the Scottish Government), CDI directors Graeme MacKenzie, Nicola Thomson and Donnie MacKinnon



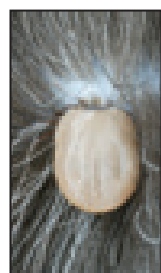
The Allt Duisdale reservoir dam showing the volume of water which the community hopes can be harnessed to generate electricity and an annual income for community projects



Allt Duisdale Reservoir with the hills of Knoydart in the background.

Controlling ticks

TICKS AND THE diseases they can transmit result in serious economic loss to upland livestock farmers, sporting estates and are increasingly perceived as a public health concern.



In the UK the main diseases that can be transmitted by ticks are tick-borne fever (affecting sheep and cattle), Lyme disease (affecting humans, dogs and horses), louping-ill (affecting all livestock, humans and red grouse) and Babesiosis (affecting cattle).

Although there are at least 22 species of tick in the UK, the sheep tick, (*Ixodes ricinus*) is of most concern to livestock farming. Ticks have a complex three-host life cycle and can feed off any warm-blooded animal (including man). However, ticks only suck blood for about 20 days of the life-cycle of a tick is spent not on the host but in the environment.

Ticks need a moist environment to survive when off the host. Ticks will generally not survive in well-drained lowland pasture. However, they can flourish on improved pasture if it receives rainfall throughout the year. Ticks also require an average daily temperature of 70C to be active so they are generally inactive during the

average UK winter.

Controlling ticks

The control of ticks requires a vigorous and sustained programme if it is going to have an impact. Although much of the tick's life-cycle is spent away from the host, control measures to reduce numbers of ticks off the host are limited. Attempts to use insecticides by environmental application are unacceptable, due to the effect on all forms of insect life. Reducing suitable tick habitat, such as bracken control and creation of well-drained improved pasture lacking a moisture retentive mat does have a role, but only as part of a more comprehensive strategy.

Current control is therefore largely reliant

Has your croft shrunk for IACS 2010?

THE ABOVE QUESTION may appear to be nonsensical – surely your croft has not got smaller unless you have sold part of it?

However this year the answer may be YES in many cases. The size in question is the forage area. The forage area is defined as the area of ground your stock have access to for grazing. Therefore heavy stands of bracken and gorse should be deducted from your forage area when you claim. These areas have to be deducted as stock cannot access them nor is there grass growing beneath.

Please see photos kindly supplied by SGRPID to give an indication of ground that should be deducted from your forage area on the field data sheets of the IACS form.

For bracken the key thing is to deduct some ground from your forage from each field with dense bracken. If you are considering treating bracken this coming season we would advise that you deduct the area from IACS 2010 and increase the area after treatment for IACS 2011.

If you are going to treat bracken seek advice as to whether you can get grant assistance from CCAGS or SRDP. Please ensure you follow all the rules such as applying to SEPA for permission and following the suitable buffers (buffers depend on type of application ie helicopter or knapsack).

For further information please refer to the Prevention of Environmental Pollution from Agricultural Activity (PEPFAA) code (we can supply you with a copy of this if you require it – please contact your local SAC office).

A few things to think about before spraying:

- Don't apply any chemicals (unless approved for use in or near water) within five metres of the bank or watercourse.



Ineligible bracken. This area of bracken is so dense it should be deducted from your claim. The scrub in the background may also need to be deducted if there is no grass growing beneath it. If you have woodland/scrub on your croft/farm you should always seek advice.

- Don't bury empty chemical containers on the croft without the correct permit.
- Don't permit spray or spray drift to endanger sensitive habitats – in the case of bracken this will be ferns or woodlands.

If you wish to apply fertiliser and grass-seed to areas post treatment you may need to complete an environmental impact assessment (EIA) if the area has not been ploughed or worked for seven years.

For gorse control in this coming season we would again advise the conservative approach of deducting the area from this year's claim and then increasing in subsequent claims once gorse has been destroyed. If you are burning gorse you have to comply with the muirburn

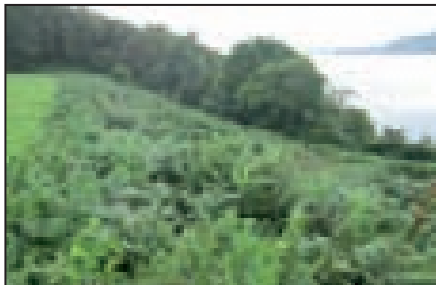
code. If you are using herbicides please ensure you comply with the PEPFAA code.

Another key issue for this year's IACS are house sites that have been sold yet not removed from IACS maps, even if you have removed them from your forage area. It is important that each year you check your IACS maps for accuracy. If you have any queries, please contact the department, or your agent if he or she completes an IACS on your behalf.

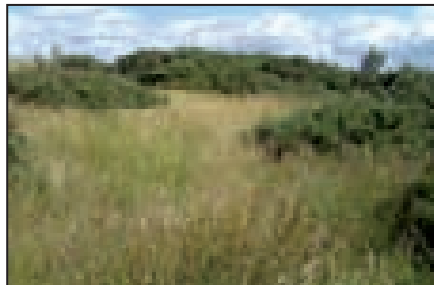
All the best with filling in your IACS form this year. Please do not hesitate to contact your local SAC office if you require advice on any topics featured.

Janette Sutherland

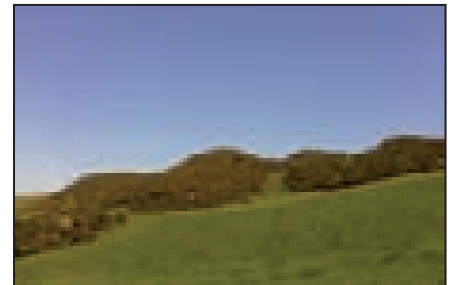
SAC Portree 01478 61 2993



Ineligible bracken stand, although the grass in the foreground is eligible.



The gorse in the background should be deducted from your forage area.



The gorse-covered hillocks should be deducted. The small paths livestock have made through this stand are eligible.

Controlling ticks continued

on the application of suitable acaricide/insecticide treatments to sheep. Most control strategies rely on the application of pour-ons or dips which can be costly, as such treatments have to be repeated every 30 to 40 days during the tick active period. Where there are large numbers of alternative wild tick hosts such as mountain hares and deer, their numbers will also have to be managed if tick numbers are to be reduced. Herbal feed-blocks have recently been promoted to control ticks but as there is a complete lack of any evidence to support their efficacy, their use cannot be advocated.

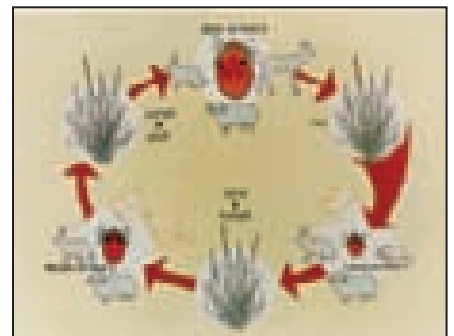
Protecting Yourself

Ticks can spread diseases that can affect humans. Control of ticks on farm and estate

workers should therefore also be considered. Suitable clothing which will minimise skin exposure should be worn in known tick-infested habitats and when ticks are found they should be promptly removed, preferably using a specifically designed tick-detaching tool.

Hugh Reid is a Research Fellow at Moredun Research Institute, just outside Edinburgh. Moredun runs a membership scheme which aims to keep farmers and their vets up to date with the latest developments in animal health research. If you would like a free copy of an eight page factsheet on ticks and diseases they cause or are interested in becoming a member of Moredun, please contact Margaret Bennett at The Moredun Foundation,

Pentlands Science Park, Bush Loan, Penicuik, EH26 0PZ phone 0131 445 5111 or visit their website at www.moredun.org.uk



Crofter's wife column

BC ALBA'S sheepdog trials programme, Farpaisean Chon-Chaorach, has become a hit in our house.

For me, I enjoy it on a non-technical level: the scenery, the day's weather, the sounds (whistles, shouted commands, bleating) the suspense. It makes entertaining telly. For the Crofter of the house it makes interesting viewing: "That's how it's really done." he'll say after a good round, head shaking, mind on the young dog in the kennel outside. As her training recommences in

the morning some new method inspired by the programme will be worked into her routine in the hope that, one day, she makes the grade, a grade...any grade...

It recently made me consider that bond between crofter and collie. The two go together like, well, let's not go down that route, suffice to say they just go together: a typical crofting image. When a dog works for you, with you, easing the burden of arduous tasks and providing unquestionable loyalty and companionship, the bond goes far deeper than the usual man-and-his-dog relationship.

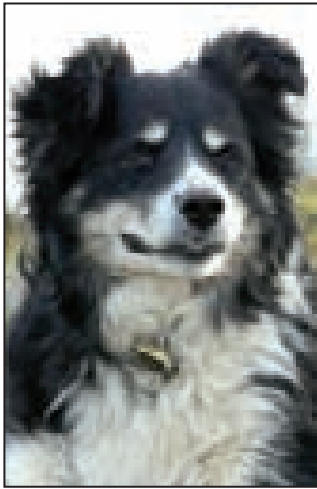
When I first came to the croft here I was immediately given the once over by the residents dogs, two of them at that time, in much the same way that a young suitor might have been given the once over by the matriarchal cailleach in years gone by. I seemed to satisfy their canine criteria and was, thankfully, accepted. On that first visit I was taken out onto the hill by the Crofter and the "old" dog (there was only a matter of months between them but she's stuck with the title none-the-less) looking for a runaway tup. For whatever reason, at some point the Crofter decided to proceed alone and abandoned me on the

hillside with instructions to neither move off nor allow the dog to follow him. I swallowed back the worries, grabbed the old leather collar attached to this huge, hairy (and smelly) collie and lowered myself onto a rock to await his return. Looking back, it could be regarded as a moment of bonding: I now love this old dog dearly, in spite of her air of supremacy!

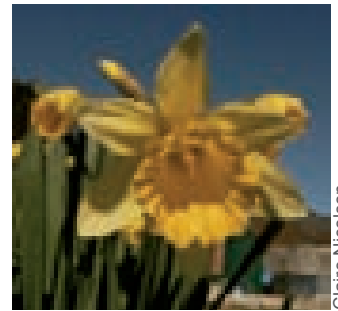
Tweed, as her name suggest, hails from the Borders but has lived on the croft longer than any of us having having been brought here as a young puppy by the Crofter's late grandfather. She's a real character and to her the croft and hill are her world and she roams it like a proud landlord surveying his acreage. A reasonably average sheepdog, she's a little strong-willed but incredibly hardy: at fourteen years of age she is as keen as ever to go out gathering with the Crofter, rain or shine. Other days she'll disappear for a while visiting all her old haunts. She's been known to turn up in the dining room of our local B&B at breakfast time, a hopeful look on her face, and, on one occasion, snuck off and followed the Crofter down to the local bar where she socialised with a crowd of well-to-do guests

in front of a roaring fire in the lounge while he enjoyed a quiet pint in the public bar!

Sadly, we lost our other old dog before Christmas but, anticipating the day when Tweed would need to be retired, Jen arrived in our midst as a tiny bundle of fur and fun last last spring. It is she who is playing on the Crofter's mind as we watch the screen admiring the combined skills of man and dog. As we sit round the fire watching the spectacle unfold, guessing the judges' scores, sharing the pain of a bad round, a pot of tea on the hearth, biscuits and cheese littering the coffee table, I smile and wonder if we make a stereotypical crofting scene? Probably. Well, at least we haven't gone as far as bringing the dogs inside to join in the viewing...yet!



Claire Nicolson



Claire Nicolson



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CROFTING CONNECTIONS

Honey producer creates a buzz in Crofting Connections schools

PUPILS AT Gergask and Dalwhinnie Primary Schools were buzzing with excitement when The Honey Man came to visit them in March as part of the Crofting Connections programme.

David Johnstone, who has been keeping bees at Lynchat for over 40 years, came along in his beekeeper's suit with a section of one of his beehives, some honeycomb, beeswax, a smoker and even some of his own delicious honey for the children to taste.

David also starred in a short film that was screened in the schools by filmmaker Helen Graham called "Hannah and the Honey Man" which features nine-year-old Hannah Robertson from Kingussie Primary School in the role of interviewer. The conversation between them about various aspects of bee keeping, honey production and pollination,

as well as problems currently experienced in bee colonies across the world, illustrates a real connection when an older person passes on his skills and knowledge, as well as his passion, to a young school girl who is keen and interested to learn.

These workshops were



Hannah Robertson and the Honey Man and pupils at Gergask Primary

organised by Kingussie Food on Film working in partnership with Crofting Connections. Helen Graham and fellow committee member Jillian Robertson, an aspiring crofter, laid on an interactive quiz on bees and honey with slides and questions to get the children involved at the



start of the workshops. They then screened the film, which was followed by an introduction to The Honey Man. Children were encouraged to ask questions and were able to handle and smell the equipment and samples he had brought along.

When oatcakes and honey were passed around to complete this five senses learning experience, even those who had been timid about trying honey for the first time decided to give it a go and agreed with their classmates that it was delicious. David was delighted to see the children so engaged with the whole process of beekeeping, and said that he hoped some of them might take it up themselves, particularly considering the importance of bees in remote communities, where they are more likely to stay free of disease and benefit from the wild landscapes.

Helen Graham

CROFTING HERO

WHEN RETIRED Ayrshire GP Elizabeth Mackenzie made the journey north to settle in the North Sutherland crofting community of Skerray more than 20 years ago, it may have been in anticipation of a quiet life. That certainly did not prove to be the case and, indeed, may not have been possible for someone like Betty MacKenzie of Skerray.



The Skerray crofting district, made up of its 11 small townships, may not have registered with any significance on the crofting map at that point in time.

However over the succeeding years it became a hive of activity and creativity. For much of that period Betty MacKenzie, although not herself a crofter, was grazings clerk for the Skerray common grazings committee. The two things are not coincidental.

Betty MacKenzie would not have been content to record and arrange meetings. She was an activist who quite simply got things done. She was directly involved in the three local organisations that were pivotal in gaining Skerray

wider recognition in this period. The Skerray grazings committee, the Skerray hall committee and Comunn Eachraidh Sgeireadh (Skerray historical association) all gained considerably from her abilities and were instrumental in the fuller development of the Skerray crofting community. In addition to this immediate community involvement she was also involved with other wider health, community and social welfare organisations. Sadly this dedicated community activist died in January of this year.

With approximately 70 small crofts and around 40 crofters, Skerray made a bid to be included in a SNH pilot agricultural demonstration project in 1993. Having gained selection, a significant number of crofters participated in the reintroduction of rotational cropping for agricultural and environmental benefits. Bracken control, the maintenance of hay meadows and the restoration of traditional dykes and buildings also featured in this programme.

The funding for the restoration of two derelict croft buildings in the centre of the community was also procured. This provided the base for local workshops and retail outlets as well as accommodating the museum and archive for Comunn Eachraidh Sgeireadh.

The establishment of a local co-operative entailed that crofting costs were reduced through bulk purchasing. Judicious use of the Crofting Township Development

Scheme (CTDS) in the same period also saw the provision of new facilities such as a large multi-purpose shed, handling pens, fencing, roads and communal machinery.

On the back of such developments Betty MacKenzie championed the case for the Skerray crofting community to receive the accolade of Crofting Township of the Year and the £5000 prize that went with it. This was deservedly awarded in 1997.

Resting on one's laurels was not in the nature of Betty MacKenzie and others in this community. Major crofter forestry initiatives were planned and undertaken by the grazings committee in the next decade. These were carefully coordinated with other developments from other community groups to gain maximum benefit from the CTDS. No sooner had one set of projects been successfully completed than Betty would be sourcing funding for whatever else might directly benefit the community.

Throughout this period she was a constant source of enthusiasm and energy for the delivery of practical initiatives on behalf of the Skerray crofting community. Much of the work centred around trying to retain the maximum financial benefits for the local community and economy.

Of course Betty MacKenzie was not the sole contributor in this process and her methodology might not have met with universal

approval. Opinion and debate are part and parcel of community life and while Betty may not always have been the most diplomatic, she was certainly very pragmatic. What was always noticeable was her good grace and sense of humour and the ability to simply get things done.

Betty MacKenzie's ability to operate with like-minded individuals was most clearly evident in the working partnership she formed with someone else who came into the Skerray crofting community around the same time. David Bowes took on a croft in Skerray as a young man, built up a successful business and chaired many community organisations, including the Skerray common grazings committee. These two individuals were regarded as key figures in making that committee "one of the most progressive in the country." Sadly David Bowes died within a few weeks of Betty MacKenzie as a result of driving accident.

Their passing has left a considerable gap in the crofting and community organisations of Skerray. However, together they have left an important legacy. Both came into this crofting community and enriched it considerably. In the case of Betty MacKenzie perhaps these words spoken locally in appreciation encapsulates that contribution: "There were an awful lot of things done that wouldn't have been done if it wasn't for her."



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MEMBERS' PAGES

Crofting induction courses

IT MUST BE SPRING – the SCF crofting induction courses are coming to an end!

Despite horrendous winter weather and another rushed start, we managed to get five courses under way by mid-January with courses being held in Lewis, Rogart, Dingwall, Grantown-on-Spey and the Isle of Skye with a total of over 80 students signing up for the 10 weekly sessions.

With all the changes in crofting regulation, legislation and support over the past year, there was indeed a great deal to learn in this year's courses. With the change in the Crofters Commission role to that of purely regulatory, we had to add course certification and advertising to our budget and we are grateful to HIE for once again financing these courses.

Despite some of the worst winter weather we have had for years, very few sessions had to be cancelled and we seem to have attracted a very intrepid core of students, some of whom travelled great distances every week to their sessions. This in itself shows the level of commitment from our students.

Although the final reports on the courses are still coming in, it would appear that we attracted quite a number of younger people, which is always encouraging, although most of them were still looking for or without crofts, which is sad. Unless the younger people get into crofting at a time when they are able to meet the challenges presented by crofting in the 21st

century, there really is not much hope for the future of crofting.

We also learned, to our amazement and consternation, that the Crofters Commission no longer have or maintain a list, or register, of people interested in acquiring crofts. This situation brought despair and despondency to many of our students as they saw no other way by which they could achieve their goals or even how to get started. As reported elsewhere in this issue, the SCF is strongly rejecting the proposal for the register to be maintained by Registers of Scotland and advocating that it remain with the Commission.

The costs of acquiring croft assignments – if any were to be

got – was another major problem with the prices being asked far exceeding what is realistically achievable for local young people. A sad state of affairs.

Over the past few months, Shetland has also run two croft induction courses which have been held by and run with the help of Shetland College. They had their final evening at the beginning of April with 12 students completing the courses.

We are also investigating ways of possibly making this course more widely available to those in very remote locations and those unable to attend weekly evening classes, with a range of options being put forward from distance learning

to dedicated three-day courses.

It is also encouraging that smallholders in England are keen to adopt the format and content of the crofters and smallholders national occupational standards which we have been working on together with Lantra for the past three years. Work to progress this is ongoing with a bid for SRDP funding about to be submitted. Watch this space.

For further information about training courses near you contact Scottish Crofting Foundation HQ on 01599 566365, or email: training@crofting.org, or visit SCF's website on www.crofting.org



Skye and Lochalsh graduates

Office blog

IN THE LAST edition of *The Crofter* we gave you the SCF official's diary to give readers an insight into the type of work undertaken on member's behalf. Now this blog will give you information on what SCF office staff have been doing since the last edition of *The Crofter*.

The beginning of March saw the meat marketing conference take place in Inverness which office staff attended to help Donald Murdie manage the two days. They were on hand for any technical glitches, to liaise with the hotel staff and to take notes so that a write up could be done for the benefit of members who were not present at the conference. All in all the

conference was a success, as I am sure you will agree from the write ups.

Once staff returned to the office it was straight into catching up with emails and phone messages. *The Crofter* had also to be sent out along with any additional information such as the questionnaires and individual slips regarding branch and area AGMs.

Once this had been cleared from our desks it was back to the usual daily tasks, processing membership letters, sending out press releases and updating the website with these.

As the crofting induction courses come to an end we have been assisting in sending out the

certificates to course directors along with information for potential new members. There have been a number of participants taking advantage of the special offers available and we would like to welcome you to the SCF.

With the help of Joyce we have set up a SCF facebook page to expand our networks and catch up with the times! We are currently sitting at just under 100 members. If you have a facebook page and would like to join the group please search for The Scottish Crofting Federation and click on join. If you are also writing a blog we would like to invite you to post your blogs to our page.

We have had a good response to the questionnaires – currently

with 300 replies. Karen has had the task of inputting all of these into the database set up by Russell Smith. Russell has also kindly analysed the replies and you can read about this in the separate article.

Due to the AGM we have had to this edition of the Crofter out sooner than usual. We have new nominations for the board and the council. You can see the profiles of the new board members in this edition. As well as all this articles have to be written for *The Crofter*.

We send out over 2000 copies of *The Crofter* so there is a bit of preparation involved in postage of these. We hope you all have enjoyed this latest edition!

MEMBERS' PAGES

New board members nominated

THE annual general meeting of the Scottish Crofting Federation will take place on Saturday 5th June 2010 at the Balmacara Hotel, Kyle of Lochalsh at 3pm.

The calling notice is included in this edition of The Crofter. If you are unable to attend please return the proxy form which is on the reverse of your calling notice.

This year our current chairman Neil Macleod is standing down as he has

now served for a full term. However he will continue on the board for a further year. Donald MacDonald and John Macleod have completed their term by rotation and will stand down.

Earlier this year nominations were sought from the SCF branch and area network for candidates for the board.

Two members, Donnie MacDonald from Lewis and John Gillies from Raasay were duly nominated and will be appointed to the board at the AGM

SCF is now on Facebook

Join our Facebook group

The SCF Facebook group is another way for you to keep up to date on the latest from SCF.

Join our Facebook group to:

- share your news, thoughts and ideas with other SCF members
- find out more about SCF's work, including alerts to new information including press releases, new member benefits and resources;
- give your comments and feedback on the work of SCF.



New SCF director profiles

DONNIE M MACDONALD was born Isle of Lewis and educated at the Nicolson Institute. He studied business management at Robert Gordon University and rural development at Lews Castle College, Stornoway. His early career was in retail management, and he worked with Shell UK before returning to Stornoway to set up his own electronics business.

Donnie lives on a croft with stock and uses his own trusty grey Fergie tractor for croft work. With a keen interest in horticulture, he grows his own vegetables. Living near the seashore, seaweed is used as fertiliser.

Donnie believes passionately in the crofting way of life and the sense of community that it generates although, he says, that is now difficult to find in any village in the Western Isles. He has been grazings clerk for eight years and is a Crofters Commission assessor. He became involved with SCF three years ago. He said: "I watched and listened for the first year and was impressed by what I saw and heard; a dedicated team of people with a remit and will to look after crofters and their rights."

Heavily involved in community projects including the biggest community windfarm in Britain, Donnie also has a parallel 'career' in television and the theatre. He is currently involved in seeking funding for and implementing an intergenerational project for the Western Isles.



Donnie M MacDonald



John Willie Gillies

JOHN WILLIE GILLIES is a full time crofter living on the Isle of Raasay and has been a member of SCU/SCF right from the start.

A shareholder and chairman of North Raasay sheep stock club, he is also a shareholder and secretary of Balachurn sheep stock club. Further involvements are as secretary/treasurer of Raasay Crofters Association, who hold the sporting lease on this "Department" estate and as director of Raasay House community company. John Willie is also serving his second term as Crofters Commission assessor for Raasay. He managed Shuna Island farm in Appin for 21 years till October 2008.

John Willie would like to see reorganisation of sheep stock clubs where inactive shareholders are as big a problem as absentee or inactive crofters.

MEMBERS' PAGES

Youth centre political training

Fergus Walker from Camuscross reports on a recent Via Campesina meeting

TWENTY SIX young people from around Europe spent five intensive days in February learning about the international struggle of peasant farmers against vast political and corporate control mechanisms; and started to plan action to change the status quo.

The event was organised by La Via Campesina, an international organisation that champions the cause of small scale and subsistence, or peasant, farmers. La Via Campesina is a world-wide network of member organisations from individual nations, of which the Scottish Crofting Federation is one. Each time there is a Via Campesina meeting they ask for one male and one female representative from each organisation. So Karen Campbell and myself set off to Geneva as the two representatives from the SCF.

When we arrived, we were welcomed with some interest.

"Ah, so you're the crofters!" exclaimed one of the organisers.

"We've wanted to meet real crofters for some time."

In the majority of Europe it is very difficult to get access to new plots of land as most of the arable is locked into the large-scale industrial agriculture system. To hear of a land where you can be assigned a plot of your own, and what's more, be given the opportunity for community buy-outs, was amazing. "I've been doing research into land-reform across Europe, and Scottish Land Reform Act is the only one I can find. It's just brilliant that you have this," one of the attendants commented to us.

We covered a huge amount of ground in those five days. The first day involved finding out more about La Via Campesina and how the organisation worked. The second day began with a breakneck tour of the decision-makers of agricultural policy, from the GATT agreement to the WTO, the IMF, the UN, the FAO, to the European Union and the central agricultural policy. Before we'd finished the discussions that followed, we were already starting the third day, watching

a film that told the tale of how small-scale Romanian farmers are being ruined by the CAP and are obliged to become migrant workers tied to industrial agribusiness, such as the strawberry farms of southern Spain. The fourth day brought us to some of the concepts that are central to La Via Campesina: food sovereignty and agro-ecology. And by the fifth and final day, with our heads reeling with information worthy of the United Nations general assembly agenda, it was time to act and actually pin down some concrete decisions for further action.

It was a truly inspiring experience. It was amazing to meet such a focussed and committed bunch of young people – people who seemed undaunted by hugely bold plans to take on global corporations, encourage young people across the world to return to a farming way of life and decommission capitalism. They certainly were not thinking small.

One of the things that stood out for me from the visit to Geneva – perhaps because it was a break

from our high octane cogitations – was a visit to a cooperative farm in the outskirts of the city. In a most unlikely location tucked in between industrial complexes and barren waste ground is a thriving polytunnel market garden. It is a cooperative of 150 members; each pays an annual fee which pays for all their vegetables for a year, plus enough to employ three part time workers to tend the produce. They proudly showed me their promotional leaflet – on which they declared solidarity with a system of land tenure which to them represented independence, freedom, and a future for food production – with the intriguing slogan: "Viva Crofting!"

I think we need some Viva Crofting back here in Scotland! Across Europe and across the world, there are like-minded, progressive and radical young people and I'm sure that young people here, the current and potential crofters, can show the same vitality, the same spirit.

I'm now convinced that being a revolting young peasant is something to be proud of!

Who will be the standard bearers to carry crofting into the 21st century?

SCF HQ's Karen Campbell offers an open invitation to a new initiative

THE SCF is reaching out to young crofters who want to work together to bring new life to crofting.

There are many issues that face young people who are interested in crofting. It is commonly known that crofters are an aging population and that there have been a high number of young people migrating away from remote areas. There is also no new entrant scheme to help young people into crofting. These problems, coupled with unobtainable high prices for housing and land, brings concern for the long-term viability of communities. Despite these difficulties there are many young people who believe that WE ARE THE FUTURE of crofting. So we have taken lead from other European organisations that have a place for young people to have their say. There is strength in numbers and together we can shape our own future!

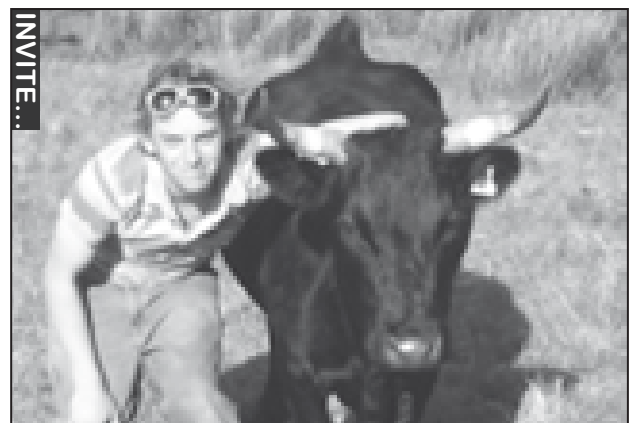
If you are interested in crofting, have a croft or are hoping to obtain one then we want you to get involved. We want to

give you the chance of meeting up with like-minded people to discuss the issues we as young crofters face today, to learn new skills and share experiences with others. Working with the SCF will help us to make our voices heard and ensure that crofting has a viable and bright future for us and the wider community.

Young Crofters would be a new autonomous group which would give the younger generation a place within the existing SCF structure. A place on the council has also been made available so we can ensure that we will have a voice and be able to bring new ideas into the organisation. We can use the influential powers of the SCF for our benefit to make sure that young crofters have a future in the crofting counties.

If you are interested and want more information please get in touch with me: karen@crofting.org or on 01599 566365. We are also looking for suggestions on what you would want to achieve from being part of a young crofters network, so you can shape the future of the group.

Will the new generation of crofters please stand up!



would you join a YOUNG CROFTERS network?

Young Crofters, part of the Scottish Crofting Federation, would give young people a specific voice within the SCF. It would be a chance to meet up, discuss the most important issues for young crofters today, learn new skills, and swap tips on the best way to shear a sheep!

If you have or would like a croft, are interested in producing healthy, tasty, or environmentally friendly food, are proud of crofting and its traditions, or want to be part of the future of crofting - we want to hear from you. All ideas welcome - what we need is enthusiasm!

Who will be the standard bearers to carry Crofting, fighting fit, into the 21st Century?

WILL THE NEW GENERATION OF CROFTERS PLEASE STAND UP!

Please get in touch and tell us if you're interested. Contact:
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Crofters well placed to help the government achieve renewable targets

Free seminar on crofting resource

THE HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS is the windiest region in Europe and, although this winter may have been drier than normal, on average 60 inches of rain fall here each year. This means that crofters are well placed to help the Scottish government achieve its target of providing 50% of our electricity generation from renewable sources by 2020. Wind and rain could well be your croft's greatest asset.

SCF has organised a renewable energy event to raise awareness of the opportunities available for townships for renewable developments on in-bye and common grazing. The new Feed-In Tariff (FIT), which takes effect from this April, coupled with the generation potential of crofting areas, should provide the incentive for townships and individuals to generate their own energy.

"The renewable energy feed-in tariff could pay up to £10,000 per annum to an owner of an 11 kW small wind turbine in a location with high, consistent wind speeds," commented Alex Murley, head of small systems at British Wind Energy Association.

The programme is designed primarily for crofters, grazings shareholders, grazings clerks and members of crofting communities and will include presentations from crofters who have themselves successfully embraced renewable energy technologies.

The event will help townships and individuals understand the opportunities and benefits available if they are considering using their land for the production of energy and is part of the SCF Crofting Resources Programme funded by the SRDP and HIE.

Speakers include Eilidh Ross, crofting lawyer with Macleod and MacCallum and a

representative from The Highland Council's planning department, who will both cover the groundwork required in establishing renewables on croft land.

David Cameron of the North Harris Trust and SCF's Norman Leask will talk about renewable developments on croft land and common grazings.

Chris Rodgers from Renewable Energy and Asset Finance Scottish Co-Op will give advice on funding, followed by an outline by an expert from the Scottish government on what might assistance might be available from SRDP.

The seminar, which takes place on Saturday 5th June in Balmacara, will be followed by the SCF AGM.

There are limited places so booking this FREE event is essential. To secure your place, e-mail bookings@crofting.org or telephone HQ on 01599 566 365.

One size doesn't fit all

SCF annual gathering 2010

THIS YEAR the SCF annual gathering will be held in Argyll (Oban) on Monday 13th and Tuesday 14th September. The theme is "One size doesn't fit all". The SCF has led with this theme in our responses to the Crofting Reform Bill parliamentary inquiry and the Pack inquiry on future support to agriculture.

Crofting is as an important part of our cultural heritage and an important part of our future, supporting a unique way of life, a diverse and rich environment and a rural population in some of the most fragile areas of the Highlands and Islands.

In "A Charter for Crofting", published by the SCF in 2007, four key issues were identified as being central to the future of crofting. These were –

- environmentally sound and economically viable crofting land use
- a well-regulated, well-supported crofting system
- access to economic opportunities and services
- a strong local food economy.

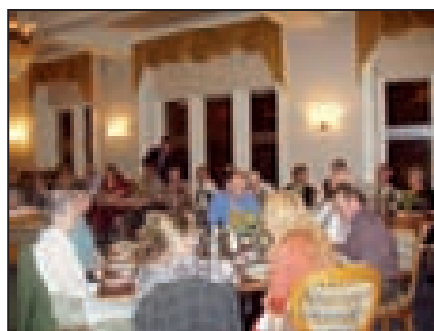
These issues highlight the many dimensions to a viable future for crofting and underline the need for a joined-up approach to public policy in relation to crofting, where "one size doesn't fit all"

The gathering will be addressed by a wide range of speakers including minister for environment, Roseanna Cunningham MSP, George Lyon MEP and members of the recently-formed SCF youth group.

In addition participatory workshops will take place on the second day and these will be used in conjunction with the recent membership survey to inform and focus the work of the SCF.

Further details and advance booking forms are enclosed and are also available from our website www.crofting.org or by contacting HQ on 01599 566 365.

This event is supported by HIE.



A Scottish Crofting Credit Union

THE SCF has recently joined the Association of British Credit Unions and formed a study group with a view to establishing a Scottish Crofting Credit Union.

The SCF believes that a pan-crofting-communities credit union would be the best way to provide affordable credit to our members. We looked at establishing a credit union in the late 1990s and over 90% of the members surveyed then agreed that a credit union would be a good idea.

For a variety of reasons the idea was not taken forward at that time. But now, thanks to increasing use of new technologies, most of these issues have been resolved.

You will hear more about our plans in the next edition of The Crofter.


Scottish Crofting Federation
 rooted in our communities

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