

TAKING THE FUTURE INTO OUR OWN HANDS

Celebrating 25 years of the only member-led organisation dedicated to promoting crofting

“WE’VE COME A LONG WAY, but there’s still much to be done.” Those were the words of Scottish Crofters Union president Angus MacRae at the SCU’s second annual conference in Skye in 1988.

Two and a half years after the ground-breaking crofters organisation was inaugurated in November 1985 Angus was able to report a strong membership of 4000 and still growing. The federation of the area-based crofters’ union’s uniting as a single body in the Scottish Crofters Union was an unprecedented success and surpassed all expectations. The need to stand together as one, to have a strong united voice, was recognised. This need is just as valid today with crofting being constantly under threat.



Some of the issues back then in '88 don't sound that unfamiliar: concerns on the EEC sheepmeat regime and the lack of recognition of the practical difficulties facing producers in remote mountainous areas; crofter housing; changes to the Crofters Commission; creation of new crofts; rates reform; croft diversification and more. **“We must ensure the crofting interest is kept to the forefront,”** Angus commented. The mission of the SCF today remains the same.

On this and the centre pages we look back at some of the milestones of the SCU/SCF and look ahead at the path before us.



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Effective solutions to our own problems

Frank Rennie, first SCU president, looks back

IN THE HECTIC WEEKENDS of 1985 as the Scottish Crofters Union took shape there was one remarkable phenomenon that pervaded Highlands and Islands crofting communities – the quietly optimistic anticipation of change.

As the branch and area structures grew, some of the usual community activists came forward to take up elected positions, but also an enormous number of new faces came forward too. People who had never been involved in

any organisation before were motivated and excited to throw their efforts behind the SCU.

This resulted in a major revitalisation of the Highlands and Islands. Not just crofting communities in isolation, it provided vigour to discussions on environmental conservation, business development, estate management, local housing, rural transport and a dozen other issues that are vital to a vibrant society. Slowly, some of the establishment bodies came to the surprising conclusion that rather

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Message from the chair...

Eleanor Arthur



SUMMER has definitely gone; Shetland has had horrendous weather this month.

In fact the weather has affected crops in a variety of ways over the season; the Shetland cabbages have not hearted the same as they usually would, the cereal crops have not been as good, some varieties of tatties have not been as floury as they normally are – but plenty of grass! And better stock prices, which have held up so far.

Carol Anne and I attended Terra Madre in Turin, in October,

which is an international food event that showcases indigenous foods. It proved a very humbling experience in one sense and very rich in another. It really brought home what indigenous means, in people, animals, culture and heritage: 5000 delegates attended from 150 countries – and yet we could relate in so many ways.

I have just returned from Edinburgh where a group of us attended the parliamentary working group on support mechanisms to crofting agriculture, the parliamentary cross-party group on crofting, the steering group for the crofting community mapping programme which SCF is developing and a meeting with Jim Mather MSP, minister for enterprise, energy and tourism, to talk about crofting renewable energy projects.

Perhaps the most important event of this busy trip was the Crofting Connections reception in parliament. This event celebrated the successes of the school children involved in this project, run by SCF in partnership with

Soil Association Scotland. It was an exceptionally good night and the young folk were very brave when it came to speaking, singing and playing instruments for the 400 people in attendance; and it was great to hear a set of pipes being played in the parliament hall. A huge thank you has to go to the people who made this project possible and to all the children who have participated to date.

Patrick and Derek Flynn came to Shetland to deliver an update on the Crofting Act 2010 and the proposed community mapping programme. We arranged a few meetings which were very well attended and useful discussions took place. The act has some criticism, naturally, but Derek was able to put things in perspective very well.

The mapping programme is being seen with great enthusiasm and there are already a few communities putting themselves forward to participate in the pilot scheme. Patrick and Derek also went to Stornoway for a similar meeting and will be in Helmsdale

on 25th November and in other areas over the winter.

Norman has been busy representing the SCF in Brussels and was joined by Patrick to attend a CAP discussion with, amongst others, the commissioner for agriculture Dacian Cioloş.

Norman was also joined by the Shetland Isles Council veterinary officer, Hilary Liebeschuetz, for the sheep and goat meat advisory committee on which he sits. Hilary has written about this in this issue.

Not long now until Christmas; I wonder where the year has gone. Our boys were lying on the sitting room rug writing their Santa lists while I was thinking beef, lamb, pork or turkey for the Christmas dinner? Isn't it sweet to think crofters produce and eat a quality premium product, which fits the glove of slow food without any fuss?

It takes an awful lot of hard work to be recognised for our efforts and it is surprising how many other small producers around the world fight the same battle.

Director's blog

New SCF director John Gilles from the Isle of Raasay contributes the blog for this issue.

JULY AND AUGUST were quite different this year than was usual, in that I went on holiday.

This was a belated honeymoon as I got married last year but my wife and I were unable to go away after the wedding. But more on the holiday later.

Early July meant checking our WGS plantation fences and repairs to stock fences. Then it was on to the most important job of shearing. With the weather mixed for July we were lucky to get finished by the 22nd thanks to Malcolm White and his gang (Marty and Nigel) and also having sheds to keep 500 head under cover. The following night we enjoyed a dance with the Cast Ewe Ceilidh band in the Community Hall and then had the weekend to pack for our holiday in Nova Scotia and Cape Breton. On Monday we left for Glasgow, flew to Heathrow and on to Halifax, where we picked up a motor home which would be our home for the next three weeks.

We first travelled the eastern shore of Nova Scotia, which is heavily wooded with not much scenery. When we crossed to Cape Breton we went up the north west coast where there was

lots of evidence of agriculture in the past but little or none today. It is amazing that so much has changed from when the land was cleared by the people who settled there and it is now covered in weeds and trees. Some fields I saw were comparable in size to some crofts here on the west coast but were of far better quality. Considering how good the soil was I was surprised at even how little vegetables were grown. We went to a farmers market in Mabou where I saw only one farmer from Nova Scotia and the rest of the stalls sold baking, a small amount of salad and crafts.

I felt that it was such a shame that land use in much of Cape Breton seemed to mean so little to the people who lived there, despite them being descended from the original settlers from the west of Scotland, whilst we still put so much emphasis on crofting here. Some people still have their tractors but only with toppers attached to keep the weeds down.

I have to say I enjoyed driving through the Skye Glen, where there are a few dairy farms and the land is being used.

Much of our holiday was a combination of trying to listen to as much live music as possible, wildlife watching and visiting places of historical interest, such

as the Louisburg Fortress which is still in the period when the English and French fought for control of the area.

I was glad to see that Gaelic is still well used in some places and that ceilidhs and concerts are on most nights throughout the summer.

Unfortunately three weeks were not long enough to get round the whole of Cape Breton and Nova Scotia but it was back home on

19th August, having planned the holiday to fit in with getting the shearing finished and not having to start silage until the middle of August. We were then fortunate in getting good weather in early September to secure the harvest.

As I write this we have just finished gathering the hill for lamb and cast ewe sales and I hope to be in Stirling for the first tup sale on Saturday 2nd October.



Farm and steading, Canada

SCF ANNUAL GATHERING

One size doesn't fit all – 25th anniversary

AN ORGANISATION'S 25th anniversary should be marked by a special occasion, and SCF's 2010 annual gathering held in Oban was indeed a special one, with over one hundred delegates attending.

The choice of venue was important too – an acknowledgement that Argyll is an important crofting county. SCF retains a strong membership there, which was well represented with delegates from the mainland and most of the islands attending. The media coverage was special too, as viewers of BBC's Landward will know. A 25th anniversary calls for a special dinner and the superb menu of Scottish crofting produce served up by the Caledonian Hotel certainly lived up to the occasion, as did the after-dinner speech given by Alistair MacIver, a loyal supporter of crofting for 25 years and more.

The theme of the gathering was "One size doesn't fit all", reflecting the broad diversity within crofting itself and the difficulty we have as small producers finding a niche within a European agriculture policy designed around industrial-scale agribusiness.

Europe and the CAP were inevitably woven through the programme. George Lyon MEP gave us the latest thinking on the post-2014 prospects for agricultural support and Vicki Swales, head of land use policy with RSPB asked the pertinent question "Does the CAP fit crofting?" As always, SCF's international connections were to the fore with presentations from Heike Schiebeck, a small farmer in Austria representing the international small producers' organisation, Via Campesina and Brendan O'Malley of the Irish Farmers' Association. Heike works a highly diversified co-operative farm in the Austrian mountains which, as is common in Austria, has its own abattoir. If they can do that in Austria, why not in Scotland?

We need to find the answer to that question. Diversification was also on the Irish agenda, as Brendan described how his hill farming operation, which would look familiar to many crofters, was now highly geared to tourism. A highlight of the gathering for many was Heike Schiebeck's forensic analysis of George Lyon's presentation, in which she very neatly summed up the failings of CAP for small producers.

Crofting reform was on the agenda too, naturally enough. The minister, Rosanna Cunningham, gave her keynote speech fresh from the passing of the 2010 Crofting Reform Act. Later in the day, SCF director Derek Flynn took us through the legislative changes. A nagging doubt remains. The timetable for enacting the reforms is over three years, and there's a Scottish general election in six months. How much of this will see the light of day?

We heard also from Pete Ritchie about his inspiring organic farming and local food marketing business in the borders and from Peter North of Liverpool University on local currency initiatives designed to ensure that local economies benefit local people. There were presentations on the variety of projects that SCF is involved in either directly or as a partner or supporter. Karen Campbell spoke on the SCF young crofters' group; Pam Rodway gave an update on Crofting Connections; and Mary Norton reported on the Uist blacklands project.

The proceedings concluded with a series of workshop sessions on current crofting issues, which left behind some nagging questions raised by one of the groups. Has SCF lost its radicalism? Are we too close to government? Why is it virtually impossible these days to get crofters out to branch and even area meetings? Do people think that the battles have been won? Or is it simply that a generation has passed? Well, not really, because the young men and women that we see in the photos from 25 years ago may now be middle aged, but while they remain active crofters many are now in important positions of power and influence. So what is the answer?

To end on a lighter note: the pies! Well, we tasted them at the chair's reception, as

Landward viewers will have seen, and they were very good indeed – meat supplied by Robin Calvert and baked by MacLeans of Benbecula. The pies are a bit of fun but with a very serious purpose – to find new markets for mutton – which in turn helps to keep sheep in the hills and to put a bit of extra income in the pockets of crofters. The viability of crofting is what will sustain its future, and that was really what this gathering was all about.

Thanks are due to all who made the gathering a success, especially to Carol Anne Stewart, Karen Campbell and Mabel MacAulay for organising the event; to Highlands and Islands Enterprise, the European Union and Argyll and Bute Council for funding; and to Susy MacAulay for co-ordinating media coverage.



Neil Mitchison, Scottish representative of the EC, hosted the evening dinner



Delegates enjoying the crofters' pies



SCF chair Eleanor Arthur welcomed delegates

CROFTING REFORM

A sense of community Decrofting and sale of crofts

While we await recent changes in crofting law to be brought into force, board member Derek Flynn was asked to explore and explain how changes in crofting law might be used to enhance crofting communities.

SINCE ITS INTRODUCTION in 1976, some people have regularly criticised crofters' right to buy. Others have found it useful. It became the cause of some tension between tenants and owner-occupiers in a few communities. As nothing could be done, most of us learned to live with it. But now, with the equalisation of the duties of owner-occupiers with those of tenants, both are now to be defined as crofters, with almost identical roles. This disagreement can now be put behind us.

All crofters, both tenants and owner-occupiers, are required to be normally resident on or within 32km (20 miles) of their crofts. Those who cannot must ask for consent to live elsewhere. There is also adjustment and clarification of every crofter's duty relating to his croft. He or she must not misuse or neglect the croft. S/he must cultivate and maintain it or put it to another purposeful use.

The neglect of a croft is not easily defined but most will know it when they see it. How is it to be identified? How is it to be dealt with? Changes in 2007 allowed for individuals, either landlords or members of the crofting community, to draw matters to

attention of Crofters Commission. In future the principal method will be self-certification. Every crofter, tenant or owner-occupier, will be required to declare that the duties of (1) residency and (2) non-neglect have been complied with. Those who fail to do so can expect to draw attention to themselves.

A secondary level of reporting will require a grazing committee to report regularly on the condition of the grazings and on the condition of crofts in the township. At first sight this may appear unpalatable, but it is working crofters who have raised these concerns. The door is being opened to allow such crofters to discuss misuse or neglect and to see it as a symptom of a problem, a problem which might be tackled locally and more sensitively than by seeking outside help. If it works, only wilful misuse or neglect need be drawn to the attention of the Crofters Commission.

As for the new register of crofting, the proposals for community mapping put forward by the SCF can provide an opportunity to strengthen, deepen and expand local connections; to examine local assets, needs and opportunities. By engaging people in a meaningful way, they are more likely to become involved with the community. Such community engagement is a high priority with many funding sources. It will identify emerging leaders, encourage strategic thinking and open up possibilities for the future.

Ellidh Ross, solicitor, Inverness, outlines issues raised by the new act

THIS TOPIC may not always engender polite conversation around a dinner table, but if the number of calls I have received in connection with the decrofting and sale of land to parties out with the crofter's family is any guide, it is one which needs to be discussed in light of the impending changes in the law.

At the moment, it is fairly widely known that a crofter may, if approached by a third party and if the crofter is minded to negotiate, obtain planning permission for (usually) a house and then apply to the Crofters Commission to decroft the site of the house. The crofter may then request a title deed to the land from his landlord and, significantly, request that the title deed be drawn directly in the name of the third party. This third party is known as the crofter's nominee. This direct transfer of title means that the crofter is not required to pay to the landlord a share of the market value of the land (or else wait for five years until the current clawback period has expired), known as landlord's claw-back.

This procedure, known as the nominee procedure, is currently utilised by many crofters and is likely to become more difficult when the Crofting Reform Act 2010 commences. Whilst it is difficult to gauge how much more difficult at this stage, a summary of the new provisions and their possible effects may be helpful.

Decrofting

Decrofting provisions are contained in Part 4 of the 2010 Act, section 43. These provisions are additions to the existing law (the 1993 Act as amended by, amongst others, the 2007 Act) rather than replacements. They provide the following:

When the Commission is deciding whether the purpose for which decrofting is requested is reasonable (as is already required by the existing law), they may take in to account what effect that purpose would have on the following matters:-

- the sustainability of crofting in the locality of the croft or other relevant areas;
- the sustainability of the

crofting community in that locality or communities;

- the sustainability of the landscape of the locality or area;
- the sustainability of the environment of that locality or area;
- the social and cultural benefits associated with crofting.

Where the reasonable purpose is associated with development of the croft which has planning permission, the Commission may take in to account the effect such development would have on the croft, the estate and the crofting community in that locality.

The new act therefore allows the Crofters Commission a much wider discretion in its decision whether or not to decroft land and it seems likely that the current presumption in favour of decrofting where planning permission exists may no longer be assumed. The Commission's policy criteria in this regard will be essential in interpreting the new provisions; indeed, little can be predicted about the effect of them until the act commences and the policy criteria are known.

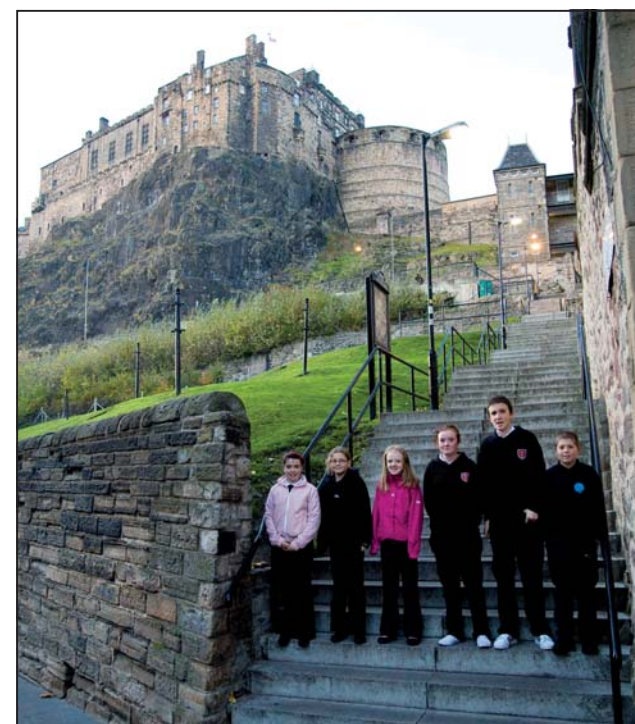
Sale

The ability of the crofter to request that a title deed be granted in the name of his nominee is also to be curtailed. This curtailment will have two stages, namely, (1) the closing of the so-called nominee loophole, and (2) the extension of the period during which a former crofting landlord may negotiate a claw back payment.

The first stage is contained in section 40 of the 2010 Act, which clearly stipulates that only a member of the crofter's family may be the crofter's nominee. In practice, this is likely to mean that only a transfer to a member of the crofter's family is without threat of a landlord wishing to claw back some of the development value. There are likely to be transfers to non-family members, but these are likely to require negotiation with the landlord regarding payment for the land.

The second stage of the measure is contained in section 41 of the 2010 Act, which provides that the claw-back period will be ten years (rather than five under the current law).

CROFTING CONNECTIONS GO TO PARLIAMENT



Pupils from Balivanich, Paible and Lionacleit below Edinburgh Castle



Pupils Mhairi and Hannah from Kilchoan Primary show their woven wall display, with their teacher Lynne McLuckie and Mary Scanlon MSP

Rob Gibson MSP hosted a reception at the Scottish Parliament on 10th November on behalf of Crofting Connections.

Forty schools participated in the event, bringing 81 children from as far afield as Shetland, Lewis and Argyll. The pupils provided musical entertainment and talked about their experiences with the project.

On display were their very varied items from potatoes, artwork, oatcakes to weaving plus woodwork from Farr High School. The Scottish Crofting Produce Mark provided canapés for the evening with a selection of mutton pies from Sandy and Ali Granville, potato scones topped with black pudding or wild mushrooms and Calina's chutney plus mini-

quiches from Balmacara black rock eggs.

The event was very successful with an exceptional attendance. Guest included MSPs, Scottish Government officials, representatives from our funders: HIE, Leader, SNH, HLF and the Craginish Trust as well as many other supporters of Crofting Connections.

The new Soils of the Croft book was launched

by Lorna Dawson from the Macaulay Institute. The book will be printed for all schools involved in Crofting Connections.

The children made the most of their visit to Edinburgh by going to workshops at Dynamic Earth, SASA and a tour of the Scottish parliament and various museums and art galleries.



Pupils displaying their Crofting Connections work



Lachlan and Lauchlan from Dalwhinnie play the whistle



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CROFTING RESOURCES PROGRAMME

Promote your Scottish Crofting Produce

SCOTTISH CROFTING Produce has received huge media attention through the summer and autumn, starting with the Royal Highland Show back in June and culminating in coverage of the Oban gathering on BBC's Landward programme.

As a brand, Scottish Crofting Produce is established in the consciousness of discerning consumers of quality local food. So what we need now is for more producers to become involved in the scheme, raising the profile and building critical mass.

If you produce beef, pork, lamb, mutton, potatoes, vegetables, fruit, eggs, dairy produce, honey, preserves, wool, knitwear or craft products and sell either direct to customers or through retailers, you should apply for the Scottish Crofting Produce (SCP) mark.

The mark implies that the

produce comes from a croft (or similar small agricultural unit in the Highlands and Islands) and that the producer is a member of the Scottish Crofting Federation and meets certain laid-down standards of quality, animal health and welfare, hygiene and total traceability. The criteria for membership are available on the SCF website. Crofters who run any kind of food business on the croft are invited to apply by describing what they produce, the origin of their raw materials and the processes involved.

Membership of Scottish Crofting Produce costs £20 to cover administrative expenses (£10 for existing members' renewal). Members will receive labelling and publicity material and space on the SCP web page with links to members' own websites if they have them.



Russell Smith and the SCF stand at Cawdor

To find out more please visit www.crofting.org, phone head office (01599 530005) or email donald@crofting.org. Existing members needing labels or leaflets please contact head office.

A fresh look at mutton

AT THE TIME of writing (early November) wedders were fetching around £50 in the sale ring at Portree. Changed days for those of us that remember the price for these prime animals being stuck at the £20 mark for two decades or more.

Does this mark the start of a genuine mutton renaissance or is it just a reflection of general short supply in the sheepmeat sector?

It is disappointing that the organisations within the red meat industry charged with product promotion continue to ignore mutton, perhaps still reflecting the image problem suffered by mature sheepmeat. For some of us old enough to remember, that image is of the strong taste (and smell!) of a bony yet over-fat hunk of meat left boiling away for too long on the Rayburn; not exactly tempting to the burger and pizza generation, or to consumers conditioned by the myriad of cheffy programmes on the telly.

So what we need, for a whole variety of reasons, is a fresh look at mutton, starting with a redefinition of the product which would banish the image of any old sheep and reposition it (to use the marketing jargon) as a prime, natural, healthy meat. That is one reason for SCF's much-publicised venture into pies that took place over the summer and even featured on BBC's Landward.

The pies are just one aspect. Most crofters already know that meat from older sheep which

are well finished and carefully selected, preferably straight from the hill, is the best you can get. This message is slowly getting across. Intensive meat production with its heavy demands on grain, water and oil, and output of powerful greenhouse gases, is rightly being questioned for its sustainability. Extensification and slow-maturing, hardy, native breeds grazing natural herbage must surely form a large part of the answer.

The mutton renaissance campaign has succeeded in attracting some celebrity chefs and top restaurants to the cause. (www.muttonrenaissance.org.uk) The campaign, launched in 2004 by Prince Charles, has now come up with a definition of the product which is genuinely helpful: sheep must be over two years old and animals must have a forage-based diet (for example, grass, heather and root crops). Sheep meeting the mutton renaissance standard should have a given amount of fat cover and be matured (for example by hanging) for at least two weeks. Mutton producers must be able to provide full traceability records showing where an animal is reared, its breed and age at slaughter. Some of these standards are similar to those adopted for Scottish Crofting Produce and a number of mutton producers have become members of that scheme.

If mutton can be brought back into the mainstream of production

and consumption, that can only be good news for crofters and for the hills and moors of the highlands and islands. The vast land resource that exists in crofters' common grazings is underused and the skills of the hill shepherd are in danger of dying out with the present generation.

That, together with land

abandonment and environmental degradation, is the result of sheep coming off the hills. A renewed demand for mutton would go a long way towards reversing these trends, improving the economics of hill sheep, giving encouragement to stock clubs and township collaboration and maintaining rural skills of inestimable value.



© Claire Nicolson

CROFTING RESOURCES PROGRAMME

North European cereal varieties for the north of Scotland

By Peter Martin, Agronomy Institute, Orkney College UHI

AN ARTICLE in the previous edition of *The Crofter* described the start of research trials on north European cereal varieties being run by the Agronomy Institute (AI) at Orkney College UHI in collaboration with the Orkney seed merchant William Shearer (WS) and the Swedish seed company SW Seeds.

This research stems from the successful cultivation of a Finnish wheat (Anniina) and oat (Fiia) in Orkney since 2005 and the adoption of these two varieties by growers for local milling and specialist feeds.

The 2010 trials were established to try to identify a wider range of early-maturing varieties which might be of value to growers in the north of Scotland which would help to widen the harvesting window, enable more crops to be harvested as dry grain and possibly supply specialist local markets like milling or malting. The 2010 trials were all planted on 15 April and consisted of three separate trials, one each for barley, oats and wheat. The trials compared six varieties of barley, four of oats and four of wheat from SW Seeds with the Finnish varieties and standard UK varieties (Waggon – barley; Firth – oats; Paragon – wheat). Some of the most promising varieties for yield and earliness are described in the paragraphs below. Yields are presented at 15% moisture content.

In the barley trial, the highest grain yield was from Waggon (6.3 t/ha) which was harvested on 8 September (145 days after planting). However, four of the northern varieties were harvested

eight days earlier and two of these, Gustav and Vilde, yielded within 10% of Waggon (5.8 and 5.7 t/ha, respectively). It is likely that Vilde could have been harvested four days earlier than its actual harvest date and its estimated straw yield was slightly higher than that of Waggon.

In the oat trial, Firth and all north European varieties were harvested on 19 September (157 days after planting). Harvesting of varieties in this trial was delayed by wet weather, but it is clear from grain moisture measurements that most of the northern varieties were ready for harvesting earlier than this – probably about six to nine days earlier for the varieties Aveny, Ringsaker and Fiia. The grain yields of Aveny, Belinda and Ringsaker (5.9, 5.8 and 5.3 t/ha, respectively) were all considerably higher than both the UK variety Firth (4.9 t/ha) and Fiia (4.6 t/ha). The estimated straw yields of Aveny and Belinda were similar to that of Firth.

In the wheat trial, Paragon was harvested on 26 September (164 days after planting) which was also the first opportunity when the weather allowed the northern varieties to be harvested. Although Paragon had the highest grain yield (6.0 t/ha), grain moisture measurements indicated that the northern varieties were ready for harvesting considerably earlier (seven days for Demonstrant, 10 days for Anniina and 18 days for Berserk). Amongst these three northern varieties, Demonstrant was highest yielding (5.3 t/ha) followed by Anniina (4.8 t/ha) and then Berserk (4.3 t/ha). The estimated straw yields of Demonstrant and Anniina were similar to that of Paragon while Berserk's was lower.



The variety trials have provided some very encouraging initial results, suggesting that there are several early-maturing north European varieties of cereals which could make a useful contribution to agriculture in the north of Scotland. While the main advantage of northern barley and wheat varieties was earliness, several oat varieties combined earliness with a higher yield than the UK standard.

The AI and WS are now hoping to test some of the more promising varieties on a larger scale and

investigate the suitability of all varieties for specialist markets. Growers who might be interested in ordering seed of these varieties for planting in 2011 should contact Richard Shearer (Tel. 01856 873189) before the middle of January.

Photographs: The oat variety trial in August (top) and wheat variety trial in September (bottom). In both photos, the UK variety (centre) is still green and is flanked by plots of earlier maturing north European varieties.

CROFTING LAW ADVICE

for advice on Crofting and Agricultural Law call

David Findlay or Eilidh Ross

from our Rural Land Department

01463 239393

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ON THE CROFT

Crofting cattle improvement scheme

THE BULL HIRE SCHEME, now evolved into the crofting cattle improvement scheme, is open to applications for the 2011-12 season.

The scheme is open to groups of at least two crofters within the crofting counties and provides good-quality, high-health bulls in areas where it is impractical to keep bulls and over winter them and where no alternative hiring facility exists.

Breeds supplied include: Limousin, Simmental, Aberdeen Angus, Charolais, Shorthorn, Luing, Salers and Highland. If demand for any other breed was demonstrated, we would consider adding to our range, provided it was deemed to be cost-effective and value for money.

Our bulls are selected on a combination of attributes such as correctness, good legs and feet, good locomotion, size range to suit the many variations of herds within the crofting counties and estimated breeding values. We try to select animals which are above the top 40% for the breed, with many being in the top 20%, whilst still ensuring value for money. Animals have to be of known health status and come

from low TB risk areas (no less than four years testing interval).

The bulls are health screened when they return to the stud, which involves blood testing for Johnes disease etc and sheath washing for campylobacter foeti. They then receive vaccinations for BVD, IBR, leptospirosis, louping ill and a 10 in 1 vaccine for clostridial diseases. This not only protects them whilst away from the stud, but also reduces the risk of spreading disease between township herds.

If a bull out on hire develops a problem, a replacement is provided at no additional cost once veterinary advice has been obtained.

The cost of a hire is £1281.25 if the bull is over-wintered at the stud farms and £922.50 or £973.75 if wintered on the township, subject to farm staff approval. The prices have increased this year to reflect the 2.5% rise in VAT, which groups may be able to reclaim. A VAT invoice is available on request.

From this year, groups participating in the scheme will have to complete a basic development plan, very similar to the plan used in previous bull schemes. The plan

should provide information such as herd composition, breeding plan, health status, marketing and details of any agri-environmental and other community schemes and initiatives.

The information in the plan will be used to monitor the scheme, assist with future planning for the stud and also to demonstrate the benefits the scheme provides. As always, advice and assistance will

be available from farm staff.

If you wish to participate in the scheme or require any further information please contact:

John Cowan
Stud Farm Manager
Knocknagael Farm
Inverness IV2 6AJ
T: 01463 231261 M: 07767673717
john.cowan@crofterscommission.org.uk

www.crofting.org

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ON THE CROFT

Controlling liver fluke

LIVER FLUKE DISEASE has been estimated to cost the Scottish livestock industry in excess of £50 million per year due to deaths of infected animals and condemnation of affected livers at slaughter.

The latter is becoming even more important. Latest QMS figures suggest ±25% of lamb and cattle livers are condemned at slaughter in Scotland. Liver fluke disease is on the increase in Scotland, in both sheep and cattle so it is therefore important to work with your vet and develop liver fluke control strategies specifically for your croft.

Symptoms

The disease is caused by the parasitic flatworm, *Fasciola hepatica* and the type of disease seen depends on the type of infection.

Acute fluke is caused by the movement of large numbers of young parasites through the liver. The resulting liver damage can cause sudden death in lambs and sheep in autumn and winter. Fortunately, acute fluke is relatively rare in cattle.

Chronic fluke is caused by the establishment of adult parasites in the bile duct, usually seen in late winter/early spring. The blood-feeding habit of the adults can cause severe anaemia and poor productivity, reduced fertility, poor wool quality in sheep, reduced milk yield/quality in cattle and depressed lambing/calving rates.

Control

The main way to treat and control liver fluke disease is through strategic use of a flukicide. There are a number of products on the market, though they differ in what age of parasite they

are effective against.

- Use the right drug at the right time and don't over-use any particular drug. For acute fluke infections a drug which is effective against immature fluke is required, whereas a flukicide with activity against the adult parasites is required to treat chronic fluke and/or prevent egg laying and pasture contamination.

- Use a flukicide rather than a combination wormer as part of a specific fluke control strategy.

- Remember to include cattle in control programmes aimed at sheep flocks on mixed crofts. Cattle are often relatively unaffected by fluke but represent a significant maintenance host for the parasite.

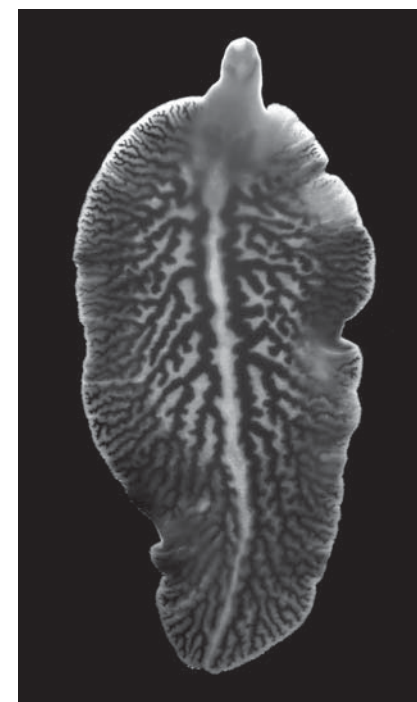
Prevention

- Your vet can diagnose past or current fluke infections using faecal, blood or milk samples. Your abattoir may also be able to supply information about the fluke status of the livers of the animals you send for slaughter.

- Avoid grazing livestock on heavy, low-lying pasture – this is ideal snail/fluke habitat. Boggy areas should be fenced off if possible and drainage should be considered on crofts with severe fluke problems

- Adopt a quarantine strategy. Your vet will be able to provide advice on which flukicide to use and when to use it to treat a particular fluke problem on your croft

If you would like a free eight page newsheet on liver fluke please contact Maggie Bennett at The Moredun Foundation, Pentlands Science Park, Bush Loan, Penicuik, EH26 0PZ or phone 0131 445 5111 or visit the website www.moredun.org.uk



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Cuimhnicheamaid gu bheil a làthaireachd an crochadh ri na tha ann as t-samhradh de sheilcheagan beaga – tha mu threas cuid m'ingne annta - a tha beò san talamh fliuch a tha pailt an ceann an iar-thuath Alba. Bidh larbhaidh a' ghlupead a' meudachadh annasan, mus sgaol iad anns an fheurach gun tèid an ithe le beathach.

Ni an glupad call air a' ghruthan. Tha bàs aithghearr bitheanta leis ann an caoraich, ach ma thig am milleadh mean air mhean, 's dòcha thairis air miosan de thim, nochdaidh comharraidhean nas fhaide air adhart dhan a' gheamhradh; caillidh stoc òrdan, agus chithear balg-fo-chraicinn mun àmhach aca – oedema ris an canar 'am poca'. Mar a bh' aig am bàrd Alasdair MacFhearghuis às na Hearadh ann an Òran a' Ghlupead:

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'Son 'refinadh' na fala

An tè air an tig am poca tràth
Bheir am bàs leis i as t-earrach.

'Sna seann làithean bhiodh croitearan a' fosgladh caora a bha air bàsachadh, agus fhuaradh a-mach leotha gruthan air seacadh agus 'liabagan beaga' na bhroinn, oir tha coltas liabaige air a' ghlupead.

Thèid cur às dha le dòs airson caoraich, agus snathad no pour-on airson crodh. Chan eil dion an aghaidh nan drogaichean na thrioblaid mòr fhathast, ach tha e air ceann a thogail ann an corra aithdhean. Tha pour-ons ùra a' chruidh cuideachd èifeachdach an aghaidh biast a' chraicinn, no mialan mar a chanas cuid riutha.

Lorgar biast a' chraicinn ann an clòimh chaorach cuideachd, ach chan eil i idir cho callmhor ris a' chlaimeh no scab. "Millidh aon caorach chlaimehach an treud" their an seanfhacal, agus sgapaich i eadar treudan chaorach gam measgachadh air talamh cùl-cinn. Feumar dìobadh deireadh an fhoghair, no snathad de chaochladh sheòrsaichean.

Bho rinneadh gnothach saor-thoileach seach riatanach dhen dìobadh ann an - ma 's math mo chuimhne - 1992, tha a' chlaimeh

a-rithist air fàs bitheanta ann an corra aithdhean air a' Ghàidhealtachd; ged-tà, chan eil i idir ann an Sealtainn, far a bheil lagh pàrlamaid ag òrdachadh gum faigh a h-uile caora, reithe is uan a thèid a cheannach a-steach snathad doramectin aig a' chidhe ann an Lerwick.

Cho math ris a' chlaimeh is ris na biastan, gheibhear cuidhteas an gartan agus am mial-chaorach leis an dìobadh. Chan eil am mial-chaorach glè bhitheanta san Eilean Sgitheanach, ged a tha e pailt ann an caoraich Shealtainn far am bi e bristeadh na clòimhe gu dona. Air an làimh eile, tha an gartan uile-lathaireach air feadh na Gàidhealtachd ged is gann gu bheil e ann idir ann an Sealtainn. Cha bhiodh guth air a' ghartan air a' gheamhradh sna làithean a dh'fhalbh, agus an fhuachd air cur às dha; ach bho chionn corra bhliadhnaichean tha e - agus na galaran a thèid a sgapadh leis, leithid a' chrith - air a bhith nochdadh cho tràth ris an Fhaoilleach, comharra eile air blàthachadh na talmhainn ann am beachd cuid.

Le taing do Dhòmhnall Iain Mac'Illeinn, an t-Ath Leathainn.

Neil McRae An t-Samhain 2010

ON THE CROFT

Changes and expected payment rates for LFASS 2011-2013

CROFTERS should be seeing a welcome increase in their LFASS payments when they hit the bank in early 2011.

For fragile and very fragile areas this will be 19%. Meanwhile those in the standard area on grade A or B land will get a 38% increase, while those on the better C and D land will see an increase of 5%.

For the period 2011-2013, minimum stocking densities have been reduced to 75% of previous levels, to offset the loss of ewe hoggs and heifers, which no longer count in calculations. Minimum levels which now apply are A. 0.09 LU/ha B. 0.15, C. 0.30 and D. 0.45.

If your historic stocking levels were already below this, then eligible hectares will be restricted. To calculate, divide your eligible hectares from your SAF by the minimum stocking density and multiply the result by the historic stocking density. If your historic density was above the 1.4 maximum, eligible hectares will be restricted by dividing the maximum SD by the historic SD and multiplying the eligible hectares by the result (clear as mud). Multipliers for cattle top-up are 1.35 for more than 10% LU 's and over 50% is 1.70. The figures below are for all eligible hectares; there is no need to apply a grazing category multiplier.

SA Standard area FA Fragile area
VFA Very fragile area

LFASS 2011-13 £ per eligible ha	S.A	F.A	V.F.A
Cat A	8.71	10.37	11.92
Cat B	17.37	20.68	23.76
Cat C	22.76	36.36	42.02
Cat D	27.30	43.61	50.40

Support to crofting agriculture

THE SCF is working on a number of fronts in an attempt to improve support payments for crofting.

On LMOs we are preparing a submission to Scottish Government which would see a more fit-for-purpose suite of options available for crofters to choose from.

On CCAGS we are asking the government to better reflect the additional costs of building in remote and peripheral areas, by increasing the grant rate payable.

On area support and the Pack enquiry we are developing a position which will then be circulated to area representatives for comment within the next few weeks.

The CAP towards 2020

THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION let slip a non-paper a few weeks ago called "The CAP towards 2020: meeting the food, natural resource and territorial challenges of the future".

This is a leaked copy of a policy paper under preparation that officials want to be seen in order to get feedback but that is not an official draft paper. Strange way of behaving and as one official put it, "It is not so much leaked as irrigated!"

The paper lays out the drivers of the CAP: food security; provision of quality and diversity of food produced sustainably in line with our environmental, water and animal welfare ambitions; maintaining viable rural communities. Of note are two aspects of this report – one that it endorses the public getting a return on its investment through the provision of public goods and the other that small producers have a valuable place in food production.

The commissioner for agriculture and rural development, Dacian Ciolos, said in a recent seminar in Romania "I am convinced that as long as small farms are in a position to market their production and contribute to maintaining landscapes and the vitality of rural areas, then they must be supported".

The final version of this communication will be published as we go to press and will be summarised in the next edition of *The Crofter*.

Install micro-renewable technology

CROFTS ARE ideally suited to micro-renewable energy technologies such as wind turbines or solar PV panels which can be placed onto land and buildings to help crofters diversify and have an additional income stream.

Feed in Tariffs were launched in April 2010 by the UK government. Energy suppliers must make regular payments to those generating their own electricity from renewable or low carbon sources. A minimum payment for all electricity generated, as well as a separate payment for the electricity exported to the national grid, is guaranteed.

The recent spending review made two changes to the Feed in Tariff that should encourage crofters to invest in micro-renewables quickly, to ensure they receive the best tariff available.

If there is a higher than expected deployment of micro-renewables, an earlier government review date than 31 March 2012 could be triggered, with tariffs reduced from the current rate of 41.3p per unit of electricity for solar panel owners. The tariff will be cut by £40m, or by 10% in 2014 and 2015.

"Many people don't realise they are in a position to have their own green power station on their land which can make and save them money," said Iain Sloan, co-founder of Icon Energy.

"Any property with suitable roof space can have a solar photovoltaic (PV) panel and anyone with a bit of land can introduce a small turbine. The current feed-in tariff rate is guaranteed for 25 years, so people should make the switch to micro-renewables now."

Pack final report

THE LONG-AWAITED final report of the inquiry into future support for agriculture in Scotland, headed by Brian Pack OBE, has been published.

On the face of it the report, 'The Road Ahead for Scotland', is an improvement on the interim version in that it appears to take more account of the less favoured areas and the wider role of agriculture in the more marginal areas. However, SCF cannot accept Mr Pack's guiding principles that larger payments must be given to occupiers of the best 12% of Scottish land. He claims that they are somehow best placed to deliver on the global challenges and Scottish priorities detailed in the reports remit.

Nor can we accept that more agriculturally productive units are faced with disproportionately higher regulatory costs and therefore require higher rates of support. Quite the reverse is often claimed by representatives of these same units – that they, through economies of scale, are more viable. So why would they need more public money spending on them?

The European Commission has made it clear that there has to be greater accountability over the use of public spending on agriculture (see 'CAP towards 2020') and that public spending has to be justified by the delivery of public goods – such as environmental protection, increased bio-diversity, carbon sequestration and so on. Public money is not there to increase the wealth of the more viable agri-businesses; but that is apparently not how Mr Pack sees it.

Despite the size of the report (108 pages) there is a lack of detail which makes it difficult to respond conclusively to parts, such as the top up fund and standard labour requirements – these will have to be detailed further and we will comment in the next issue where we will present our response to the report.

Renewables update

FOLLOWING ON from the very informative SCF renewable energy seminar held in Balmacara in June, we met with Jim Mather MSP, minister for energy, to discuss the difficulties crofters face in trying to benefit from renewable energy production – something that should be a huge opportunity for crofters. Mr Mather's suggestion is that we get together some of our people and those experts, representatives of the energy companies etc, who can inform the meeting. The government will host the meeting which we are aiming to hold mid-December. The outcomes will be reported on in the next issue of *The Crofter*.



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CELEBRATING 25 YEARS

Crofters securing the future for themselves

NOT LONG AFTER it became known that I was to be the first director of the then not-quite-launched Scottish Crofters Union (SCU), I was visiting Skye to which my family and I were shortly to move.

Driving down the single-track road into Braes, south of Portree, I saw by the roadside one of the crofters I'd interviewed some time before when – on behalf of the Highlands and Islands Development Board (HIDB) – I looked into the feasibility of crofters having their own representative organisation.

I stopped to talk with the crofter in question, an elderly gentleman. "Well," he greeted me, "you're a brave man." Not being aware of having done anything very heroic, I asked what he meant. Soon his meaning was plain enough. While it might be fine in theory for crofters to have their own union, I was told, the thing would never work in practice. There was simply no way that any worthwhile number of crofters would pay the exorbitant annual subscription – £8 was the figure under consideration – likely to be requested by the SCU. The union, as a result, would never get off the ground. And I, as a further result, would quickly be out of a job.

Such pessimism about the SCU's prospects was far from unusual in the run-up to the new union's launch. It was a pessimism I sometimes shared myself. But as I'd told Angus Macleod, the SCU's founding father and the man who'd persuaded the HIDB to finance that feasibility study, I was personally of the view that crofting and crofters were urgently in need of just the sort of organisation Angus had long been pressing for. Hence the assurance I'd privately given Angus before starting my month-long commission from the HIDB in the back end of 1984 – this assurance being to the effect that, barring every single crofter I met telling me there never could be an effective crofters' union, I'd assure the development board that the union, given a little bit of start-up backing from the HIDB itself, would be a roaring success.

In the event, I didn't need to doctor the evidence too greatly. Sure, it wasn't hard to find doom and gloom about the prospective union's prospects. But it wasn't hard either to find people who took an entirely opposite view. By the time I'd completed my grand tour of the crofting areas, I'd spent time with lots of crofters – the late Roddy Steele from South Uist and the late Angus MacRae from North Ströme were two who did much to shape my thinking – who were firmly of the opinion both

that there was a job for a union to do and that there would be enough backing for such a union to make it a viable proposition.

This proved to be the case. In November 1984, I presented my – strongly positive – findings to a public meeting in Inverness. At that meeting, I was asked by a Gairloch crofter, Donald MacLeod, if I'd come and explain my report to crofters in his area. Although having no real standing with regard to what might come next, I said I would.

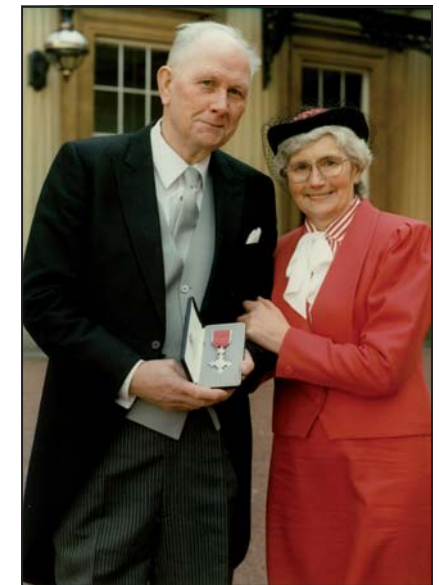
On a wet and windy night at the beginning of December 1984, the possibility of establishing a Scottish Crofters Union was put – somewhat tentatively – to a gathering of crofters in Poolewe. Would such a union work? What would it do? What benefits would it bring? There were plenty of such queries. But there was real enthusiasm too. Before the evening ended – and nearly a year in advance of its official launch – the SCU had its first branch, to be known as Gairloch and District, its first branch chairman, Kenny Urquhart, its first branch secretary, Aimi Macdonald, its first branch treasurer, George Macleod and, perhaps most significantly, its first subscriptions – of which there were no less than 38.

Much has changed in the 26 years since then. But one thing, I believe and will always believe, has remained the same. If crofting is to have a future, that future will not be secured by Crofters Commissions, Land Courts or government agencies of any kind. It will be secured, and it can only be secured, by crofters themselves – crofters prepared to get together in sufficient numbers to make their collective voice heard in the places where it matters. The 38 crofters who signed up to that proposition in Poolewe in December 1984 were the first of thousands who were to join the SCU. Crofting needed those thousands then. Crofting needs such thousands still.

Jim Hunter



Jim Hunter at his new desk 1986



Angus and Annie Macleod after Angus received his MBE



SCU conference in Thurso



Iain MacIver, Angus MacRae and Jim Hunter 1986



Early meeting of the SCU's Skye and Lochalsh area committee



Alastair Campbell and Neil Jones on the ferry to Harris

CELEBRATING 25 YEARS

Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose

WHEN I STARTED work as director of the Scottish Crofters Union in March 1990, the world was a very different place.

Or was it? We had a Tory prime minister, were in the middle of a recession, house prices had dropped by 10% on the previous year and GDP was predicted to fall by 1%..... and Rangers won the Scottish League Cup campaign that started that year.

Some of the issues facing crofting also resonate with today. Crofters were not happy with what the government was proposing for them and firmly rejected the proposal to transfer the DAFS (remember them?) estates on Skye into community ownership.

It is interesting to note just how quickly and fundamentally the attitude to crofting and community ownership has changed in the intervening two decades. I do count it a privilege to have been around when two of the pioneering crofter buyouts took place – Assynt and Borve.

Other highlights of my four years at the Scottish Crofters Union were the passage of Calum MacDonald MP's Crofter Forestry Bill and the subsequent publication of the SCU's Crofter Forestry Handbook. The fact that in the mid 90s crofter forestry represented the greatest contribution to new planting of forestry in Scotland was a great tribute to all of the individuals and grazings committees who seized on the new opportunities that the Crofter Forestry Act afforded them.

Other significant events were the pioneering work the SCU did in conjunction with the RSPB which culminated in the publication in 1992 of the Crofting and The Environment report. This was a seminal publication which for the first time redefined the contribution of crofting to society. At a time when mainstream agriculture was moving ever more towards industrialisation, crofting was increasingly being viewed as outdated and anachronistic. The joint report articulated crofting's social, cultural and environmental contribution. It defined these contributions as public goods and argued successfully that they were worthy of public support.

We also campaigned on crofter housing, less favoured area support, headage payments, the tup and bull scheme, the crofting counties agricultural grants scheme, land reform and crofting reform – sometimes successfully, sometimes not.

However, what made it all worthwhile was the unstinting support I got from my colleagues: Fiona Mandeville, John Toal, Angus Graham, Neil MacLeod, Drew Ratter and the SCU's 4,500 members, 57 SCU branches and particularly the SCU's ruling council.

The elected members of the SCU council were an extraordinary group. They gave freely of their limited time and considerable talents to further the cause of crofting. Whilst some of the changes in support of crofting policy they influenced have long been forgotten, the positive impacts of these changes are still

benefitting those crofting today.

So whilst the world may have changed, the challenges facing crofting have not – and the requirement for an articulate and forceful crofting organisation remains the same.

I count it an enormous privilege to have had a bit part in the first 25 years of the SCU/SCF and I wish you all the very best for the next quarter century and beyond.

George Campbell



Effective solutions to our own problems

Continued from page 1

than the apathy they expected from these communities, there was instead a ferment of ideas, innovation, and enthusiasm. The Highlands and Islands Development Board was a very early supporter of the crofting movement and later declared that it was the possibly the single best investment that they had ever made in terms of regional development outcomes.

Why was this change so astonishingly successful? Quite simply, it's because people learn about power through having the opportunity to exercise it. We have the collective ability to provide effective solutions to our own problems when we have the opportunity to analyse and explore them – and the confidence to take action on our conclusions.

Much has changed since the launch in 1985 – in political, economic, social and environmental terms we are operating in a very different world. The web had not been born; climate change was a thing that happened between seasons of a year; no mobile phones or electronic tagging; there was no Scottish Parliament; and no land reform on the political agenda.

So what's the future?

I'm always suspicious of people who make predictions, because they are

nearly always wrong, but allow me to share some opinions. I think that crofting has a very promising future – but not as we would recognise it 25 years ago! Production margins are tighter, but there is also a greater demand for local produce, farmers' markets and food traceability.

Income from croft produce is down as a percentage of household income, but the crofting location allows an even greater



flexibility in the types of employment that can be done from rural areas – internet retail, distance working, environmental and food tourism, renewable energy and many more commercial opportunities that were simply not available 25 years ago, but can be combined nicely with crofting.

The SCU was pro-active, it did not simply wait to react to events, so we need to follow this lead. Community-owned estates offer a massive potential for local regeneration and community revitalisation and we need to build on their successes. We need to actively encourage crofter co-operatives and other forms of collaboration – social housing, district energy schemes, stock clubs for cattle and sheep, local food initiatives, smart transport solutions.

We choose to live in these communities because we see the myriad advantages; millions of visitors want to sample this environment as a contrast to their own lifestyles, even through buying books, art and music of the region. We have a golden opportunity to support and encourage what is the very best in the crofting communities and to share this with the world on our own terms.

The SCF is the natural successor to the SCU and what a wonderful horizon of challenges is open to us!

Let's use them.

CELEBRATING 25 YEARS

The big men

Alastair MacIver, former SCU president, remembers some of the big players in the organisation's history

MY VERY FIRST involvement with the organisation was in November 1985 when, along with John MacDonald and Alistair MacRae, I attended the meeting in the Cummings Hotel Inverness which established the Scottish Crofters Union.

I suppose that if I were to be asked to name all those whom I have encountered in my twenty five years in this organisation I could probably fill quite a few pages of *The Crofter*. However I have been given a limit within which I have to stay so I will restrict myself to those who stand out for me.

Every crofter in Scotland owes a huge debt to the late Angus MacLeod, for it was he who had the vision and determination which allowed him to persuade all the right people that the time was ripe to set up a crofters union – and the rest, as they say, is history.

My first personal contact with Angus was when the Rogart Branch invited him to open our first attempt at fundraising in the form of a sale of work. Not only did Angus agree but he brought with him a length of tweed to sell; such was the commitment of the man.

Angus MacRae MBE – a giant of a man in stature as well as ability. It was said of Angus that he could do the cryptic crossword in the P & J quicker than most others could do the ordinary one.

Angus was the one who encouraged me to take an active part in the affairs of the SCU and supported me through these early years, very much my friend and mentor over a number of years until his untimely death – a huge loss to crofting and crofters.

Many people in the organisation and beyond have commented on his ability and presence and my abiding memory of Angus will always be my first attendance at a meeting of the Hill Farming Review along with the great man. This was the annual meeting where government ministers and civil servants listened to all the hard luck stories from farmers and crofters and then went away and decided how to reduce next year's support, particularly to crofters.

There were quite a number of senior representatives from all the major organisations sitting round the table all chatting quietly until the meeting got underway and a representative from each organisation presented the case from their point of view while a low murmur of background conversation continued. Finally Angus was asked to speak. Angus got slowly to his feet and suddenly an absolute silence descended on that room, truly a measure of the respect that Angus commanded wherever he went.

Any account of the SCU/SCF could not be made without mention of Jim Hunter and his contribution to the crofting cause. His literary works and his campaigning on behalf of the organisation he did so much to set up will surely guarantee him a well-deserved and special place in crofting history.

In closing I have to make special reference to the staff and friends of SCF who kept the organisation alive in a very difficult period.

Alistair MacIver

Common themes across the years

THINKING BACK twenty five years to the mid 80s and those early days of the SCU brings back many good memories of a new, vibrant and very busy organisation fighting the cause for crofters from the local level to the highest level of government at the time.

For me, as a much younger crofter, it was a great privilege to take part in board meetings alongside some big men with very big hearts and a great passion for crofting and the success of the union. I refer of course to gentlemen such as Roddy Steele, Angus MacLeod and Angus MacRae.

Roddy provided me with tremendous support and advice in these early days as I wrote recently in *The Crofter*, giving an account of some of his achievements prior to his untimely death just as the union was getting off the ground. There is no doubt in my



Alasdair MacEachan and Alistair MacIver

mind that I benefited greatly from his example when I took over the post of area president for Uist and Barra, a post which I held until the beginning of 1991.

As for Messrs MacLeod and MacRae, well they had that special presence and simply inspired anyone present at a meeting or in the audience at any gathering. The former, Angus (Ease) MacLeod, worked tirelessly to form the union from the earlier federation and the reign of Angus MacRae as overall president of the union was, in my view, crucial to the early success of the organisation.

From that period, through to my own time as a local area and branch office-bearer, I seem to have kept most of the documents and many of the letters from that time. Some of the topics sound familiar even today, twenty five years on – for example the problem with greylag geese in Uist and yet another discussion paper on getting croft land into active occupancy.

Also among the papers are some interesting records of a small local committee, the Uist land use committee, on which I represented the union.

This committee was formed by the late Dr Denis Branagan, secretary to the Uist council of social services at the time, and was set up with the aim of assisting the local authority, the Crofters' Commission and other bodies and local communities in creating the most advantageous policies as regards land tenure, use and development.

Interestingly, a paper written outlining the case for the land use committee describes how the proposal had arisen from prolonged consideration of the present predicament of the crofting system within Uist and of the factors which bear upon the means of improving that predicament.

The report went on to describe how the proposal for this land use committee was further prompted by the recognition that, sooner or later, the Western Isles would be obliged to develop its indigenous natural resources as a counter to declining external support.

Well, sooner or later indeed, some very true words spoken those twenty five years ago as we today debate the very same themes in the light of possible threats to the way that our economy has been supported in the past.

Alasdair MacEachan Benbecula

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CELEBRATING 25 YEARS

25 not out and still at the stump

WHAT HAS a cricket allegory got to do with SCF?

Well nothing really, but if you check the members list of the Hong Kong Cricket Club (HKCC) – that bastion of pastoralism and community-based agriculture – then the list contains swathes of Jamiesons, MacRaes, MacKenzies, Mathiesons and so on.

It is called "stickability"; it is what has made the SCF the force it is today. In much the same way as those from the crofting counties made their way in the wider world and stuck to their beliefs, then the SCF is delivering that original vision of the SCU.

The HKCC could be replicated in places like Argentina, Australia, Canada, South Africa and other places too.

The open forums held at the Oban gathering in September gave members a chance to have their say. A comment which jarred was "It's not the same, the buzz has gone". I think we should pay some heed to that; but I do want to dismiss the off-the-cuff remarks of those protected by public money or quango funding.

The SCF is not the same. We have no core funding, we have no sponsorship from Scottish Government and we have to fight for every penny of revenue. It is of deep regret to me that so much staff time is taken up with sourcing funding and I would like to record the highest praise for all our staff efforts in remaining at the stump.

We have dodged a few "no balls" and managed to score a few sixes along the way. The recent award of funding for extensive training is a fine example of the stickability of our volunteer staff. Many people in crofting will benefit from this programme.

Well done guys.

Let's celebrate the achievements of today in the context of the realities we have to deal with. For sure let's remember the struggle but there



Hughie Donaldson

are different rules now.

Advocacy and casework have always been a key element of SCF's work and that work continues to this day – where the dead hand of beaurocracy and the inflexible attitude of some lead to confusion and despair.

I believe we will soon be asked off for tea and cold drinks (they need to talk to us) before returning to the crease to despatch whatever is thrown at us to the boundaries.

Crofting's place is in the communities where it was nurtured and where we are beginning to see that politicians and policy makers recognise the overall benefits of place-based policy and local organisations to deliver.

The SCF is just such an organisation, and as we move forward the development of community-based solutions to seemingly intractable individual problems will release a new wave of optimism for the future. Over-reliance on the past will damage the future. Alternatives will be found to ensure the future health and well being of crofting.

SCF is battling for that cause and for every member's overall interest in that cause.

25 and not out – 25 and just getting warmed up, more like.

Hughie Donaldson, former SCF director, Strontian



Iain MacIver, former SCU president



An aspiring crofter

The crofting movement in Shetland

Agnes Leask outlines the history of the crofting movement in Shetland

IN 1958, Davie and I were looking for a croft of our own. The lady who had the croft at Cott was retiring and she kindly offered the tenancy to me. The trustees of the estate, which was bankrupt, decided not to re-let so they refused the assignment and it was put on the market and we had to buy.

The house was habitable but was a very small but 'n ben, with no mod cons.

We applied to the Crofters Commission for a grant and loan to build a new house, were refused because I was deemed to be the landlady of a vacant croft and they refused to accept Davie as a tenant because he was my husband. I couldn't get grants for anything, either fencing, draining or re-seeding.

Soon after, I think about 1960 or 1961, I heard about the Crofters Federation. The president for Shetland at time was John Johnson. I contacted him and he came to the house with all the information. I joined and have been a member ever since. During the last 15 to 20 years, thanks to the hard work of the Scottish Crofters Union, as it was 20 years ago, owner occupier crofters now have the same rights as tenants.

If I remember right the next president for the Shetland branch was Hugh Bowie, who was followed by Lollie Graham. About that time Violet Smith retired as treasurer and I was appointed. When Lollie Graham retired Neil Jones took over the mantle which was then passed to Jim Johnson,

at which time I was appointed as vice-president. About 1996 Jim Johnson retired and I was appointed president. In 2002 the presidency became a joint position and I was joined by Peter Dodge, Aith, Cunningsburgh.

The Shetland branch of the Federation is served well by all its office-bearers who spend many hours doing their best to make sure that crofters throughout the Highlands and Islands are treated with the respect they deserve as the original environmentalists.

Shetland was honoured in 2006 when Norman Leask was elected national chair of the SCF and then this year Shetland was again honoured by the election of Eleanor Arthur.

I am completely confident the present SCF is still carrying on the fight for crofters and long may they continue.



Agnes Leask



Ray Dutton (former SCU director), Donnie MacLennan, John MacKintosh (former SCU presidents)

TRACTOR RESTORATION

Banned from the kitchen

Edd Green, who describes himself as an old enthusiast, sets the scene

MY INTEREST IN TRACTORS was born when I started my working life during the war years, when the transition from horses to tractors was making big changes to the way in which farming was carried out.

Because money was short during that period, the tractor man had to learn how things worked and to make repairs to keep tools and tractors on the move. It was natural that after a working life in another occupation, I should go back to my roots amongst tractors – and so began my interest in restoration.

Firstly I would point out that this is not for the fainthearted as it requires a lot of money, getting dirty, cold and frustrated. But if you are mechanically minded, can spray paint and you don't mind being banned from the kitchen for getting grease on the floor and staying half the night in the shed, you can overcome all these stumbling blocks – then there is no reason why you cannot restore old tractors.

We have now reached the situation that a lot of good old tractors have been dismantled by enthusiasts who found the job not so easy and they lie in bits all over the place, lost and rusting away, which is a great pity as most of them only needed a bit of TLC. Unfortunately prices have gone crazy and people who have old tractors have been given the wrong idea that they are worth money. This is only the case if they are in

good order or are already restored.

Parts are readily available and tractor displays, shows, ploughing matches, rallies and charity events are a good time to discuss restoration projects with the people who have done the job and who are usually willing to give advice to novices.

There are some beautifully restored old machines of all makes on display throughout the northern area which are a credit to the owners and should encourage more young enthusiasts to get involved.

Good Luck!

My address for tractor collection is Achnandarach, Plockton



Edd's collection of tractors in his shed are a Ferguson 1947 TEA petrol, a 1954 Ferguson TEF diesel, a 1957 Ferguson FE35 grey/gold diesel and a 1967 Massey Ferguson 135.



At the Strathspey Railway Company's steam fair: a display for passengers doing the round trip on the steam train from Aviemore to Broomhill station, end of the line for the steam trains from Aviemore station until the last section of track is completed to Grantown on Spey.

From horses to machines

Neil MacDonald remembers his early interest in tractors

BORN AND BROUGHT UP on a croft in Ross-shire, one of five brothers, I watched my father working with horses on 30 acres, cultivating the land.

Then came the first tractors to the area, putting the horses into retirement.

I ploughed with a Fordson N and a Cockshut No 6 plough at the age of 14. That was me hooked. On leaving school I worked on farms for about 10 years.

In 1979 I bought my own croft which I worked part time; and full time as a fencing contractor.

I always had an ambition to renovate an old tractor so in 2005 I bought and restored



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MEMBERSHIP PAGES

Actions from the membership survey

EARLIER THIS YEAR a survey was sent round members in *The Crofter* to find out their views on the priorities for the SCF.

I reported in the last *Crofter* on the main results. Now we can see what actions the SCF needs to take to meet the aspirations of its members as put forward in the survey.

The results were very clear that the most important issues facing crofting today are to do with legislation, grants and subsidies and the lobbying of various levels of government that goes with these regulations.

However, when the survey asked "What should SCF be doing differently?" a separate set of concerns surfaced to do with local branches and training. This suggests that SCF is tackling the big issues but, in doing so, we have neglected the local areas and branches.

Encouragingly, the third biggest category was expressions of general support such as "Keep up the good work", "More of the same" and "Doing a good job". Just

under half of the respondents answered this question.

Of the 145 responses to this question, getting on for a quarter were to do with local activities, more meetings, more activities, more info on contacts and meetings. The next biggest category was training (10%). This pattern holds for most of the breakdowns we looked at. The only exception was for the under 40s who thought training was the most important. Training can overlap with local meetings since many talks have an element of training or updating skills and knowledge, depending on the speaker. Otherwise, whether the respondent was male or female, worked a croft or didn't, lived on a croft or didn't, they all put more local activity at the top of the list and training as second.

The traditional structure for SCF is local branches run by local members. A number of branches then combine to form an area; and the area elects a delegate to sit on the SCF council, which consists of area reps and the board. The council sets the strategy and priorities for SCF.

Thus the branches and areas depend on local members to

organise meetings and are driven from the grass roots. HQ could do more to help with this and maybe the next steps are –

- HQ to check with branch and area office bearers to see whether they are still active and use *The Crofter* or a mail shot to advertise any vacancies.

- HQ could then help with organising meetings by arranging speakers, doing advertising or whatever to get branches energised again.

- Our crofting resources programme and our new skills training programme (see below) can set up training sessions around the areas.

- There might even be a case for an SCF roadshow to tour areas, provide assistance, boost membership and generally raise the profile.

- Continue with providing an SCF presence at agricultural shows around the Highlands and Islands, as it does every year.

If you don't know who your branch reps are then get in touch with HQ for their contact details or ask for help in reviving your own branch.

Russell Smith

Crofting skills for the 21st century

THE SCF'S Crofters and Small Landholders Skills for the 21st Century training scheme will provide courses at entry level (the crofting induction course) covering subjects ranging from tenancy and ownership laws to livestock and land management, landscape and wildlife conservation, forestry, horticulture, finance and marketing, the European dimension and community development.

This is followed by wide-ranging practical skills options under various individual unit headings of crofting livestock; land management; conservation and environment; crofter forestry; crofter horticulture and crofting heritage skills.

The 18-month programme is responding to a recognised and pressing need for appropriate and affordable training in the crofting sector. It will also complement SCF's existing SCF/Soil Association Crofting Connections programme which provides crofting, land management and

food production skills to secondary pupils in 23 schools across the crofting counties.

The entry level and practical skills courses will be delivered in seven areas across the Highlands and Islands: Inverness and East Highland; Skye, Wester Ross and Lochalsh; Western Isles; Argyll and the Islands; Northern Isles; Moray, Badenoch and Strathspey; Caithness and Sutherland.

During the life of the project it expects to provide training to around 210 people at entry level and 420 on the practical skills programme. It will be delivered by specialists and accredited practical trainers who are themselves in tune with the small scale nature of crofting and smallholding in the Highlands.

While the entry level course is aimed at aspiring and new entrant crofters and small landholders, it is expected that the courses will also attract existing crofters wanting to develop their skills and ensure they are keeping up to date with law and industry-approved good practice.

The aim is to underpin and

develop appropriate skills for crofters, smallholders and rural contractors in the Highlands and Islands area. The skills programme will be delivered through a structured system conforming to a range of national occupational standards which have been specifically designed by LANTRA in consultation with crofters and smallholders.

Scottish Government funding for the programme of £99,000 was confirmed by environment minister Roseanna Cunningham in her keynote address to the SCF's annual gathering in Oban. It is to be matched by contributions from Highlands and Islands Enterprise, LANTRA, Scottish Natural Heritage, Scottish Agricultural College and Forestry Commission Scotland.

Information about the courses is available from SCF HQ on 01599 530 005 and at www.crofting.org Also from Su Cooper on 01463 796 836 and at training@crofting.org

HI-Scot credit union for crofters

ON 1ST NOVEMBER 2010 the Highlands and Islands saving and lending organisation HI-Scot credit union was officially up-and-running. This has grown from a development of the Western Isles credit union to cover the Highlands and Islands.

Credit unions have huge potential for all who want a more ethical and community-minded way of saving and borrowing than banks, but are especially relevant to crofters who may find a bank reluctant to lend to someone with a part-time or variable income. Even lending on tenanted crofts could be considered in the future. In short, a credit union is a friendly alternative to a bank.

SCF aims to nurture a relationship with HI-Scot and are keen to help publicise it to crofting communities – as the more savers in the credit union the more it is able to help with loans.

Young crofters group

AT THE ANNUAL gathering in Oban Karen talked about the aims for the young crofters group she is in the process of setting up.

After this there was a flurry of media interest with articles in the Press and Journal and the West Highland Free Press. We have had a good response from this attention and also from information in *The Crofter* and through word of mouth, but we still want more people to get involved directly.

A study tour has been put on hold till the spring. If you are interested in coming on this tour, or alternatively if you think you have something to offer to the young crofters group please do contact us.

We will be doing the tour over two days and plan to visit crofts of all types to get an understanding of the range of activities that can be done with croft land and also have a look at financial aspects.

If you have any ideas of what you would like to see included, please get in touch.

MEMBERSHIP PAGES

John retiring – surely not!

JOHN BANNISTER, until recently SCF training manager, says he is retiring and handing over to Su Cooper. Whilst the hand-over has taken place and Su is our new training manager, the 'retiring' bit doesn't ring true.

John left the Midlands Police force and moved to Kylesha in Skye in the early 1990s to retire. Since then this remarkable man has established a successful croft business from scratch and was instrumental in the forming of the Skye and Lochalsh horticultural development association; has served as grazings clerk in his township and secretary to the Sleaf and Strath branch of the SCU; was significantly involved in the establishment of the Glenelg ferry community company; designed and managed the SCU/SCF crofting induction courses that have grown in popularity and geographical spread year by year; formed and administered the Highlands and Islands crofters and small landholders training panel and recently secured funding for the SCF training programme, which now employs Su. That's an interesting definition of retiring! But John says that he is going to be taking it a bit easier now. As I write,

he is in Africa doing a stint as a conservation volunteer on a brown hyena survival programme – so we will see what that means.

The SCF owes John a huge vote of thanks, not only for the amount of voluntary time and expertise he has given to crofting – which was deservedly recognised with the award of an MBE a couple of years ago – but perhaps more importantly for his support and friendship to us all through thick and thin.

Our very best wishes to you and Beryl in your 'retirement', John.



New face for SCF training

JOHN BANNISTER, retiring SCF training manager has been replaced by Su Cooper, a lassie who hails from the Inverness area.

John said, "Su impressed the selection panel members at her interview in early November. She is a qualified and experienced ecologist, having an MSc and a BSc in environment, economics and ecology. She also has a considerable background in teaching and training in formal, informal and community learning."

"Su is well suited to this field of work and I'm sure she will be a worthy asset whilst working with us in the Federation. Su will be a part-time contractor for the initial 18 months of the project, starting in November. Her remit is to ensure that the induction

courses (now called entry level induction courses) and a whole bunch of other relevant practical courses are delivered to as wide a crofting and smallholding audience as possible."

Su is a busy lady, undertaking voluntary work as a science ambassador, involved with nation-wide surveys including birds, plants and butterflies as well as the Highland cycle campaign. In her spare time she is studying for maths and IT with the open university.

Her recent work with the RSPB brought her into working contact with farmers and crofters throughout the Highlands and Islands. No time for a rest however – welcome, Su, to the SCF.



Karen attends young Scotland and Northern Ireland programme

THE YOUNG UK and Ireland Programme exists to develop the communication skills of people in the early stages of their working lives or who are performing voluntary work in the community.

It does so through an annual series of residential courses and competitions of between two and four days' duration. The programme aims to encourage the research, writing and presentational abilities of delegates, helping to build confidence where it is fragile as well as enhancing the talents of more experienced participants.

Karen Campbell, SCF membership administrator and young crofters' group contact, attended the course at the end of October. The judges noted that her paper on Nocton's super dairy and intensive agriculture had the power to shock with her facts and statistics.

Karen commented: "It was a very useful and insightful programme covering many topics. We had very interesting discussions and overall I would say that it has helped to boost my confidence when speaking to large groups of people and also for working in groups."

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Further details, including fees and allowances from:
SCF Training Manager – Su Cooper
email: training@crofting.org tel: 01463 796836

The Land Settlement Association

By Peter Clarke

JUST OVER 75 years ago the London government started an experiment to re-settle unemployed miners, engineers and others from heavy industries in the depressed coalfields onto agricultural small holdings.

This resettlement was to go on until the outbreak of war in September 1939. But this was not the end of the Land Settlement Association (LSA). It continued until 1983 to give men with agricultural experience the chance to get onto the first rung of the farming ladder.

There were a number of different agencies engaged to deliver the scheme for the unemployed, but the biggest was the Land Settlement Association which operated in England. Scotland had its own much smaller scheme, which did not involve the creation of new holdings and resettled only 72 men.

The LSA's first estate was set up at Potton, in Bedfordshire and this provided the model for development elsewhere. At Potton 30 full-time holdings were created (average size five acres), each with a newly-built dwelling, clustered around an estate service depot. The holdings were equipped for the three-legged stool of pigs, poultry and horticulture. Each had a greenhouse, pig sties and chicken hutches.

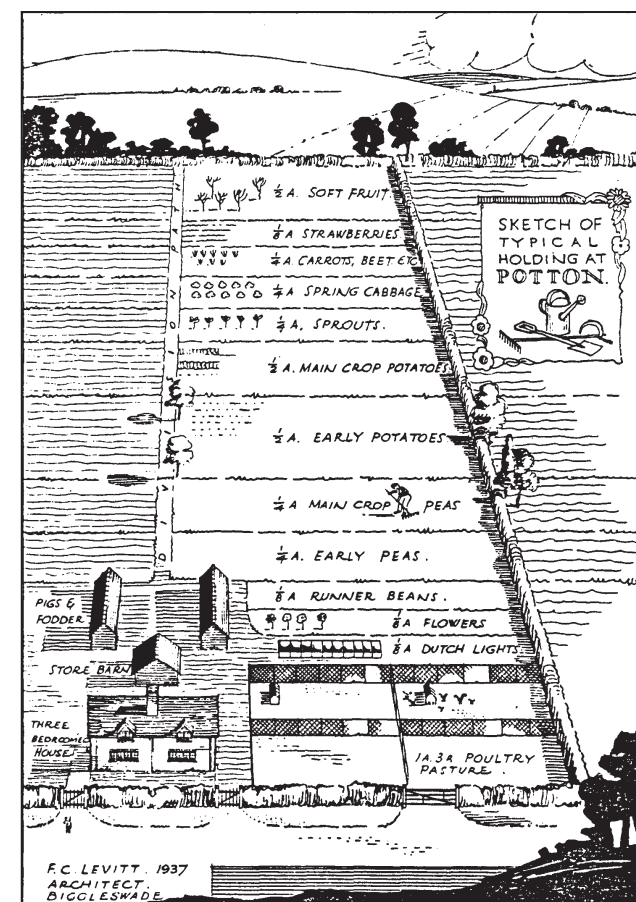
Everything on the holding had to be done by hand; the men were not permitted to own tractors. Tractors and other services such as packing, grading and marketing, the propagation of plants, incubation

of chicks and breeding of pigs were supplied by the estate service depot. The men were bound by contract to co-operate via the LSA. They could be evicted for illicit selling – that is selling independently locally – and pocketing the money. The men received about two years training, during which time they continued to receive their unemployment assistance benefit. They were joined by their families after three to six months.

By March 1939 the LSA held 11,063 acres allowing for 1,479 holdings, of which 1,100 were developed. Twenty six estates had been created. 3,809 people had been transferred but not all remained. About half of the 1,728 men transferred had given up. At the outbreak of war there were 853 smallholders in occupation, 408 as tenants and 448 as trainees. 692 families were at the estates including about 2,069 children.

The LSA also ran a scheme of group holdings. This scheme pre-dated the LSA by a couple of years but under the LSA it expanded rapidly. These were quarter-acre holdings devoted to poultry keeping and allotment cultivation in groups of ten or twenty with a communal hut. A few had pigs or a glasshouse instead of poultry. By 1939 2,519 men were working in 161 groups throughout England.

Starting in 1937 the LSA also established 201 cottage homesteads on five estates. This was a half-acre equipped holding with a detached house grouped together with a small number of cottage homesteads

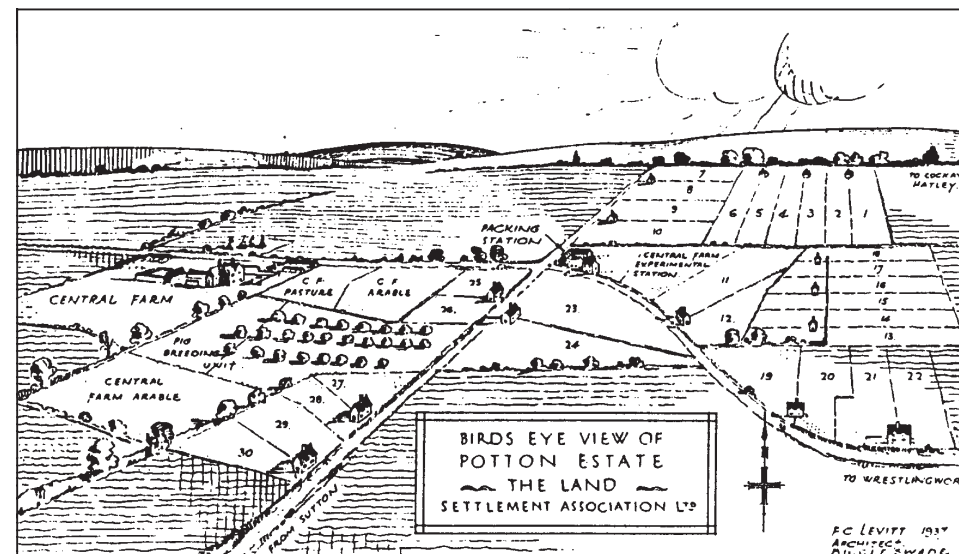


on the outskirts of an industrial town in the Midlands or South of England. They were designed to give unemployed married men over the age of 50 a means of subsistence whilst their adolescent children found employment in the nearby towns.

There is much to learn from the experience of LSA and its tenants about how to organise and not organise economically

viable smallholdings which is directly relevant to crofting today. But two things predominantly: survival is determined by the degree of social cohesion and co-operation.

Peter Clarke spent his youth in the village of Potton. He is currently working on a book about the return of the unemployed to the land, based on his PhD thesis.



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The implementation and impact of sheep EID

Hilary Liebeschuetz reports on a presentation which she delivered to the sheep and goat meat advisory group in Brussels in October. The visit was funded by the European Forum for Nature Conservation and Pastoralism. Hilary, who has been campaigning on the issue of sheep EID for a long time, is a vet who works for the Shetland Island Council managing the Shetland animal health schemes and helps with the family farm.

SERGIO PAVON from DG – SANCO, the section responsible, gave an update on implementation of the sheep EID regulation.

This was proceeding well with no serious issues reported so far from member states. It soon became obvious that this was not the view of the majority of persons in the room and things got a little heated. Here are some views put forward by the country representatives.

'Sheep end up with no ears – they end up with the remains of ears and we still have to identify'

'I am surprised the Commission has indicated there are no problems with this regulation. We would be very grateful for them visiting member states to look at how this is applied in practice.'

'This system will eradicate sheep farmers. Rules cost too much.'

'Please travel around member states and we will teach you something.'

'The legislation is imposed on us. We do not see how we can cope.'

'Go out into the field. Do not develop legislation sitting at your desk.'

The more moderate NFUS view detailed the success of the Scottish EID pilot in

demonstrating that sheep can be traced through CCPs and how this could be used to gain farmer buy in through limiting paper work and cross-compliance issues.

I had always thought that it was only the UK that was against this regulation. It seemed that the views of European governments were very different to those of the farmers.

Mr Pavon reminded us that this system had been proposed to deal with highly infectious disease with huge economic impacts. He challenged the view that the system didn't work using the Scottish data of 96% read rates, denying that farmers would be penalised through cross compliance for technological failures.

The debate over-ran into the lunch break. I think we had better not dwell on the subsidised staff canteen prices or why mountains of steak are on display – cooked to order, as for a high class hotel.

My presentation detailed the import controls and health status already achieved in Shetland and how the Scottish EID pilot is operating there. I gave examples of issues relating to the application of EID: animal welfare, cross compliance, lack of access to broadband/mobile phone networks in remote areas, lack of computer skills, cost, variable tag quality, unknown durability of technology and stress.

I challenged the view that sheep need to be identified with an individual number on the holding of birth for foot and mouth control. I requested that individual identification of sheep on the holding of birth be made voluntary, with animals able to be identified with a single flock tag and upgraded to an electronic tag with individual ID when they move off. In this way the cross-compliance burden on farm is

reduced and animal welfare improved. The sheep's ears would stand more chance of being fit to hold the tags and the electronic chip in the tag more likely to be in place and functional when they move off the holding of birth and need to be traced.

Mr Pavon's response was largely a repeat of his previous statements, which so angered the committee that the discussion had to be brought to a rapid conclusion.

The German representative then stated that four German farmers, with the support of their union and a collection to raise funds, are taking the commission to court – challenging the EID regulation, intending to go right to the European court of human rights.

We must also keep up the political pressure at European, UK and Scottish levels, reminding our politicians that the goal of traceability and disease control is a good one but it is necessary to enable the breeders of sheep, often in extensive systems, to remain in business, such that there remain some sheep to trace.

The commission listens only to facts, but is committed to animal welfare, so keeping records of ear damage caused by tags will be useful to crofting representatives to take forward to Brussels.

In conclusion, if like me you are struggling to comply, pondering over your poster-sized EID regulation summary sheet, listening out for the knock of the inspectors at the door, I think there is some reassurance to be gained from my experience in Brussels, which showed that farmers across Europe are feeling just the same way as you.

hilary@liebeschuetz.fsnet.co.uk

Terra Madre

CROFTERS FEATURED prominently in a recent edition of BBC Radio Four's Food Programme which reported on a major international gathering of agricultural communities in northern Italy in October.

SCF chair Eleanor Arthur and project officer Carolanne Stewart visited Terra Madre, which is organised by the international Slow Food movement and held once every two years in Turin. The event allows more than 5,000 representatives of different food communities throughout the world to meet one another and share knowledge on issues of common interest.

The crofting delegates met with members of some of the many different indigenous groups represented at the event, such as the Sami and the Maori. They also spoke to the Food Programme's presenter Sheila Dillon. She described how crofters were making a common cause with indigenous groups and concluded: "Indigenous peoples' ways of life – their inherited knowledge of plants and animals and their agricultural methods – have something crucial to offer a world looking for answers on how we are going to feed a growing population."

Eleanor Arthur said "It is great to discover, through being at Terra Madre, that there are so many other groups out there for whom working the land is about more than just food production – as one of the Maori delegates said: "It is about who we are as a people". We

want to be supported to work the land in ways that are good for the land and good for our crofting culture.

"For so long crofters have been treated by the powers-that-be as a problem needing solved. What we are learning from Terra Madre is that other peoples have been treated in the same way, but they are fighting back and showing how it is often the powers-that-

be that are causing the problems."

The programme also focussed on the reindeer herding Sami of northern Europe who have been at the forefront of a resurgence in indigenous cultures over the last fifty years. Indigenous peoples are being supported by the United Nations in claiming land and political rights, as well as giving legal foundations for their languages and cultural practices and beliefs.



Eleanor Arthur (L) and Carol Anne Stewart (R) at Terra Madre

Crofter's wife column

I'M KNOWN for liking a fairly traditional Christmas – church, tree, modest gifts, relaxing with family, good food etc. However, in recent years a new tradition has snuck its way onto the pages of the season's diary and already I wouldn't miss it for the world...

The weekend before Christmas my sisters, nieces and their friends come to the island from the Big City. On Saturday afternoon we head down to the shore at the foot of the croft. There, the lone tree that stands guard by the old ruin is decorated by a multitude of eager, gloved hands: lanterns lit with candles, paperchains (we're really thumbing our noses at health and safety here, aren't we?!) and chocolate novelties. One year it even had a visit from a robin!

While we build a fire on the shore and cook, in the first instance, sausages, the children's chatter and excitement must surely carry for miles across the water – a real spreading of Christmas cheer. Later the children commandeer the fire and in the embers create sickly sweet "smores" with gooey marshmallows and chocolate biscuits. Bellies full, we sing Christmas songs and carols; eeking out the last few pieces of wood to delay the cold penetrating our bones.

And before dusk falls the children perform – usually a slant on the Nativity or a song (the "Twelve Days of Christmas" being a particularly memorable year!) while we film it for posterity. Regardless of their intentions this is always a comedy performance with cast and audience regularly succumbing to

bouts of mirth and hilarity and even being reduced to tears.

As the sun sets (somehow we always seem to have a good day of weather) and the temperature plummets we make our way back up the croft in high spirits, red-cheeked, freezing cold but full of real happiness. For me, there could be no better start to the Christmas season.

O chionn ghoirid, cho-dhùin An Croitear gun robh làn-thìde againn tòiseachadh air joba mhòr.... sgioblachadh na garaids againn. A dh'innse na firinn, chan e garaids a th' ann ach bùth-obrach/stòr is e a bha làn sean stuth – stuth feumail is stuth gun fheum!

Mar chroitearan air feadh na Gaidhealtachd, chan eil sion nach cumadh seanaid a' chroiteir... 's dòcha gum biodh e feumail uaireigin!

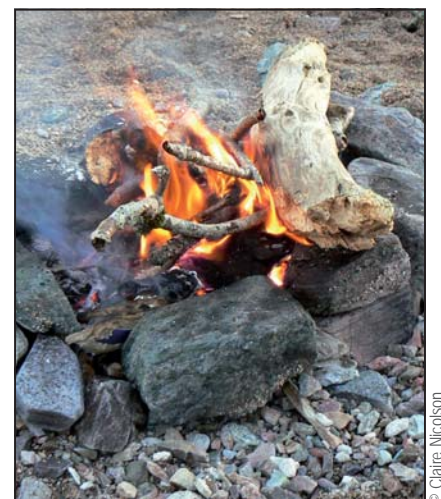
Chòrd an obair seo rium.... ged nach robh fios agam gu tric dè fon a' ghrian a bh' anns an rud seo agus an rud sin eile agus, na bu chudthromaich na sin, am bu choir dhuinn a chumail?

Tha sinn air a bhith trang leis fad trì feasgaran Dòmhnach a-nise agus cha mhòr nach eil sinn deiseil. Às dèidh dà thrup gu lagais na comhairle tha sinn gar lorg le rùm gu leòr airson a bhith ag obrachadh air innealan is achfainn croite agus tha a' bheing-obrach cho glan is cho sgiobalta 's a bha i a-riamh le dachaigh ann airson fiù 's gach tarrag! Abair obair shàsachail!

Nollaig chridheil dhuibh uile!



© Claire Nicolson



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Crofters Commission
Coimisean nan Croitearan

Regulating crofting to sustain and enhance rural communities

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CROFTING RESOURCES PROGRAMME

Shetland cattle herd book society centenary

Clare Abernethy reports

BONDED BY common resolve, a coach-load of Shetland kye enthusiasts boarded the north-bound ferry to join the four-day Shetland Cattle Herd Book Society (SCHBS) centenary celebrations a few months ago.

The Cunningsburgh show afforded an ideal opportunity to meet Shetland breeders, assess their exhibits and study the comprehensive display in the society marquee which also hosted Pearl Young's captivating presentation of traditional dairying. This popular demonstration attracted a fascinated crowd to view the ancient skill of butter-making.

A seminar embraced a bevy of specialists from bovine genetics, niche beef production, animal health and sustainable land management to regional strategy issues. Collectively these experts pointed a constructive way forward for the society in its second century. Shetland beef was the key component in the ensuing dinner, a fitting conclusion to a stimulating day.

Local breeders on their home soil were featured, a chance for guests to compare and contrast individual herd policies in productive exchange with their owners.

Ronnie Eunson, mid-90s president of the SCHBS, expanded on his grass-roots philosophies from the scenic vistas of his Uradale farm, whilst his routine dog-handling won universal acclaim from appreciative bystanders.

Tommy and Mary Isbisters' Burland croft trail was an impelling contrast with its impressive selection of native breeds, indigenous flora and historic artefacts.

Fortified by Mary's lavish home produce we veered south to admire two attractive heifer calves displaying ancient dun and white markings, pride of the new Beadies herd. This theme was further highlighted at Hillwell where a spectrum of colour from a selective breeding programme was on show. Owner Magnus Burgess also demonstrated the breed's commercial potential by an impressive multi-suckling regime producing thriving store stock.

At Northmavine the group visited Addie Doull, current SCHBS president, who proffered the traditional Shetland hospitality against the backdrop of his Islesburgh herd in its picturesque setting of trademark red granite.

The ultimate stop was the vintage Collafirth herd of Robert Ramsay, SCHBS past president, his grandfather William Ramsay being a founder member of the SCHBS. Robert also bears the distinction of breeding, in 1990, Collafirth Rasmie, the first red calf for generations, to which his current descendants bear colourful witness.

We were proud to conclude our centenary celebration with this direct personal link to the society foundation and now enter its second century with the society's positive millennium slogan: **A breed from the past with a place in the future.**



Shetland kye enthusiasts

Blackland project

GRIMSAY is an island in the Uists associated with a progressive, dynamic yet sustainable fishing industry, but rooted firmly in its culture and traditions, including seafaring, boatbuilding and crofting.

It is appropriate that it is now the base for an innovative project that seeks to show that the land can once again be as productive as the sea. Behind that project is the Crofting Environment Improvement Association (CEIA), a group of crofters from the east side of the Uists who came together last year to investigate ways of restoring fertility and productivity to the blackland crofts typical of the east coast of the islands which, until recent times, produced fodder for livestock and food crops for families.

Crofting in Uist is better known for the flat, fertile machair lands of the west coast with their highly designated natural heritage sites, maintained by crofters' traditional practices. However, the Uist blackland crofts are more representative of crofting conditions on the western seaboard in general, whether in Lewis, Wester Ross, west Sutherland or indeed Shetland.

At the end of September, CEIA held its first conference, "Blackland: from the ground up", at the experimental croft at Scotvein, Grimsay. The theme of the conference was the past, present and future of this type of croft land. Its former productivity was achieved by centuries of often back-breaking work – drainage, stone clearance and addition of manure, seaweed and shell sand. In recent years it has become invaded by rank vegetation, waterlogged and underused – a result of an agricultural policy that first encouraged overgrazing by sheep and then rapid de-stocking and abandonment. How could these crofts be returned to better grassland, fodder production and cropping?

These topics were addressed by an impressive panel of speakers. Ken Davies, a weed and vegetation specialist with Scottish Agricultural College (SAC) said that moss is the main enemy. It holds two to three times its own weight in water and takes up all available nutrients. It can be combatted by draining and

liming. Soils scientist Tony Edwards spoke about the relationship between phosphorous and acidity in the soil. Ian Cairns of SAC, formerly their consultant in Stornoway, dealt with appropriate croft-scale machinery. He reminded us of the mini-baler trials in Lewis which had resulted in the development of a micro-industry, substituting local for imported fodder. Bob Rees, a soil and climate change scientist at Edinburgh University, gave us a fascinating statistic. Peat soils cover just 3% of the earth's surface but hold one third of the planet's soil carbon. The challenge for all agriculturists is to increase both production and environmental protection. Crofting communities, he said, could again become self-sustaining.

A questions and discussion session was followed by tours of the croft led by the experts and a demonstration of the impressive array of small-scale machinery that the CEIA project has assembled. There were demonstrations and a display by the Uist Wool Development Group, which is working to establish a commercial wool mill for the islands. In the evening, dinner was served in CEIA's new shed at Scotvein, consisting of Uist venison and, most appropriately, wild goose! This was followed by a showing of archive film of the islands, including footage of a youthful Kenny MacKenzie conducting an open air cattle sale in the 1970s. He hasn't changed a bit! The evening concluded with entertainment from a very talented group of the island's young musicians.

Congratulations are due to CEIA for this inspiring project and especially to Mary Norton, Dana MacPhee and all who organised the very informative and enjoyable conference. For more information contact The Blackland Project, 5 Scotvein, Grimsay, North Uist HS6 5JA, 01870 602954.

The project has reprinted "Crofting Agriculture" by F. Fraser Darling which, although first published in 1945, contains a wealth of information relevant to crofters today who are seeking to raise crops and livestock on the black soils of the west. The book is now on sale from the above address.

The gold standard

LOOKING THROUGH my folder of past issues of *The Crofter* it is clear that quality stock breeding and food production have a prominent place, including related animal health issues.

In a wider context this was supported by the 2006 Scottish Executive initiative, "A forward Strategy for Scottish Agriculture: Next Steps".

In addition to diet being affected by what produce is available, health and general wellbeing can be affected, in particular, by the built environment.

Crofter housing initiatives through the department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland (DAFS) encouraged post-war space standards to be adopted where generous living and sleeping space was adopted in house design, all against a national background to improve the living environment.

With the desire to move forward there was the downside of dampness and condensation associated with little understanding of vapour levels in confined spaces and moisture migration within the building fabric and how to manage it – aspects to be addressed again with the October



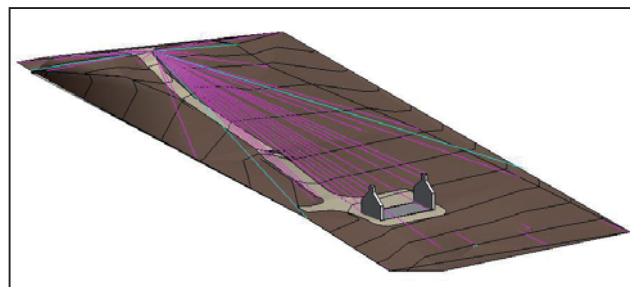
1st increase in insulation levels required by the revised Scottish building standards. Within outbuildings, similar issues have to be addressed when keeping animals warm and dry – and feeding free from mould.

The launch on October 5th of the Outer Hebrides Design Guide by the Comhairle's design champion, councillor Angus McCormack, is a welcome step on the road to improving design standards.

<http://www.cne-siar.gov.uk/planningservice/designguide>

The accompanying images are influenced by that important theme being local context, through the use of an existing poured concrete gable wall and modern building attached with echoes of the local traditional house or steading form.

It is the right time to have our very own crofting design guide to draw together all that is best throughout our



crofting communities. In harsh economic times we have to reflect on our lives, the way we live, and our livelihoods and gear up for change.

With skills programmes, local hydro schemes, wind power, stonework, Chelsea gold for a Shetland croft house garden, woodland crofts and timber harvesting and Marina's eco-house to name but a few features in this magazine, is it not time to have a gold standard for design innovation and a skills register to bring together and harness this vast resource of local skills and developing expertise – reconnecting our young people with the resourcefulness of our forebears.

At a rural design Seminar at the Comhairle in Stornoway in October, 1999, Arni Winther spoke of his work as an architect in the Faeroes

and stated, "I'm convinced that we are to work hard to ensure better design quality in our surroundings to attract and keep an active local population in rural areas. This will play an important role in developing our identity and self-understanding, and also to avoid feelings of remoteness ... the task made easier by demonstrating that better design is more economical..."

Let us gear up for change and start to move forward.

Leis gach deagh dhurachd agus le h-uile bheannachd.

Niall Ferguson

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Nickie May, 1958 – 2010

SCF'S ORKNEY representative, Nickie May, died on Friday November 12th 2010 at home on the island of Shapinsay, after a short fight against cancer. Nickie is survived by her husband Stewart, father and younger brother.

An enthusiastic student, Nickie gained a masters degree in economics from Cambridge university and later went on to become a registered chartered accountant.

While living at Tankerville Farm in Shropshire, Nickie developed a keen interest in keeping and breeding Shetland cattle. In August 1999 Nickie and Stewart moved to the small island of Shapinsay in Orkney. Nickie, a keen environmentalist, turned Farm of Garth into an organic unit where she bred Herdwick sheep along with her Shetland cattle. Also a keen horsewoman, she always kept a few horses as well.

Nickie was an enthusiastic member of her community and was always willing to help with any local or heritage issues. As well as serving as a community development officer she also worked as the community powerdown officer, stepping down only when the initial planning and financial issues had been addressed. As president of the local agricultural society she helped organise the annual Orkney county show of livestock, produce and crafts.

Nickie joined the Scottish Crofting Federation in 2006 and was actively involved in setting up the Orkney branch of the organisation. She served initially as the branch secretary before becoming Orkney area representative on the SCF council. A passionate supporter of crofting, her contribution to the work of the SCF was much appreciated.

Nickie's good friend Evelyn Leask commented: "Nickie was bursting with enterprise both at a personal level and in her commitment to the many projects with which she was involved. Although her boundless vitality will be missed, we must also rejoice in her lifetime of enthusiasm and dedication. I feel privileged to have known so well this lovely lady."



Eigg crofter's innovative crop

ACROFTER on the island of Eigg is helping to save one of Scotland's most threatened and iconic wild flowers.

The delicate native bluebells which carpet woods in colour are under severe threat from cross breeding with imported Spanish bluebells.

Eigg is a stronghold of the Scottish bluebell, which transform swathes of the island into a sea of deep, rich blue each spring.

Now Irishman Eddie Scott is harvesting wild seeds to help secure the native bluebell's future on the mainland. "The bluebells on Eigg have never been exposed to the Spanish variety so have not cross bred to become hybrids," he explained.

"In a lot of places the hybrids and Spanish bluebells have driven the native ones to the brink of extinction. Planting more pure Scottish bluebells will help strengthen their foothold once again. It'll be great to see their beautiful colour and gorgeous, subtle fragrance returning to woods and gardens throughout the country."

Eddie was head gardener at Ardross Castle Estate in Easter Ross, before moving to Eigg in 2004. "I'd been visiting Eigg for many years before moving here, playing at ceilidhs and gradually getting to know the place and the people."

Eddie grows fruit and vegetables in a polytunnel on the croft, supplying surplus produce to the shop and tea room, and is a volunteer on a range of community projects, such as helping to establishing an orchard on the island.

The plan to diversify into seed gathering came when Eddie realised his croft was a sanctuary for the threatened wild flowers. "I was trying to think what I could produce on the croft that would be light and easy to export off the island."

"My idea was to grow plants for making herbal teas; but when spring came I realised the croft was awash with bluebells, which I knew were becoming rare in many places."

Staff from the botanic gardens in Edinburgh verified the purity of the seeds, and Eddie obtained a licence from the Scottish Government to harvest a strictly limited number of them from the



croft each year.

Artist Saira Renny and graphic designer Ben Cormack are among the growing number of young people who have moved to Eigg or returned to make the island their home. They worked with Eddie to create distinctive packaging for the seeds, which are sold in the island craft shop and online.

Seeds can be sown from September to March and take two to four years to mature. For more information and to buy them online go to www.eddieseiggcroft.com.

Pictures by Megan Frey



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