

## The Crofting Reform (Scotland) Act 2010

**S**OME SECTIONS of the 2010 Act have now come into effect – on 22 December 2010 and 1 February 2011. A further two sections take effect on 1 July 2011.

Perhaps the most significant provisions for many crofters are those which relate to a crofter's ability to nominate a third party (or parties) in whose name title is to be taken to croft land and the payment due to landlords following a disposal of croft land – the "landlord's claw back".

Full details can be found on page 3.

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And much more ...

## Are crofting support schemes missing their target?

**T**HAT IS A QUESTION that arises from the results of the survey on support schemes contained in the last issue of The Crofter.

We asked about the use of Crofting Counties Agricultural Grant Scheme (CCAGS) and Land Managers Options (LMOs). Both types of support are especially important for crofters as they are non-competitive and (supposedly) easy to apply for. But the take up has not been good, so we were trying to find out why – in order to represent members' views in our discussions with the Scottish Government.

The replies were mainly from active crofters

(93% work a croft and 81% keep cattle and/or sheep). We also asked about Single Farm Payment (SFP) and the Less Favoured Area Support Scheme (LFASS). 17% of respondents who keep stock don't get SFP; 20% who don't keep stock do get SFP; and 13% of respondents who keep stock don't get LFASS, raising serious questions about the targeting of these schemes and their accessibility to new entrants, questions that we hope are being addressed by the Scottish Government in the wake of the Pack Report.

The uptake for CCAGS has been declining

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## Renewable energy: golden goose or wild goose?

**F**OLLOWING ON from the SCF seminar on crofting renewables last June, Minister for Energy Jim Mather MSP organised a meeting of all involved and interested in this topic at the beginning of February. Interestingly, banks and energy supply companies invited to the seminar did not attend.

SCF set the scene and used a case-study from Shetland to illustrate the situation. An abridged version follows.

### Small-scale wind energy generation on a Shetland croft

Any business is valued on its ability to produce an income and ultimately on its profitability. With mine I manage to break even, which on 50 hectares in Shetland and at

the level of support which I receive, is probably pretty good going.

My croft is fairly productive, fairly good land. I receive approximately £100 per hectare in support payments. If it was on the Scottish mainland I would receive multiple hundreds per hectare.

Many crofters are running their enterprises at a loss. Not only have we cut every cost to the bone, but crofters subsidise their activities from earned wages. They will sell an area of land for development just to be able to continue, to invest in their croft, purchase a tractor, or whatever is needed. I recently sold a small piece of land so I could employ a contractor to renew the ditches on my croft. It feels like I am forced to sell the family silver. This is neither an equitable nor

sustainable situation!

The solution to my predicament, and the wider crofting communities, I thought may lie in renewable energy. There was the prospect of generating our own electricity, a guaranteed income for 20 years through Feed In Tariffs (FIT) and the sale of surplus energy to the grid.

When I first started looking at this, about a year ago, the simplest route for funding was through the Energy Savings Trust (EST). They were offering a grant and an interest free loan. There was also the more complex SRDP route.

The whole process has been highly frustrating, as one funding source after another has evaporated.

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# Message from the chair...

Eleanor Arthur



**F**UEL AND FEED prices continue to soar.

In Shetland the price of diesel (at time of writing) is now £1.46 per litre, with barley £155 per ton, sugar beet £257 per ton, hay £60 and straw £45 per round bale. It is a very expensive winter for crofters.

However does this reflect in how smaller producers currently run their crofts? Will they try to change to make profit or at least break even? For example, will we adjust the stocking density to just keep the number of animals our land can support? Will we change what we do? Will we use native breeds that can survive our winters with less feed? Will

we grow more crops to support a smaller number of animals and family or buy in to support larger numbers of animals?

Food for thought.

Travelling from Inverness to Edinburgh by train recently, it was obvious the animals and land looked in a sorry state. The newly-ploughed land was standing with water-filled furrows, cattle standing grouped around rings of silage knee deep in mud and a good number of sheep huddling side by side in shelter where they could find it. Times are really hard for those dedicated people who work animals and the land – not only to make a living for themselves, but to supply food to the general public. They are paying a hefty price for what they believe in.

This brings up the age-old question of support. Smaller units, like we have, would benefit from the return of cropping support. The less favoured area support scheme is continuing to lean towards more intensive farming systems – businesses in the more favoured areas. Weird or what? These businesses rely on finishing stock bought from the smaller producer in the north and

west. Where will they get the stock from if we all go more extensive? Who is going to lose the most?

Why does government not realise what and where fragile and very fragile areas are? Are these not the crofting counties?

Attempts to make crofting pay by supplementing it with renewable energy production, a natural income earner for crofts you would think, also seem to be thwarted by big business. In Edinburgh we attended a seminar organised by Jim Mather MSP, Minister for Enterprise, Energy and Tourism. This event was well attended by stakeholders. However two

of the main beneficiaries in renewable energy, ie financiers and electricity suppliers, failed to be represented. It is frustrating when the crofting counties have all the elements which would not only help to achieve the government's renewable energy requirements but would also help those who are struggling in the periphery.

This week in Shetland with the gales we have had, if I had had a wind generator up and working, the registration process all finalised and the Feed in Tariff set up, I would be sitting here as I write looking like the proverbial Cheshire cat!



## Director's blog

*In this blog, newly-appointed company secretary John Bannister, strictly speaking not a company director, has a few words to say about his role in SCF's company business*

**Y**OU WILL ALL know by now, and if not then you'll find reference to it elsewhere in this issue, that our long-standing, hard-working and well-respected company secretary, Alistair MacIver, has stood down from his post.

Consequently, I was invited to take on the role which, as you see, I accepted after much thought – perhaps not enough. I wondered, am I up to the job? Have I the time to do it? What responsibilities would I have under the new Companies Act? What will my wife say (most important of all)?

Anyway – having said “Yes” it now behoves me to let you know who I am and how my new job fits in the order of things.

The SCF is a relatively small private company with a charitable status, which under legislation does not actually have to have a



company secretary but it always has had and there are very good reasons why it should continue to keep this post.

It's not the first time I've been a company secretary. I've formed and been secretary to two companies limited by guarantee and one company registered as a community interest company. During this time I've gained some knowledge by necessity and

through hard experience. I am not a qualified company secretary in the meaning of the present Act but I have some idea how it works.

I suppose the other reason why I was asked to take this on is because I happen to live reasonably near to SCF's head office and can and do make regular visits there out of habit in my former capacity as SCF's training manager. So, I think I can make a reasonable fist of doing the job.

Do I have the time? Well, no, not really, but how many of us would admit to it when pressed by nice people, eh?

What's new in company law? From the perspective of a private company's company secretary, not a great deal has changed. The legislation does not specify a particular role but he/she is normally expected to maintain the statutory registers; ensure that the company files its statutory information promptly; provide members and directors with notice of meetings and of any proposed resolutions; sending copies of resolutions and agreements to

Companies House; supplying a copy of the company accounts to people entitled to receive them; keeping minutes of all proceedings at general meetings; ensuring that people entitled to do so can inspect company records and finally, keeping custody and use of the company seal.

On the face of it that all looks a bit daunting, but by and large simply requires the secretary to keep a weather eye on things and make sure things that need to be done are done timeously. The serious bit for the secretary comes from the fact that he/she is a legally appointed officer of the company and is therefore criminally liable. SCF fortunately has no previous history of this and I don't intend to alter that state of affairs during my tenure.

It's customary for the company secretary to work particularly closely with the chair and chief executive and maintain a close relationship with the board as a whole, so perhaps with all their goodwill and cooperation it'll prove not to be such a daunting job after all. Time, however, will tell.



# The Crofting Reform (Scotland) Act 2010

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## 22 December 2010 – Owner occupier crofters and crofts – definition and letting

The 2010 Act provides that an owner occupier must (1) be the owner of a croft; (2) be either the crofter (croft tenant) at the time of acquisition, that person's successor in title, or must have purchased the croft from the constituting landlord, or must be that person's successor in title; AND (3) must not have subsequently let the tenancy to another individual.

The relevant section is now in effect only for the purpose of allowing Scottish Ministers to make financial assistance and loans to crofters and owner occupier crofters. The remainder of the section (relating to duties of owner occupier crofters and the division of owner occupier crofts) is not yet in force.

The definition will be used in relation to the regulation of letting of owner occupied crofts and, when they come in to effect, the sections relating to duties of owner occupier crofters and the division of owner occupier crofts.

In order to let the tenancy of his croft, an owner occupier crofter must obtain the consent of the Crofters Commission. Again, this has limited application at present, as it is currently only for the purposes of allowing Scottish Ministers to make financial assistance and loans to crofters and owner occupier crofters.

## Report by Scottish Ministers on Crofting

Section 51 requires the Scottish Ministers to exhibit a report relating to crofting to the Scottish Parliament every four years.

## 1 February 2011 – Appeals to the Scottish Land Court

Section 50 (1) removes the need for appeals to the Scottish Land Court (in relation to decisions of the Crofters Commission) to be by way of stated case.

If you wish to appeal a decision of the Crofters Commission using the stated case procedure, you must have done so prior to 1 February 2011.

## 1 July 2011 – Crofters' nominees

Section 40 of the 2010 Act provides that a crofter nominating a party in whose name title to croft land may be taken (the nominee) may only nominate a member of his family. This will end the ability of crofters to take title to their crofts, or parts thereof (eg house sites) in the names of unrelated third parties.

This provision will not affect applications made to the Scottish Land Court before 1 July 2011, and therefore if you are currently negotiating with your landlord in relation to such a

# Are crofting support schemes missing their target?

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for a number of years and the survey asked why respondents thought this might be. The most common reasons given were "crofters are under-resourced and lack the funds to cover the other 50% of costs"; "the process is too complicated"; and "the scope of CCAGS should be expanded to cover other things". All of these were ticked by about three quarters of respondents. Doing away with standards costs was cited by 62%. The same reasons were given by the 41% of respondents who had applied for a CCAGS grant in the past five years. There were some comments made about SGRPID taking too long to process applications and that the current limit should be doubled to £50,000 over two years. Suggested new activities for which CCAGS could be paid include bracken control, lime spreading, replacement fencing, reseedling, drainage, woodlands, organic conversion and housing.

The survey also asked about LMOs. The options were recently changed significantly and there is a feeling that the options now offered are of limited relevance to crofts.

The top five choices that crofters would

like to see added, all ticked by 40% or more of respondents, were:

- bracken management programme
- livestock tracks, gates and river crossings
- management of moorland grazings
- conservation management for small units
- control of invasive non-native species

Looking at those crofters who keep livestock, they are keener on the options for management of moorland grazing, hill grazing, peatlands and muirburn and less keen on measures such as conservation management for small units and control of non-native species.

There were a large number of other suggested measures such as creation and management of native woodlands; creating and maintaining footpaths; goose control; rush management; drainage; lime spreading; and rebuilding dykes – all suggested by more than one respondent. Some of the general comments suggested that the rates paid aren't realistic and that the options were skewed towards environmental rather than economic measures.

The responses from the 186 respondents will all be analysed in detail and the information used to formulate SCF's policy submissions to the Scottish Government.



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matter, and do not expect to complete that transaction successfully before 1 July, you must make an application to the Land Court before 1 July 2011 to enable your case to be decided under the current rules (which allow a crofter to nominate any third party).

## Landlord's clawback

Section 41 provides that the period during which the payment commonly referred to as 'landlord's claw back' can be claimed by a landlord is now ten years, rather than five.

This will not affect orders of the Scottish Land Court made before 1 July 2011. If, however, the application is made before 1 July but no decision has been received by that date, the new provision will be applied.

Until 1 July, it will be for individual estates to determine their policy on whether to seek to impose the extended claw back period.

The full Commencement Order may be found online.

*Eilidh Ross, solicitor, Inverness*

# Renewable energy: golden goose or wild goose?

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Firstly we lost the EST household grant, then the loan. The small business loan which the EST still do is not available to agricultural primary producers. Even if it were, the agricultural de-minimis level is so low at 7500 euros most producers would exceed it.

Having lost the EST option, I put together an SRDP application. During this process the issue of development aid and FIT compatibility reared its head. We were promised clarity, so I continued with the process. I received the required amber light and proceeded to create my business and marketing plan and compile the financial information requested.

The application was submitted, committed and then rejected without reaching the assessment stage. I was informed that I had failed to include how I might repay the grant if required, or the necessary cash flow projections – information I would have been happy to supply, had it ever been requested at any stage of the process. The whole thing had been a waste of time and money.

I had also made an approach to my bank for a business overdraft. I was optimistic, as the financial projections were extremely positive and I had a good track record with them. If you can't make a financial case for a wind turbine in Shetland, where can you? Eventually I got a phone call from a young woman claiming to be my relationship manager and accusing me of wanting to borrow money, for that was the tone used.

Needless to say, the relationship didn't last.

I then approached our fairly wealthy local authority. Loans were available. However for a small amount such as I needed, the legal costs would be in the order of £5000 – a third of the amount I had asked for. Our local authority, rich off the back of fossil fuels, couldn't help to



fund a small-scale renewable energy project.

Energy companies are now charging fees which can potentially double the cost of small-scale projects. Even when these fees are paid, there is no guarantee of a grid connection.

In Shetland, SSE are restricting the size of turbine which can be grid connected to 3.6 kilowatts. This is the level they are obliged, by law, to accept. However this is not adequate for most people's needs and it impacts on the viability of a project. Systems have been developed which could allow larger turbines to be fitted. The energy produced is split between electricity and heating and the amount of energy exported to the grid is restricted to 3.6kw. But SSE are, so far, refusing to allow this system to be installed. It seems by privatising the energy supply system, government has placed us at the mercy of huge companies whose over-riding focus is their own profit.

If crofters are to survive economically we need to be able to earn our living. Renewable energy seems to have that potential. However we must have a simple way to access a source of capital, one which is compatible with state aid – and the whole process needs to be affordable, including grid connection.

So whilst it sounds a great way for small enterprises such as crofts to benefit from their natural resources in reality they are effectively excluded unless they happen to have a large amount of their own capital to invest.

Will the Scottish Government make this resource available to the small business that has access to land – crofters?



## The Future Farmer award

*Promoting practical ideas for improving the sustainability of farming in Scotland.*

The Future Farmer award is an initiative funded by the Elizabeth Murray Trust. Each year a trailblazing Scottish farmer or crofter will be given £4,000 and a package of practical support to help them promote their ideas to other land managers.

The award aims to showcase ways in which Scotland can produce food, fibre and wood products from farms and crofts in a commercially viable way while maintaining the natural capital of the land and minimizing the ecological footprint of farming activities.

Anyone farming or crofting in Scotland who is keen to inspire others to try practical ideas for improving sustainability is eligible for the award. Both direct applications and nominations are accepted.

Applications for 2011 are now open and will close on Friday 29th April. Go to [www.futurefarmer.org.uk/award.html](http://www.futurefarmer.org.uk/award.html) for full details and the "Applications" subsection to see how to apply.

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

## ON THE CROFT

## Changes to CCAGS

**T**HE SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT has announced important changes to the Crofting Counties Agricultural Grants Scheme (CCAGS) to take effect from 1st April 2011.

Non-croft holdings will be excluded from the scheme; the scheme will be extended to the new crofting areas of Moray, Arran, Bute and Cumbræ; applicants under 40 will get a 10% higher rate of grant; short lease tenants of an owner-occupied croft, as introduced by the Crofting Reform (Scotland) Act 2010, will be eligible for assistance; and the scheme will no longer be subject to means testing for any category of applicants.

Non-crofter applicants who currently meet the eligibility criteria have until 31st March to submit applications, but must have completed the economic status test by 28th February. Thereafter the only way that such applicants can have access to CCAGS is by converting their holdings to crofts, as permitted by the 2007 Act. This is a relatively simple process for owner-occupiers, but may be complex and expensive for tenants.

Full detail on the scheme can be found at [www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/farmingrural/SRDP/CCAGS](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/farmingrural/SRDP/CCAGS)

## Sheep scab on the increase

*Sheep scab is again on the increase.*

**I**N DECEMBER the Scottish Government introduced tighter controls on the disease (the Sheep Scab (Scotland) Order 2010). New legislation requires any sheep keeper suspecting scab to notify the Divisional Veterinary Manager (DVM) as soon as possible. Movement restrictions, both on and off the holding, then apply until either the sheep are treated and the DVM is notified of the treatment, or a vet has given a negative diagnosis and notified the DVM.

If sheep scab is suspected on a common grazing, all graziers may be required to remove sheep from the grazing and carry out treatment. In this case the local authority is responsible for enforcement. The local authority may also seize and detain sheep remaining on the grazing, as well as any other stray sheep whose owner cannot be identified.

Further information can be found at [www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/farmingrural/Agriculture/animal-welfare/Diseases/disease/SheepScab](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/farmingrural/Agriculture/animal-welfare/Diseases/disease/SheepScab)

Visit us online at [www.crofting.org](http://www.crofting.org)

## New diagnostic test for sheep scab on the cards

**S**CIENTISTS from Moredun Research Institute have developed a new blood test for accurately diagnosing sheep infested with the sheep scab mite before clinical signs are seen, which will have a massive positive impact on the health and welfare of UK sheep.

Sheep scab is caused by the mite *Psoroptes ovis* and is, arguably, the most important ectoparasitic disease of sheep in the UK. Since its deregulation as a notifiable disease in 1992, sheep scab has become endemic throughout the UK. The disease is highly contagious, causes considerable irritation and is a major welfare concern. As the incidence of sheep scab continues to rise throughout the UK, even those flocks with good treatment regimes are continuously fighting against re-infection. The reality is that all sheep keepers are at risk of scab.

While injectable macrolide endectocides or macrocyclic lactones are effective at treating sheep scab at present, there is concern that the mites will become resistant to these chemicals as well. Moreover, their frequent use for the control of scab will only intensify the development of resistance of gastrointestinal

nematode worms.

During the early stages infections are not obvious and animals often appear clinically normal. This subclinical stage can last for several weeks during which animals can act as a vector of infection. For control or eradication programs to be successful it is crucial that all infected animals are identified, including subclinical cases.

Moredun scientists have recently developed a diagnostic test capable of accurately detecting sheep scab in infested animals. Moreover, the test can detect infected animals at a much

earlier stage and before the onset of clinical symptoms which will be important in the control of this parasite.

The new ELISA test is based on detection of host antibodies specific to a recombinant mite antigen. The test is sensitive and specific, with no cross-reactions to other ecto- or endo-parasites. The patent for this new diagnostic test has now been protected and the test is currently being used on a number of farms to determine its most appropriate application.

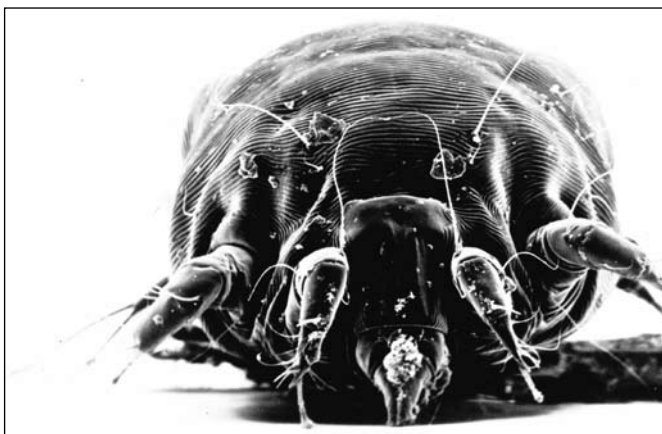
Moredun is currently in discussions with a number of external diagnostic companies

to determine how this test could be commercially developed. Moredun scientists are also investigating whether a lateral flow (penside dipstick) test for scab could also be developed which would provide farmers with a much more rapid result.

As new controls to deal with the increasing incidence of sheep scab in Scotland were introduced by the Scottish Government in December last year, it is hoped that this new diagnostic test may be a useful tool to aid the control of sheep scab in the future.

*John Huntley is a principal research scientist at Moredun Research Institute.*

*Moredun runs a membership scheme which aims to keep farmers and their vets up to date with the latest developments in animal health research. If you like would more information on sheep scab and other ectoparasite control or are interested in becoming a member of Moredun, please contact Maggie Bennett at The Moredun Foundation, Pentlands Science Park, Bush Loan, Penicuik, EH26 0PZ, phone 0131 445 5111 or visit their website at [www.moredun.org.uk](http://www.moredun.org.uk).*



Scab mite



## ON THE CROFT

## Ciobairean Mara

*Abair prògram inntinneach a bha air BBC ALBA o chionn ghoirid: Trusadh, Ciobairean Mara.*

**A**IRSON IOMADACH LINN, tha na ceudan de na h-eileanan beaga far a' chosta taobh siar, a' chuid mhòr gun daoine a' fuireach orra, air an cleachdadh airson sprèidh, ach gu sònraichte caoraich. Tha an cleachdadh a' cur feum air deagh sgilean mara agus ciobaireachd a tha gu math eadar-dhealaichte bho shuidheachadh àiteachais àbhaisteach. Gu math tric air talamh garbh agus ann an cuantan fiadhaich, 's e cleachdadh a th' ann a tha dol a-mach à bith agus a tha a' cur feum air sgilean agus eòlas sgioba threun de chio-bairean mara.

Lean na camarathan dithis a tha a' cumail caoraich, air na h-Eileanan Mòra agus Eilean Phabaigh, agus croitear a bhios ag obair sna sgiobaidhean chuideachaidh aca air cuairtean ropach gus uain a thoirt far nan eilean airson nam fèilltean reic.

Tha na beathaichean fiadhaich, duilich smachd a chumail orra agus gu math làidir. Tha an nàdar aca air atharrachadh seach nach eil iad air daoine fhaicinn gu tric. Tha e comasach dhaibh a bhith beò ann an seusan agus suidheachadh sam bith gun dòighean biathaidh ùra no fasgadh a bharrachd. Feumaidh na ciobairean a tha a' cumail nan caorach a bhith ullaichte airson na

dh' fhaodadh tachairt.

A' riuth tron phrògram air fad bha cuspairean ann air a bheil sinn uile, mar chroitearan, eòlach: gleanntean fala-mh, bailtean beaga iomallach le sluaigh a tha a' sior lùghdachadh, duilgheadasan ann a bhith a' faighinn sgioba chuideachaidh airson obair na croite...Ach, a' seasamh an aghaidh sin, dìongbhaltas is dòchas. Dìongbhaltas an aghaidh na h-aimsir is a' chuain, gus am bi iad a' cumail na seann-dhòighean beò, agus dòchas: gus an aithnich an riaghaltas gu bheil feum ann a bhith a' cumail caoraich, ge be gu càite a bheil e, mus tig an là nuair nach bi ciobairean mara is caoraich air na h-eileanan iomallach air fhàgail.

BBC Alba recently aired an interesting Trusadh programme: Sea Shepherds.

For centuries the hundreds of small, mainly uninhabited islands off the west coast have been used by shepherds in the production of livestock, especially sheep, requiring a combination of maritime and shepherding skills very different to any normal agricultural situation. Often on difficult terrain and in wild seas, it is a dying tradition that requires the skill and experience of a hardy band of sea shepherds.

Cameras followed two men

with island grazing rights, on the Shiantas and Pabbay, and a crofter who forms part of the shepherding teams on expeditions out to the islands to collect lambs for the sales.

The animals are wild, uncontrollable and very strong. The lack of human contact has totally changed their nature. They are naturally hardy because they survive all seasons and conditions without modern feed supplements or additional shelter. The shepherds who manage those flocks need to be prepared for the unexpected.

Themes that as crofters, we are all too well aware of, ran throughout the programme: empty glens, remote villages with dwindling populations, difficulties in recruiting help for crofting work. But there was determination and hope. Determination against the weather and sea, that their traditional methods will endure; and hope: that the government will recognise the value in grazing sheep, wherever it may be, before the day comes when there are no sea shepherds and no sheep left on remote islands.



© Calum Angus MacKay



Harvest on the Uist machair. Most of the cereal crop these days goes into big bale silage (to save it from the geese!) but some is put into traditional stooks (some of which are paid for by RSPB arable stacks scheme for the corn bunting) and some is combined to ensure a seed supply of the native varieties.

## ON THE CROFT

## Happy memories

**H**E STANDS and surveys the scene with eagle eye and confident pose, like a commander in the field determined that his troops will do their duty and win the battle before the close of day.

The troops in this case are neighbours gathered together on a fine April day to plant a field of obligatory Kerr's Pink potatoes. They were always Kerr's Pink – and a fine potato it is too.

Littledidtheboyinthe photograph realise that he was witnessing the dying days of a unique way of life. By the time he left school, many had given up on cattle and planting potatoes. You would not encounter such a scene nowadays on the Isle of Lewis. Supermarkets killed self-sufficiency. Affluence and covetousness killed neighbourliness.

Before he had even gone to school, this little boy had visited every house in the village. He knew all of the occupants by name and knew at least some of their family history. In sharp contrast, children growing up in the village today have no idea who their neighbours are or have any interest in finding out.

He particularly remembers the kindness, compassion and total selflessness of these 'old' people; their willingness to help each other. Every eager visit would end with a freshly-baked pancake or scone topped with generous portions of homemade butter and homemade rhubarb jam and placed in the proffered hand with a kindly, trusting smile. Paradise!

Even in paradise there were chores galore; potatoes to plant and lift and store, sheaves to stook and hay to stack, sheep to shear and cows to collect (for evening milking), peats to pile on groaning tractor trailers; fuel for the winter months ahead. There was seed to sow and then produce to pick for pot and plate. It wasn't all fun!

Looking back, there were many more sheep and cattle in the village then. Yet the land was better managed. The boy distinctly remembers walking the common grazing on long, summer days treading a multicoloured carpet of wildflowers and grasses and stumbling, quite often, on the hidden treasure that was a perfectly-constructed little bird's nest with strange-coloured eggs sat in the middle. He never touched them. It's what he was taught. There are no nests there today.

Isn't it curious, he now thinks, that all these 'old' people knew exactly what they were doing and treated the land with a respect and wisdom that has long since disappeared. They weren't hounded by armies of

self-proclaimed experts who issued detailed instructions on copious amounts of paper and threatened them with fines and even imprisonment for non-compliance.

Changed days! They instinctively understood what stewardship of the land meant before that word had become fashionable in the bureaucrats' vocabulary. They truly were custodians of the land.

The large volume of people over the past ten or twenty years, who have come to the Western Isles romantically seeking such a lifestyle, must be sorely disappointed. Many tenants of crofts today are more pre-occupied with how many house-sites they can sell off at the highest possible price, encouraged and emboldened by a system without sanctions or at least a system where such sanctions are afraid to be applied. Concrete crofts. Changed days!

Oh yes. Who is that little boy in the picture? Why, he's the author of this illuminating article, no less! Happy memories!

*Donnie MacDonald, Lewis*



© Claire Nicolson



## Salt and old cows

*Is there a connection? Marina Dennis explains.*

**A**S THE OLD FOLK used to say, with a trace of Gaelic in their tongue – 'Wait you, and you'll be told later'.

I was reading an account of crofters from Lewis who emigrated to Canada in the 1800s. They settled some distance from Megantic in Quebec and built simple wooden houses, making a living in the only way they knew how by keeping cattle, pigs and hens and growing as much as they could in the short summer season. The Canadian

winters were long, dark and intensely cold, much colder than in maritime Lewis.

In October they would plan a shopping trip to Megantic for stores that would hopefully last them for six months. The list was almost entirely made up of dry supplies as they would have been self sufficient in potatoes, turnips and beans. During the summer, with the precious and indispensable salt, they would make huge crocks of butter, well salted to preserve it, while the cows were in milk. Beef, pork and venison would also be salted and if those Lewis folk

could secure a barrel or salt herring or cod then they felt they could face anything a Canadian winter could throw at them.

Everything was calculated in 100lb bags except loose tea which came in tea chests – flour and sugar in bags, molasses in pails and raisins in wooden boxes. They had a special closet just for the flour and, because they baked scones every day as they did back home, they used huge quantities of flour. The rest was stored in another closet which included an underground tattie pit.

A closet was a small room traditionally formed by the backs

of box-beds in a but-and-ben dwelling. There used to be one in the old house at Inchdryne and it was between the box-bed in the kitchen and the box-bed in the best room.

In the closet at Inchdryne we also had a tattie pit which protected the tatties from the frost and enabled easy access when we were in the grip of a Strathspey winter. Like the Lewis people we also kept flour, sugar, jam, salt and, if we were lucky, a basin or two of milk. The closet here was a small, dark room with a tiny window and a cold, dry smell. The salt was bought in 10lb bags and kept in an engraved 10lb



## ON THE CROFT

## Crofters wife column

## eCrofting!

**A**S OUR POSTMAN would ruefully confirm, I am an internet shopper.

As a non-driver living in a rural location I'd be lost otherwise: shopping trips to the city are kept to a bare minimum, the shortage of time, transport and absence of the shopping gene being equally responsible.

It's become a bit of a joke in our house: the cry goes up from somebody that they need a what-ever-it-is and before they know it my fingers are clacking away on the keyboard sourcing it, pricing it and more often than not moaning about excessive delivery charges, "because you live in a remote location" – grrrr!

Over and above the everyday purchases – books, music, film, clothing, electrical appliances – we are more and more using the internet to source and buy crofting supplies: anything from tiny, obscure tractor parts to replacement instruction manuals via ultra-strong hand-cleaner and dog kennels!

Online agricultural suppliers are, on the whole, a friendly bunch of traders who are happy to answer questions. And should those newly-acquired size ten wellies pinch his toes beyond endurance you'll be able to return them. The security of my personal and financial details is always a priority online and I'm happy to say that I've never had any problems. All the same, never take a risk and if you harbour

doubts or suspicions about any transaction speak to the retailer and your bank immediately.

However, the internet brings far more than shopping opportunities: barely a day goes by without me plonking myself in front of the screen determined that know-it-all Mr Google will supply an answer to my query... When is the deadline for that claim? I've lost my application form, where can I get a new one? Just what were the criteria for that grant? Switch on, push a few buttons and, hey presto! INFORMATION!

For the crofter tangled up in ubiquitous red tape and paperwork, almost everything can be found online – CCAGS, SFPS, IACS, SBCS, LMO – including many application forms. Cattle records can be maintained with BCMA (CTS) online, VAT registered and returns submitted... you can even renew your SCF membership! All you need is a computer with internet access... and, perhaps, a degree in acronyms!!

So, the next time you need a new oil filter for the tractor or, ahem, somebody drops a vital nut in the long grass that becomes the proverbial needle in the hay-stack and therefore needs replacing, try the internet – not only are you avoiding making trips to shops that may not even have what you're looking for but, generally, when shopping online you tend only buy what you set out for... and it all gets delivered to your door!



You can even renew your tax online

© Claire Nicolson



© Claire Nicolson

## Salt and old cows continued

stone jar in which I now have a geranium. The salt was always dry and easily ran through my aunt's fingers as she stirred the porridge with a spurtle on the black range.

So back to old cows and salt; every day I see that 10lb salt crock and every day I see my old cow, Edessa of Silverwells, an ancient Aberdeen Angus with more than a touch of rheumatics and who is painfully slow in this long, hard winter. They bring to mind this story from another time and another place.

On farms in Scotland it was the custom to take on hired or fee'd help for a term of six months and

any farm worker who left before that time was thought little of. Willie was in his second term on a farm where he much enjoyed working with a good master, a good pair of horses and an interesting relationship developing between Willie and the farmer's daughter. However, in the middle of his second term on the farm he suddenly left and came home to his parents. They were shocked to see him but Willie would not divulge his reasons for leaving. Eventually the minister came to see him and finally persuaded Willie to tell his tale.

There was an old, thin cow on the farm that died and the farmer

asked Willie to go the shop for a baggie of salt. They then skinned, cut up and salted the old beast which they ate all winter and in the end Willie could hardly bear to go in for his dinner, so scunnered was he with the tough beef.

Memories of the old cow faded and it was not until the autumn that the farmer found Willie in the stable and asked him to go to the shop for a baggie of salt. The old boar had died, so old nobody could remember his age. So they skinned the beast and salted him away in a barrel for the winter. Long before he even entered the farmhouse Willie could smell the

old boar cooking and the thought of having to eat him nearly gave him the jaundice. But between themselves and the dogs they emptied the barrel and it was now nearly Christmas with the thought of good, juicy dinners.

Then one cold, winter's day the farmer came out to tell Willie that his 95 year old mother had died, asking him in the same breath if he would go to the shop for a baggie of salt. Willie went up the road to the shop but kept on going, his thoughts in turmoil as he headed for his parent's house.

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## ON THE CROFT

# The Allen scythe

*Not so very long ago, the Allen scythe was a familiar sight on crofts, says Donald Murdie.*

**I**N MANY CASES it was the first piece of machinery to be introduced as it was suitable for working on feannagan, or lazy beds, that could not accommodate a tractor.

My first experience of these temperamental machines was gained a long way from the croft. I was working for the parks and recreation department of a London borough, parts of which were remarkably rural. The local council was responsible for an area of scrubby woodland and heath and had decided in its wisdom to use an area of this land to grow its own Christmas trees.

One day my boss delivered me to the site and gestured towards an area of rank grass and weeds. This, apparently, was the plantation. My task was to find the trees and clear the competing vegetation. The following day the boss arrived with the bizarre and primitive contraption I now know as an Allen scythe in his van. After the briefest of briefings, I was instructed to mow between the rows of trees then clear around each plant by hand. Off went the boss in his van.

The first challenge was to start the monster, which, as the engine was cold, was not too difficult once I found how to work the choke. So far, so good; now to engage the clutch, which consisted of a massive, ratcheted lever connected by a series of metal rods to an arrangement of cogs and springs on the outside of one of the huge wheels. We were off. The Allen charged along the row leaving a swathe of closely cropped vegetation in its wake. This was exhilarating and great fun,

but the end of the row, and a wire fence, were fast approaching.

So, reduce the throttle and disengage the clutch. Nothing happened and soon the machine was gnawing its way into a fence post before, mercifully, the engine stalled. Once I got over the shock I was able to disengage the clutch by hitting it with a lump of wood and drag the whole thing backwards. Try to restart. Impossible of course: those familiar with these machines will know very well that (the two-stroke versions at least) will not start until cooled down, which can take a good hour.

Over the next few days I began to master the vagaries of the Allen. The way I found to disengage the clutch without stopping the engine was to lift the wheels off the ground and drop them down again as hard as possible. The engine was kept running all day, even during tea breaks and while refuelling (don't try this at home). I thought I had done quite a

decent job for a beginner, but my boss was not so impressed on his return. I should mention that he was a rare character – an Irishman without a sense of humour. He quickly spotted that I had gone off line at one point and had decapitated about fifty of the council's Christmas trees and he was not amused.

Twenty or so years later, as a crofter in Lewis, I saw an Allen Scythe advertised in the Stornoway Gazette. For old times' sake I went and bought it and, for a while, it did some useful work. An area of bracken was cut regularly, which was pretty easy for the old warhorse and a small hay park was cut for a couple of years, which was a lot more challenging. It also managed to cut a hole in an asbestos-clad shed – that clutch problem again! Gradually the performance deteriorated and starting became even harder. An expert on old two-strokes diagnosed piston-ring failure (he also removed a cupful of water from the carburettor, which can't have been helping matters). Sadly the Allen was, I suppose like many others, abandoned in a corner of the croft when the machine, the crofter's patience, or both, finally gave up. My own machine was replaced with a modern, Italian 'two-wheel tractor' with implements, which is still going strong a further twenty years on, having suffered a huge amount of use and abuse.

The last time I saw an Allen scythe in action was about four years ago at Ullinish in Skye, where a crofter was using one to do his LMO Rush Pasture Management. The four-stroke model was coping well, albeit with very light work. I'm sure that there are crofters still using these old machines. If so, please let us know and send us a picture!



## POLYTUNNELS

# Thinking about a polytunnel?

**T**HE FIRST question to ask is "Do I really need one?"

What do you want to grow? Will it grow outside with just a bit of shelter, cloche protection or floating fleece material? What's the soil like, and will the polytunnel survive the weather conditions? Even given the available grant aid, polytunnels represent a substantial investment of money and effort, and an element of risk, so they need to justify the outlay.

I would be thinking about potential income; the ability to extend the growing season and to raise plants from seed instead of buying in; growing of high-value catch crops like very early potatoes; producing tender summer crops like tomatoes, cucumbers, courgettes and french beans. If these are your priorities, you're on the way to making the case for one or more polytunnels on the croft.

The next thing is to look at potential sites. After over twenty years working with polytunnels in some pretty exposed west coast locations I would say that they are capable of standing up to some quite extreme conditions, but absolute exposure is asking for trouble. Look for a site

that has natural shelter. Established trees and hedging are ideal, but not available on most crofts. A lot of shelter can be gained from natural land forms – tucking the structures in behind a low hill will help a lot – but buildings and cliff faces can make matters worse by causing turbulence.

If all else fails, artificial windbreak may be needed. There are a variety of materials available, all very expensive. The windbreak can end up costing more than the polytunnel! I have found that the most cost-effective option is to fix six-inch sarking timber (leaving four-inch gaps) to strong uprights braced and set in concrete. The site will also need decent soil (unless the crops are to be container grown), and good drainage. Full planning permission will probably not be required, but you will need to follow the 'prior notification' procedure. This should be discussed in advance with the local authority planning officers.

The structure itself will have to be designed to withstand the local conditions. SGRPID will provide specifications if grant aid under CCAGS



*Continued on page 14*

## CROFTING RESOURCES PROGRAMME

### The abattoir question

**P**ROBABLY WHAT CROFTERS in the most remote areas lack more than anything is local abattoirs.

At least that is what we are hearing regularly when crofters are asked about their development needs. Paradoxically, the problem areas are not so much in the western or northern isles, but in the western periphery of the mainland – northwest Sutherland, Skye and Lochalsh; and Lochaber. The restricted seasonal opening of the council-operated Stornoway abattoir continues to limit the capacity of Lewis and Harris to supply local demand for meat.

SCF, through the Crofting Resources Programme, is undertaking research on abattoir provision. In the present financial climate there will be no easy answers, but the status quo cannot be an option. This is an issue that we should be raising with politicians as they seek our votes over the next few weeks.

The research is being undertaken by our Shetland fieldworker Sue White and these are her initial findings.

#### Funding

It is difficult to make a case for new abattoirs on a purely commercial basis. As a result a situation of market failure exists throughout most of the Highlands and Islands. It is said there is over-provision of facilities, since most are struggling financially. However this claim ignores the fact that most of the existing plants are privately owned and not always accessible or affordable for other users. In other words, if a region has no

accessible, appropriately-compliant facility, then private business is very unlikely to provide it as it is not seen as profitable.

A community-owned facility offers a route for the development of many micro-businesses seeking to maximise their incomes by accessing a range of markets hitherto inaccessible. A key weakness in agricultural businesses in the crofting counties is their traditional reliance on singly-orientated markets. This has to be addressed before any strengthening can take place.

There is one avenue of funding, in the form of EU Temporary Framework for Industrial De Minimis (Euros 500,000 maximum grant) and Industrial De Minimis (Euros 200,000), if you can find a funder. This support can be up to 100%.

#### Design

Experience reveals that the affordability of community-owned abattoirs lies in the design. To date plans have been over-complicated and not relevant to local needs. Little emphasis has been applied to creating facilities with viable business plans prepared from the viewpoint of the users. This has resulted in industrial-scale plants not suited to seasonal throughput and small batches. It is possible to design facilities to fit circumstances and funds and meet Food Standards Agency (FSA) requirements.

The basic requirements for a new plant are ante-mortem animal inspection; carcass inspection post evisceration; and carcass temperature control. The major concern for modern plants is e-coli contamination.

An appropriate design would take account of these three factors, with the construction works proportionate to the throughput.

#### How to run it

The community-owned facility must remain secure from financial risks.

One model is to create a community company to own the asset and a trading company to operate it.

While the trading company can develop and supply markets in its own right, it will be more robust and require less capital if it welcomes other private business to maximise use of the plant.

The trading company requires a business plan to be developed to deal with all the operations it undertakes. With operational costs determining the company's future and with staffing being the main item, each member must be involved and aware.

If the FSA goes for full cost retrieval for meat inspection then the cost burden will be intolerable.

Raising ever higher charges on users stifles opportunities and will result in fewer users. Therefore there is a balance to be struck between losing money and encouraging business.

Any community facility will rely totally on long term committed individuals.

#### Conclusion

If you can find a funder and if you have a determined group, there is a means to build abattoirs anywhere to suit specific needs.

### Taking Stock – an interim report

**S**COTTISH CROFTING Federation's study of crofters' stock clubs, Taking Stock, has completed its first stage.

Stock clubs could be described as the original crofter producer groups. They have existed for generations in some crofting areas, notably in Skye and Lochalsh and north-west Sutherland, with a few in Lochaber and Caithness. There are just one or two in the Uists and none in Lewis and Harris. Predominantly, the stock clubs are for sheep, but we are aware of a few cattle groups. There has been evidence that the stock club model of common grazings management has succeeded in maintaining sheep on the hills and moors at a time of general stock reduction, thereby ensuring a sound level of crofting activity and land kept in good heart. This is confirmed by the research so far, which has focused on Skye and Lochalsh. A questionnaire was sent out to the 21 stock clubs active in the area and nine of these responded.

Eight of the nine sheep stock clubs (SSCs) surveyed have a small membership and one has a very large membership. The one large (by membership) SSC has proportionally low stock numbers and a high input of paid labour by the shareholders, resulting in a relatively low annual dividend. The other SSCs produce a good annual payout and returns per ewe are generally in line with the Scottish average for

LFA hill flocks. As well as income from stock, these returns reflect the SSCs' participation in forestry schemes, RSS, LMO, etc as well as their IACS area and the value of their Single Farm Payment and LFASS.

All the responses to the survey are positive about the economic, social and environmental benefits of stock clubs and several pointed out that the system has worked well over several generations of crofters, with skills and knowledge handed down. Low-input systems are favoured, with sustainable numbers of hefted stock taking advantage of natural forage. This is the result of that handed-down knowledge, which largely avoids the need for supplementary feeding and produces hardy, healthy animals which are in strong demand in the sale ring. All the SSCs provide employment for contractors in gathering, shearing and dipping as well as paying for shareholders' input of labour.

Can new stock clubs be set up? It depends very much on the circumstances of the township and the nature of the grazings. To reintroduce sheep to an open hill or moor would realistically require fencing, as the skilled shepherding required otherwise might well prove to be prohibitive.

The Single Farm Payment, as currently administered, is a major difficulty, as a SSC could only show a profit if in receipt of SFP and LFASS.

Hopefully the post-2014 SFP regime will make things look different, especially if entitlement is available to new entrants and a stop is put to payment for inactivity. The kind of scenario where a SSC could be started at present would be where an existing group of crofters with sheep on the ground decided to work co-operatively, starting from the same base line.

Or a grazings committee with the financial resources to do so could purchase SFP entitlements. For new entrants, a cattle club might be the more achievable option, if the relevant Rural Priorities measures could be accessed.

The next steps in Taking Stock will be to do some follow-up interviews, and to study some stock-clubs in other areas. We shall report further as the project progresses.



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## CROFTING RESOURCES PROGRAMME

## Diversifying into tourism

**T**OURISM CAN BE a valuable source of extra income in some areas for some crofters.

Many of us live in beautiful locations and we can use this as a resource to bring in visitors who will pay to share it with us, making the croft more viable.

SCF, under the crofting resources programme, is looking at ways to help crofters capitalise on this resource while preserving the crofting way of life that makes a croft holiday different and desirable for those from the towns and cities to the south. The buzzword is authenticity: we are genuinely living the lifestyle that is being portrayed and the visitor can share in that for at least the week that they are on holiday.

There is already a part of the SCF website which advertises accommodation on crofts for members. If potential customers are interested in crofting then they will find the website where they can link through to the member's own website and book accommodation or whatever activities are on offer, knowing that they are participating in a new experience and a different ethos to the one they have left behind at home.

To get the authenticity, it just boils down to the tourist business being on a working croft where there is someone on hand to welcome visitors, be able to explain something of the history and culture and to offer advice on where to go to see wildlife, where it is good to walk, where you get a good meal using local produce or where to go to play golf or fish or whatever. If you are prepared to let them see the newly hatched chickens, so much the better. And you can sell them your own free range eggs or fresh garden vegetables.

It is not just a case of providing accommodation but of enhancing the



experience with local produce, the history and the culture of crofting that will make the holiday special – and make them come back.

Research into the best way to promote croft tourism is going on just now – there is a study currently running into agritourism in Scotland. This will help us to decide what sort of demand there is for farm-based tourism (£532M was spent by UK visitors on holidays in the Scottish countryside in 2009 in 2.67M trips).

Then we plan to look at what people know about crofting. A study from 1996 showed that, from a sample of people in London, Manchester and Glasgow, 51% had no prior knowledge of crofting – so if people don't know about crofting, why would they want to stay on a croft? How do we get the message across? And if they know what a croft is, what are their associations with the term – positive (wide open spaces, natural environment) or negative (old fashioned, draughty house)? Are we too many generations away from the time when "everyone has an auntie from

Bettyhill" as our Highland councillor is fond of saying?

There are different ways we can take this project and we would welcome your ideas. We intend to revamp the current webpage and move it to a dedicated website, perhaps adding lots of information on crofting and trails designed to promote bird watching, wildlife viewing, golf etc which will link providers together to provide a complete package. We could even take bookings on behalf of members or organise specialist holidays where people can work on a croft or learn traditional skills.

*If you want to advertise on the website, contact Karen at HQ – the cost is £35 for two photos, 50 words of text and contact details. If you have any ideas for developing croft tourism, contact Russell Smith. If you want to discuss setting up a tourism businesses, again contact Russell on 01863 766144 or [smith@drumbhan.freeserve.co.uk](mailto:smith@drumbhan.freeserve.co.uk).*



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## POLYTUNNELS

# Thinking about a polytunnel?

*Continued from page 11*

is requested. Usually a minimum 50mm tube diameter is required with ribs spaced no more than 1.8m apart. SGRPID may also specify an artificial windbreak, and this will be included in the allowable costs for grant. Rather than go for one huge tunnel, I would consider two smaller ones. This is to allow crop rotation (which is vital in avoiding pest and disease build-up) and because smaller structures are not so vulnerable to wind damage and are much easier to cover.

That brings us on to the choice of covering material and the method of fixing it, and again that depends on what is to be grown. For soft fruit, the best choice might be green horticultural mesh, providing shelter and bird-proofing without high temperatures. If conventional polythene covering is to be used, ventilation must be considered. Polytunnels up to about 18m in length can generally be ventilated from each end. Longer tunnels



might well need side ventilation. In this case a timber rail is fixed along the length of the structure about 1m above the ground with polythene attached above and horticultural netting below. There are sophisticated options for controlling air flow, involving wind-up plastic screens.

If a simple polythene cover is the option, I would recommend securing it by trenching into the ground along each side, as this provides the most security in exposed locations. The cover might need protection from bird damage (especially seagulls, but also starlings and even buzzards).

This can be achieved by fixing a wooden structure which is higher than the gable height at each end of the tunnel and stretching fine nylon strings tightly from end to end.

Snow loading has proved a hazard for polytunnels in the last two winters, especially in the central Highlands. Incredibly, the covers have proved stronger than the steel structures, leading in some cases to total collapse. When a very heavy load of frozen snow

has built up it might be preferable to sacrifice the cover rather than risk structural failure. Smaller falls of snow can be removed with a soft rope which has rags tied at intervals along its length. The rope is thrown over the top and pulled back and forward by a person at each side. This will avoid a dangerous build-up of snow.

*We are happy to give advice to members considering polytunnels. Please contact [dona1d@crofting.org](mailto:dona1d@crofting.org).*



## Beat the gales!

*Barry Shelby, a crofter on the Isle of Lewis and project officer for Lewis and Harris Horticultural Producers, outlines the pros and cons of polytunnels in the windy Western Isles.*

**P**OLYTUNNELS on the crofts of the Outer Hebrides is still a slightly controversial topic.

Some have found the windy conditions too severe for maintaining the tunnels – as witnessed by the skeletons of hoops not infrequently seen. Just

the other day I was at the Bernera community tunnels, taping up gashes that resulted from the most recent gales 70+ mph gales. But increasingly, I have found, more crofters and island horticulturalists are impressed with polytunnels' contributions and they see them invaluable for extending the growing season and providing extra shelter from the frequent gales.

So let's address the downside first. Topic A with tunnels seems to be – as with any horticulture on the Western Isles – establishing shelter. That can be done either with belts of hardy shrubs and trees or via fencing. Even then there are no guarantees, but the odds are certainly improved for polythene survival. Some estimate that fencing with either Paraweb type synthetic materials or timber boards can filter at least 50 per cent of the wind.

With that taken care of, I have been quite astonished by the progress of crops grown in polytunnels compared to those brought on outdoors. That seems especially true for those sown in the early months of the annual growing season.

For example, parsnips and carrots can be germinated in situ in mid-March, ahead of what is normally possible outside.

Similarly, early potatoes or onion set sown early can thrive as well. How about over-wintering late purple sprouting broccoli or kale? For the market gardener, getting any such produce to sale early – that is ahead of consumer expectations – is coup. And for the table, growers can bridge the traditionally fallow period for fresh seasonal vegetables.

Of course, polytunnels are literally invaluable for tender vegetables, such as tomatoes or cucumbers. Again, for the market crofter, these are high-value products. I have seen how small polytunnels can benefit from dry, overnight heat for such veg, but it is not necessary and can be costly on your hydro bill.

One clear commercial success story is strawberries. Several growers have systems in place, including risers for easier harvesting and timed drip watering and feed. Additionally there are techniques for extending the harvest (and the sales). One strategy is holding back some bare-root stock and planting out later than the main crop. Another is using different varieties that can be harvested slightly earlier or later than the main crop.

Out here, it is not necessarily the heat of the polytunnel that is key,

but the additional protection. Last summer on Bernera volunteers experimented with opening both ends of the tunnel during the day (save during any severe gales) and closing them overnight. That practice seemed to help keep down moisture levels, botrytis and the like.

Not everything works brilliantly inside: some summer brassicas, particularly cauliflower, bolt. Soft fruit can be tricky – but virtually anything that works outdoors can be tried under cover. Often with satisfying effect.





## POLYTUNNELS

# Polytunnel growing – planning your cropping

**T**HE USE OF polytunnels can extend the growing season considerably, whether by early cropping at the beginning of the season or extended cropping at the end.

It may also enable you to grow produce which would otherwise not be viable in our more northerly climes – tomatoes, cucumbers, peppers etc – as well as giving added protection to high-value crops such as strawberries, raspberries, salads etc. As a polytunnel can be a big initial expense, regardless of business size, making best and constant use of the environs it offers makes sense.

However, a word of caution: it should be noted that temperatures in summer may be too high for some crops and in winter too low – the much-reduced light levels in winter will also restrict growth. These difficulties can be overcome with the help of some modern technology. Effective ventilation, which can be achieved by the design and siting of the structure, can reduce the former, as can the use of shade netting. Low temperatures can be countered by the use of proscribed heaters

and extra lighting can be provided by using specialist lights/lamps etc. Both these methods will incur extra costs and consideration needs to be given to the type of crops to be produced during these times, their growing requirements and market demand. Growing crops out of season can usually guarantee higher prices but it may also be the case that because these crops are grown in a forced environment some of their usual traits eg flavour, shelf life etc, may be compromised.

Salads can be grown under polythene for most of the year and new potatoes can command high prices at the beginning of the season as well as at Christmas time. For an early season crop (May harvesting), potatoes should be planted around the end January/February in a polytunnel and in September to give a Christmas crop. Consideration should also be given to early, high-value crops such as asparagus. However, unlike salads and potatoes, this crop will have to stay in the ground throughout the year and take up a great deal of growing space, and in a restricted space like a polytunnel, this might only be

acceptable for own-use cropping if space is at a premium for a wider variety of crops.

The use of polytunnels for growing high-value, high-yielding crops such as soft fruits eg strawberries and raspberries, is a very specialist science. There are a wide variety of growing methods from soilless hydroponic systems to suspended growbag cultivation as well as growing in large buckets using specialist growing media. This is a very buoyant and fast-moving industry with regard to technology and specialist varieties developed specifically for these environs. However, some of these technologies have been developed for smaller scale use and are widely available.

### Pests and Diseases

Just because crops are under a protective cover does not necessarily mean that they are protected from pests, disease etc.

In some environments pests and diseases are more prevalent. The protected and often higher temperature environment creates the perfect breeding ground for a number of pests and diseases

which, if not treated, can quickly cause major damage and even catastrophic crop failure. It is vital that any problems are identified as soon as possible – so vigilance is the key – and treated appropriately as quickly as possible.

The number of chemical remedies available to the horticultural grower has been much reduced in recent years and care should be taken that if you choose to use chemicals, they are both allowable and appropriate for use with crops under cover. This is very important as some chemicals can be very toxic – to both plants and humans – in enclosed spaces.

Biological pest controls are especially effective in the polytunnel environment as most of these natural controls work best at higher temperatures. There is a wide range of natural controls now on the market and the costs are not exorbitantly high.

### Recommended reading

Gardening under Plastic, Bernard Salt. The Polytunnel Companion, Jayne Neville

*Calina MacDonald*



Not everything needs to be food



Training day



## POLYTUNNELS

### Case study: Skye Vegetables

**A**NTHONY HOVEY took over Skye Vegetables, a croft-based market garden business, in October 2004, including a 9.14m (30ft) x 3.58m (120ft) single span polytunnel constructed in 2002.

This year will be his seventh full growing season. The business now specialises in supplying quality restaurants on the Isle of Skye with vegetables picked and delivered the same day – including baby veg such as carrots, turnips, beetroot, leeks, parsnips and spinach, brassicas such as kale

and cabbages as well as high-value products such as salad potatoes, legumes such as broad beans, mangetout, sugar snap peas and french beans.

A corner of the polytunnel is dedicated to propagating seedlings, on a large purpose-built propagation table covered with capillary matting. About 40 raised beds occupy the rest of the polytunnel, irrigated by an overhead sprinkler system. The polytunnel was erected in the most sheltered part of the croft, which is located on the

exposed west side of Skye. Extensive tree planting further protects it from the winter gales. By siting the polytunnel here, a balance had to be struck between shelter and sunlight. As Anthony says: "Given its very sheltered position, mine doesn't get the early morning sun and sits in a bit of a frost pocket at the beginning of the season, but I know that even in the worst westerly gales, it is pretty safe!"

The polytunnel enables Anthony to (a) extend the growing season; and (b) produce vegetables that

don't do well outside in this part of Scotland. Anthony says: "If the temperatures are favourable, I can sow my first batches of turnips and carrots as early as February and then move on to the outside planting in March/April. In the autumn, I can do the same – sowing in late summer for an autumn/winter crop. Over the summer months, I grow peas and french beans in the tunnel, as well as heat-loving vegetables such as courgettes and squashes".

The polytunnel doors are always kept shut, to keep carrot



A well-stocked and well-ordered tunnel



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## POLYTUNNELS

### Skye Vegetables continued

root fly and other pests out, with ventilation provided through the meshed side vents controlled by a polythene apron which can be winched up and down. Given its large size, the polytunnel has developed its own – usually balanced – little eco-system. Frogs for example, which breed in the man-made pond outside, live alongside other friendly species such as ground beetles, hoverflies, bees and spiders.

Occasionally, however, there can be a population explosion of a particular pest. This happened in 2006 when there was a major problem with leatherjackets – “before I learned about the life-cycle of the seemingly harmless daddy long-legs flying around the

tunnel!” Diseases – mildew is the biggest risk – can generally be controlled through strict hygiene, keeping the tunnel well ventilated and crop rotation. A flame gun is very useful for burning off early weeds and also kills fungal spores. The only chemical used is an early spring application of slug pellets, which keeps this common pest under control.

The growing area in the tunnel is used intensively all year round and keeping the soil in good fertile condition is an important activity. In addition to fertilisers, large quantities of home-made compost are added annually. The raised beds, after years of working, are rich in organic matter – and still very productive.

### Something nasty in the polytunnel (or vegetable patch)

**T**HERE IS NOTHING more disappointing than an eaten or ailing crop.

In many cases identifying the culprit can be more than half the battle. SAC's crop clinic can help identify the disease or pest affecting all horticultural plants. The service is accessible from any SAC office. Advisers will post samples off to experts based in Edinburgh and help you find solutions. The cost of the service is from £58.90 for disease diagnosis and pest identification costs from £32.80.

Some tests can help prevent heartache by identifying problems before planting. For example, testing the soil for clubroot infestation costs from £53.30 but can prevent disappointment from a badly affected field of brassicas. This test needs to be carried out at least two months before sowing as it takes six weeks to run.

Nematodes are unsegmented worms which can prove to be a problem in crops. The crop clinic can sample soil for the following:

- potato cyst nematodes (PCN) – soil tests cost from £43.50
- soil migratory nematodes – soil tests cost from £77.90
- free-living nematodes – various tests cost from £69.00-£130.70.

Please note that sampling for nematodes and clubroot does not need to be done each season as the results are valid

for several years.

The SAC crop clinic has a useful web resource <http://www.sac.ac.uk/consulting/services/c-e/cropclinic>. It provides up-to-date information on pests, weeds and diseases affecting crops in Scotland, along with integrated crop management solutions.

You can use it to find out more about specific crop problems as it has detailed data on pests, weeds and diseases. You'll find information on symptoms, prevention and control, lifecycle and resistance issues. The website also has advice on sampling techniques for all of the tests mentioned above.

This is also a good time of year to take soil samples, so you can target fertiliser and dung to the best effect. SAC have specific tests for horticulture; for example the glasshouse soil routine package costs from £24.35. If you use mostly compost, a tailored test will cost from £25.25. SAC also offers services to hydroponic growers; this includes a test of hydroponic solution which costs from £31.35.

Please do not hesitate to contact your local SAC office if you have any queries about any of the services above.

I wish you well with all your growing endeavours in 2011

*Janette Sutherland*  
SAC Portree

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## CROFTING CONNECTIONS

## Dunrossness pupils make connections

**J**OSH SMITH AND NATHAN WATT, from Dunrossness primary, recently made a trip to Edinburgh, with head teacher Lesley Simpson, to attend a Crofting Connections reception at the Scottish Parliament promoting the project's work to MSPs.

"The aim was to showcase to MSPs what Crofting Connections does in school and how it builds links between schools and communities," said Ms Simpson.

"In the morning we had a tour of the Scottish Parliament building. It was nice to see the buildings inside, especially the chamber. It was very interesting. One of the best things was looking for all the Scottish crosses which are hidden in the architecture," said Josh.

In the afternoon the pupils went to visit the seed bank belonging to a division of the Scottish Government called Science and Advice for Scottish Agriculture (SASA) which helps to ensure the quality, safety and security of Scotland's food supply.

SASA set up various experiments for the children to do.

"We went into a room where the scientists look at seeds to check they aren't

contaminated", Josh said. "We put on lab coats and were given bowls of oat and barley seeds and we had to sort out the ones that weren't right. After that we checked if they were dead or not using a special camera."

The pupils also learnt about seed collection and storage and about heritage varieties such as Shetland kale and the difference between the varieties grown now and in the past.

"We looked at lots of tattie varieties, including purple ones. They had baskets of various kinds. One was the tattie of the Irish potato famine. They were called lumpers."

Shetland kale is a genetic variation which is very disease resistant and what SASA is discovering about it could help to feed the people in the future.

"They talked about Shetland kale and other ones," Josh said. "They chopped a Shetland kale in half and we saw the air holes that help it survive the winter. The other ones didn't have air holes, so they weren't good in cold weather."

Josh was able to show people his own research later in the day. After dinner hosted by Crofting Connections, he and Nathan did a

presentation on a display board that they had made about the tatties planted by the primary three and four classes. These were kindly donated by Jim Budge and Allison Duncan.

"We dug them up and weighed them and looked at the quantity and size," Josh said. "Next day they were cooked for us and we did a blindfolded tasting of different varieties including Shetland blacks and roosters, to find out or favourite. The one people liked best was Kerr's pink."

*A version of this article first appeared in the Shetland Times*



Josh and Nathan checking seeds

## Paible school visit to Lochmaddy sale

**A**S PART OF the Crofting Connections project and putting the Curriculum for Excellence into practice, Paible secondary pupils attended the auction mart in Lochmaddy in January for the first sale of the year.

They took note of the number of beasts sold, breeds, weights and the prices fetched. All the data collected has been entered into spreadsheets to produce graphs, charts and to make numerous calculations. For their language work, they produced a piece of descriptive writing of their experience. Here are some examples.

#### The crofter

He stood quietly in the corner, his face weather-beaten from a long day at work, eyes fixed on the auctioneer and a look of complete concentration on his face. Dressed in a blue boiler suit, he held his wooden stick in his hand and massive brown boots on each of his feet. His head was covered with a black woolly hat but you could still see some tufts of greyish hair sticking out the back. He didn't make any obvious movements, but if you looked closely he slightly raised his finger every time the auctioneer was looking for another bidder.

*Hannah Hocine*



Keeping a close eye

#### The auctioneer

When I walked in, my eyes were drawn to the auctioneer. He was sitting in a tight crouched corner. He was sorting out some papers with his mike on. The sound began buzzing through my ears. As he began speaking he was rumbling, taking extremely short breaths. His lips were hardly moving. Many figures came out of his mouth. His hands pointed at someone who wanted to buy. His voice projected all over the room, the microphone echoing from outside the building, his eye catching a particular person from time to time.

He used his gavel to hit the desk when a calf or cow was sold. He'd then move on to the next cow that entered the ring. As he introduced a cow, his eyes were fixed on a piece of paper. His glasses were half way down his nose, his head hardly rising as he spoke. His eyes scanned and swayed across the room. He kept looking at the top row of people then flicking his eye down each row to the bottom. My mind was lost as he spoke two times the speed of a normal person.

He must have been weary and tired when he went home that night. He deserved a good night's sleep.

*Iain MacBain S2*



All eyes on the ring

#### The cattle

As the cows and bulls entered the ring there was a sense of fear within me. Their large round brown eyes stared at the crowd in mischief. Their legs trotted, swayed and turned. Their backs were slamming the rings. Their heads were pointing towards the people on the front row. The cattle were bellowing. The noise of the cows made you feel apprehensive. The tension was building in the room.

When the cattle stumbled in, they looked disorientated. As the large steel gates closed, they rummaged their heads through the doors trying to find an exit. They scrunched their nostrils from time to time. It seemed that they were not having a very pleasant day being squeezed amongst each other, not having their own personal space or their own green pasture.

There were men dressed in green, red, blue and orange boiler suits guiding the cows round the rings with long wooden sticks. Once the cows were sold they would gallop into another pen nearest the auctioneer. The bottom of their legs was scraping along the straw making a rustling sound. The gates would then screech closed and the cows would make a lowing sound. Their day at the sales was over.

*Iain MacBain S2*



Eildh and Katlyn get a close look



## CROFTING CONNECTIONS

### Crofting Connections

**I**N MINARD PRIMARY SCHOOL we have been working hard over the last year on our Crofting Connections project.

To celebrate the end of our first year, we held a crofters' market to show everyone in the community what we had been doing. We held it at Auchindrain Museum Township and there were three schools altogether; Inveraray and Furnace primaries as well as ourselves.

The three schools were all running their own stalls and selling vegetables and preserves that we had grown and bottled in our schools. On our stall we sold home-grown veg, such as beetroot, lettuce, carrots, potatoes etc and we also sold woven wall hangings and clay bowls that we had made during our project work.

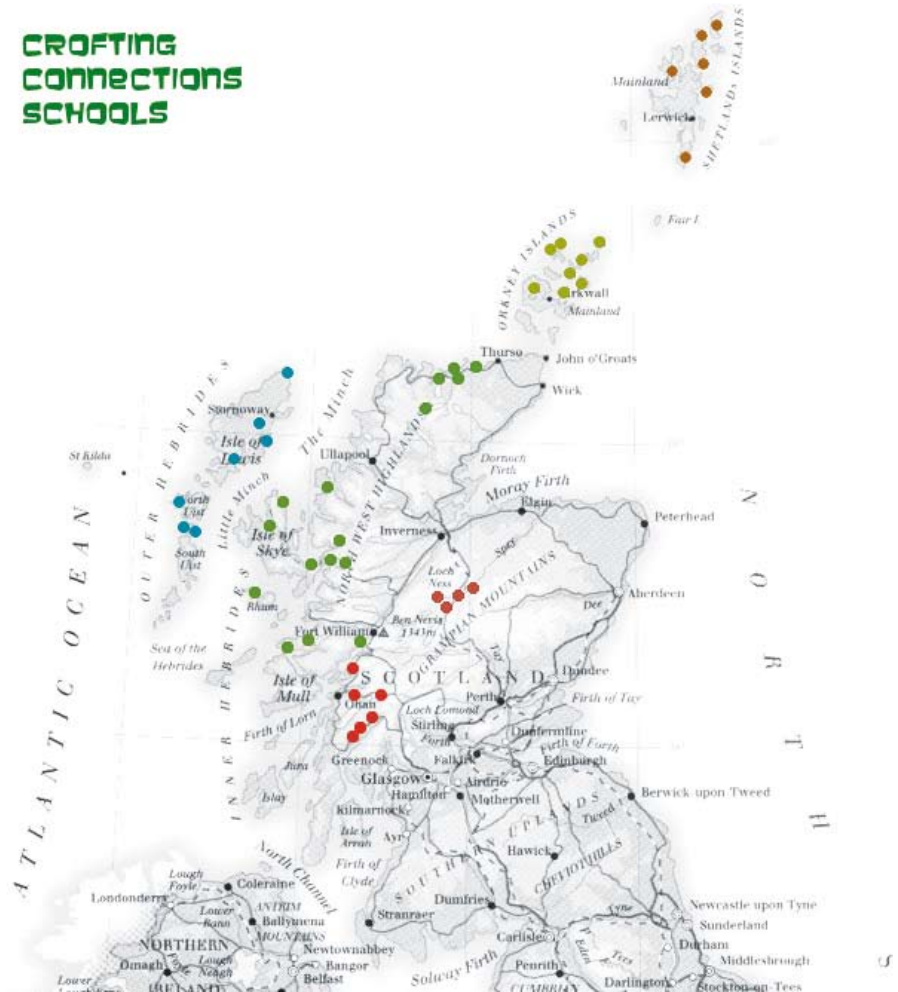
There were lots of side stalls with games and activities and our school organised the skipping and the weaving groups. The game every one enjoyed most was the scarecrow hunt. It was great fun doing all the activities.

I particularly enjoyed grinding the corn and the scarecrow hunt. We sold almost all our items and we made £70 for our school business.

I really enjoyed it and I would love to do it again.

*Donald McCallum (P7) Minard primary school*

### CROFTING CONNECTIONS SCHOOLS



Alexander, Sam, Donald, Adam and Toby take their turn to greet the customers

### Schools look for more connections

Schools are always looking for help in all forms – from help with the school vegetable gardens to coming to help with your livestock to hearing about different crofting techniques.

If you think that you could help your school please contact Karen and Pam on [info@croftingconnections.com](mailto:info@croftingconnections.com) or phone Karen on 01599 530 006. Crofting Connections schools are spread throughout the crofting counties. Please visit our web site [www.croftingconnections.com](http://www.croftingconnections.com) to see the work we do with schools and to see where your nearest Crofting Connection school is.



The busy market at Auchindrain township



Hurry, hurry, only a few tatties left!

## CROFTING LAW ADVICE

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culture of crofters and  
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## Let's liberate diversity

**T**HE Lets Liberate Diversity forum is an annual gathering of farmers and associations working on agricultural biodiversity in Europe.

The SCF has been involved with organising the forum's next conference which will take place in Szeged, Hungary. The theme of this year's event is the question of farmers' rights specifically related to the conservation, sustainable use and development of crop biodiversity.

Through the Farmers Seeds project SCF is working to raise awareness of these rights as recognized by the international treaty on plant genetic resources for food and agriculture of the United Nations organization for food and agriculture.

They include the following rights:

- The conservation, use, exchange and marketing of seeds produced on-farm by farmers.
- The participation of farmers in decision-making on agricultural biodiversity.
- The protection of farmers' traditional knowledge.
- The sharing of benefits related to the creation of new varieties from traditional or farmers' varieties.

The implementation of these rights allows us to have access to diversified agricultural systems, access to better quality food and a greater diversity of local products. They contribute to meeting the challenges posed by climate change and help facilitate the protection of biodiversity; increase food security and the transition to a green economy; and reduce dependence on chemical inputs and fossil fuels.

The objectives of the meeting in Hungary are to facilitate the exchange of experiences among existing initiatives in Europe and to inform farmers and the general public about current issues linked to agricultural biodiversity.

A full report on the conference proceedings will be included in the next edition of *The Crofter*.

## Participatory guarantee systems

**P**ARTICIPATORY guarantee systems are locally-focused quality assurance systems. They certify producers based on active participation of stakeholders and are built on a foundation of trust, social networks and knowledge exchange.

There is growing awareness and demand for safe, healthy quality-assured products amongst consumers. Third party certification assurance programmes run, for example, by Quality Meat Scotland and the Soil Association do a very good job and have no doubt increased consumer awareness of where our food comes from and how it's produced. However the associated direct – and particularly the indirect – costs of these schemes can be a barrier to small producers participating in these programmes.

Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS) offer a low-cost, locally-based system of quality assurance with an emphasis on social cohesion and awareness raising. The system seems ideally suited to locally-marketed, short supply chains such as crofting produce.

The term PGS is relatively new, although the idea of participatory certification programmes like the organic PGS run by Nature et Progrès in France have been around since the 1980s.

The main concern raised when discussing PGS is one of trust. The argument is that consumers will have no confidence in this type of certification providing a credible guarantee. No system of certification or quality assurance is perfect – and

unscrupulous people who want to exploit the system can generally find ways to do so. However PGS is based on the establishment of trust between the producer and the consumer. Therefore the direct participation of consumers is essential to the development of any successful PGS.

Producers, consumers and other stakeholders play a part in deciding:

- the choice and definition of the standards;
- the development and implementation of certification procedures;
- the certification decisions.

In some countries consumers even play an active role in distribution by running PGS cooperatives.

Additional benefits to consumers involved in PGS programmes include greater education about production techniques, stronger feeling of community, increased confidence in the quality of the products (because they are directly involved in the guarantee process) and the knowledge that they are supporting local producers.

Locally-based and non-hierarchical certification structures and mechanisms are appropriate to the social context crofters operate in and the sense of ownership and direct involvement, coupled with an element of social control, helps ensure compliance.

SCF is currently investigating how a PGS could work in the crofting counties.

## Here, there and everywhere

**S**CF REPRESENTATIVES are invited to represent crofters at many and varied meetings across the country and beyond. Below is a list of some of those meetings which had been arranged as we went to press. This list spans three months.

Animal health and welfare stakeholder meeting, science and advice for Scottish agriculture, Edinburgh – Norman Leask

SRDP programme monitoring committee, Edinburgh – Patrick Krause

Cross-party group on rural affairs, Scottish Parliament – Norman

Stakeholder event on crofting renewables, Edinburgh – Eleanor Arthur, Norman, Patrick, Donnie MacDonald, Carol Anne Stewart

Cross-party group on crofting, Scottish Parliament – Patrick, Norman, Eleanor

Policy meeting with RSPB, Edinburgh – Patrick

Evidence-giving session on agricultural support, Scottish Parliament – Patrick

Pack inquiry workshop, Inverness – Patrick

NFU Mutual meeting, Glasgow – Patrick

ECVC Via Campesina congress, Brussels – Norman and Patrick

Centre for remote and rural studies meeting, Inverness – Patrick

CAP stakeholder meeting, Edinburgh – Patrick

Meeting with Highlands and Islands credit union, Stornoway – Patrick and Derek Flynn

Crofting counties map meeting, Edinburgh – Patrick, Carol Anne, Charlotte Flowers

Working group on support for crofting, Edinburgh – Eleanor, Patrick, Norman, David Smith

Farmers market partnership, Ingliston – Patrick



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## CROFTING HERO

## Donald John the Vet

**D**ONALD JOHN MACLENNAN has been living on Skye since 1957 but was born on Harris in 1928, the youngest of eleven children.

Donald's father was from Grosebay, five miles south of Tarbert and his mother from nearby Scadabay. "My father was a crofter, but like most men used to have to go away to Glasgow to work in the shipyards and that sort of thing. They would send money back home and would have to come back at spring and harvest time."

Most memorable about his childhood was the friendship and comradeship between the people in the community – the sense of sharing that prevailed. "If there was such a thing as Christian communism, it was there as we grew up – everyone helped each other."

One of Donald John's earliest memories of childhood was his first trip to Tarbert. "It was like going to New York today – you prepared for it for three or four days before and then you looked back on it for three or four weeks afterwards and if you were lucky you had a few pennies to buy a sweetie."

Primary education was at a side school in the village at the back of the mission hall, which was a common occurrence in the Bays villages that were not connected by road at that time. "When we were nine we moved to Stockinish school and walked three miles there and back across a hill every day, with only a 'piece' for our lunch."

Donald John finished his education in Fort William before applying to the Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies in Edinburgh. He did six months practical work before his finals in Oban, Elgin and Stornoway – the latter where he worked with local vet Chris Munro. "In those days there was 6,500 head of breeding cows in Lewis and Harris. The plan was that I was go to away to a busier practice for a couple of years and then come back and join Chris."

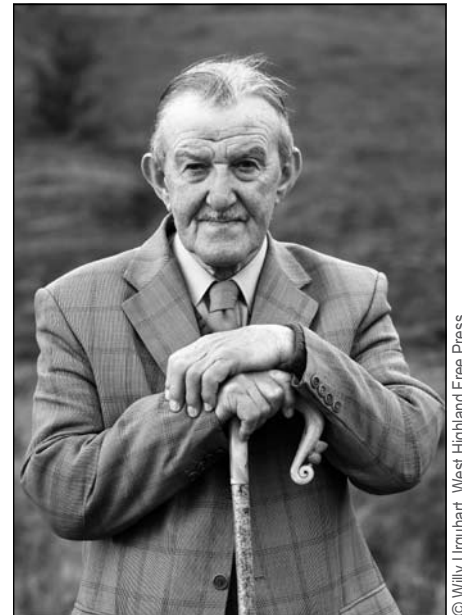
Donald John ended up in Maybole, Ayrshire, "I enjoyed the job very much. Between Ayr and Girvan, which is about 17 miles, there were 21 vets and we were all kept busy because of all the cattle and sheep down there."

He has a few amusing stories from his time in Ayrshire, including one where he had to perform a Caesarian section on a sheep. "Usually for a C section two vets would go and one would do the operation and the other would help to hold down the sheep, while the farmer held the other end down. On this occasion my colleague was ill and I went alone, so the farmer called his daughter to come and help – his wife would have nothing to do with it."

"I started the operation and the next thing the daughter did a big dive backwards onto the hay bales – she couldn't stand the sight of the blood. The farmer then stretched so he had one hand on the sheep's head and the other on its back end, but the next thing I know, just as I was pulling out the lamb and without any warning, the farmer just fled."

"I was left on my own, holding a lamb, with the sheep trying to get up from the table. I shouted and shouted and the next thing the farmer's wife had to come and help me even though she really didn't want to. On the way out, I met the famer and he said: 'Oh, I'm very sorry about what happened in there but I had a bad stomach yesterday and took some laxatives – and that was them kicking in right at that moment.' Well, I've heard some excuses in my time for people being squeamish, but that was a good one!"

Another time, the telephone rang late one night and it was a local farmer looking for help. "There was a family with two farms – the mother and one son were farming one side of the hill and the brother was at the farm on the other side. He was the one with the telephone and I had just gone to bed



© Willy Urquhart, West Highland Free Press

when he called. 'Can you come out? he said. 'What's wrong?' I asked. 'I don't know!' he replied. 'What do you mean, you don't know,' I asked him.

'Well,' he said, 'I had gone to bed and my brother came down, banging on the window and told me to send for you at once then he went off again.' 'And you don't know whether it's a horse or a cow?' I enquired. 'Oh my God, it's my mother!' he shouted. He thought he was phoning the doctor, who was on 3188 but he'd dialled 3189 which was my number!"

After five years in Ayrshire, Donald John returned to Harris in his late 20s – as the only unmarried child – to look after his mother who had taken ill. When she recovered, he accepted a position with the Highlands and Islands Veterinary Scheme, run by the government for vets working in crofting areas.

Not long after he arrived on Skye in 1957 he met Morag, also from Harris, and working as a domestic science teacher at Broadford school. They married in 1960 and then seven years later moved to a croft at Old Corry, allowing Donald John to get some of his own livestock.

Donald John is retired now, although it took him a while to properly give up work. His first attempt at retirement failed when he went back to help out the new vet. "She asked me if I'd go back for a year to help her, but it ended up being six years."

He is still very active, with 15 breeding cows on his croft and membership of the local sheep club.

In the mid 1980s Donald John received the MBE, well-deserved recognition for this much-loved character.

*This article is kindly reproduced courtesy of the West Highland Free Press, written by Lynne Kennedy.*



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## MEMBERS' PAGES

## See you at the show!

**June 1st Scotland's Beef Event** – Fochabers  
**June 11th Road to the Isles Show** – Arisaig  
**June 23rd-26th** – Royal Highland Show, Edinburgh  
**July 15-16th** – Caithness County Show  
**July 23rd** – Sutherland Show, Dornoch  
**July 30th** – Nairn Show, Auldern  
**August 3rd-4th** – Black Isle Show, Muir of Ord  
**August 3rd** – Arran Show  
**August 6th** – Lorn Show  
**August 10th** – Bute Show  
**August 11th** – Grantown Show  
**August 11th** – Islay, Jura and Colonsay Show, Islay  
**August 13th** – Mid Argyll Show, Lochgilphead  
**August 13th** – Orkney Show, Kirkwall  
**August 20th** – Appin Show  
**August 27th** – Lochaber Show, Torlundy  
**September 3rd** – Dalmally Show



As we went to press, SCF stands were organised for the Royal Highland and Black Isle shows. Check our website regularly to find out more.

[www.crofting.org](http://www.crofting.org)

## SCF company secretary retires

**A**LISTAIR MACIVER, a well-known face in crofting for many a year, has stepped down from his role as company secretary for SCF. His expertise and wise head will be missed.

Alistair was involved in the SCU since its beginnings. Recently, going through some old photos for the SCU/SCF 25 year celebration, it was striking to see how many had Alistair in them – very often with a note book and pen in hand, recording the meeting. Or giving a speech as president of the union, a post he occupied from April 1995 till November 1997. Or talking to crofters, politicians, royalty ... Alistair has been the epitome of the ideal we strive for:

"If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,

Or walk with kings – nor lose the common touch,"



Not only the Scottish Crofting Federation but all crofters everywhere owe Alistair a huge vote of thanks.

We also welcome John Bannister MBE on board as the new company secretary.

Visit us online at  
[www.crofting.org](http://www.crofting.org)

## Crofters and small landholders training programme

**S**PRING 2011 sees the start of our practical training sessions, covering a wide range of crofting skills.

These will be suitable for people who are doing or have recently completed the entry level crofting induction course and would like to follow up with hands-on training on topics of particular interest. With a wide range of training sessions on offer, there is also the opportunity for experienced crofters to develop skills in different elements of crofting.

Participants are invited to select one or more of the following units and then to attend training days on specific skills within that unit. The units – and some example training days that may be available are:

- crofting livestock (sheep shearing; lambing; basic livestock husbandry)
- croft land management (fencing; pest control; soil analysis; equipment use)
- crofting conservation and environment (muirburn; improving

grassland; managing wetland)

- crofter forestry (coppicing; structural support for trees; deer management)

- crofter horticulture (use of polytunnels; crop disorders; soft fruit growing)

- crofter heritage skills (local dry-stone walling styles; thatching).

Training will be delivered by LANTRA-approved providers and a certificate of attendance will be awarded for each training day, leading towards a certificate for the whole unit when the required number of training days has been achieved. This will be between six and 10 days, depending on the unit being followed.

During the year from spring 2011 to spring 2012 there will be around 14 days of training in each unit apart from heritage skills, for which seven days will be offered. The training days will be spread widely throughout the Highlands and Islands, depending on local demand.

It is very important that the

training on offer is of interest and value to as many crofters as possible, so please get in touch with your training needs and interests. The aim is to arrange courses in the topics that are most in demand, allowing each participant to structure their own skills development.

There is also a need to hear from additional people wishing

to be considered as trainers, but without current LANTRA accreditation. Local 'train the trainer' sessions can be arranged to help with this. Please get in touch if you would be interested in taking this course.

Further information is available from Su Cooper, SCF training manager: [training@crofting.org](mailto:training@crofting.org) 01463 796836.



Sheep shearing demo



## MEMBERS' PAGES

# Crofters to attend Sami/Slow Food conference in Sweden

**T**HE SCOTTISH Crofting Federation will have the chance to send a delegation to attend a major international conference on food issues being held in Sweden later this year after winning support from the mobile phone company Vodafone.

The Vodafone Foundation's World of Difference competition gives people the chance to propose projects that will support a local charity and the award to the SCF is one of 500 received by different charity-based projects throughout the UK.

The funding will enable Iain MacKinnon, whose research specialises in the area of traditional ecological knowledge, to organise and prepare for crofters to have a presence at the Swedish conference which will discuss issues of agricultural biodiversity, local food systems and traditional knowledge, held

by the international Slow Food movement and the Sami, the people who are indigenous to many parts of northern Europe.

Iain is currently completing a PhD at the University of Ulster exploring distinctive ways of thinking about land that are held in different indigenous cultures. He said: "I am very grateful to Vodafone for supporting this project. Their funding will allow the SCF to find out more about the parallels that exist between the attitudes towards land and nature that people in crofting areas have held and the kinds of relationships that other indigenous communities have with their homelands."

The opportunity to attend the event arose after an SCF delegation travelled to Turin in October to the Terra Madre gathering of global food communities which is held in that city every two years. The event

is organised by Slow Food and last year more than 6,000 people from different communities all over the world gathered to share their traditions and their foods. Among the groups that crofters met and were inspired by were Maori fishermen and Sami reindeer herders.

SCF chair Eleanor Arthur said: "Travelling to Italy last year and meeting such inspiring people committed to their food traditions showed us that crofters are not alone in the challenges we face in working to maintain and transmit our own way of living. There are many other cultures of the world who are equally as proud of their histories and traditions as crofters are, and have experiences to share from which we can learn."

"The indigenous peoples' Terra Madre in Sweden will be a great opportunity to connect with them and so we are very pleased

that Vodafone have given us this opportunity to employ an accomplished researcher in these issues who can show our crofting connections in a global context."

Iain added that different ways of thinking about land and what it is for can have practical consequences. "For many cultures land is a source of sustenance and identity," he said. "As the Terra Madre gathering shows, many indigenous peoples take pride not just in their homelands, but in producing foods that are distinctly of their own culture."

"It's for this reason that indigenous communities tend to be sources of agricultural biodiversity and why many believe that the traditional knowledge held by indigenous peoples in relation to their lands and ecology will have a vital role to play in creating a sustainable global agriculture."

## Membership increases for second consecutive year

**F**OR THE SECOND year in succession, the Federation has recorded an increase in membership as crofters continue to appreciate the work that the SCF carries out on their behalf.

In 2009 SCF recruited 45 new members while 2010 saw a further 75 new members come on board.

According to SCF chairperson Eleanor Arthur recruitment success validates the hard work of the SCF over the past few years "For a number of years SCF membership has been in decline, mainly due to the reduction in the number of active crofters. However it is heartening to see that the work the Federation is doing on behalf of all crofters and their communities is being recognised and this downward trend has been reversed."

"SCF is the only member-led organisation dedicated to the promotion of crofting and our achievements

benefit the whole of the crofting community. It is essential for the wellbeing of the organisation that we continue to grow the membership, not only from a financial point of view but also to maintain our standing as a representative body"

The SCF is the largest association of small scale food producers in the UK. Eleanor added: "A healthy growing membership ensures that we remain a strong representative voice for crofting and the organisation best placed to take crofting forward. Every crofter should be a member of the SCF as every crofter benefits from the work the SCF undertakes on behalf of crofting."

**If you think you can recruit a new member, the following points might help you do so. Please take every opportunity to convey the message!**

### Reasons to join SCF

The Scottish Crofting Foundation is the only organisation lobbying exclusively for the interests of crofters and small producers.

Through collective action, support for crofting and remote rural communities gains a higher profile. Stronger arguments are made for policies and enhanced schemes directly specific to crofting such as the Croft House Grant Scheme, Bull Hire Scheme, and Crofting Counties Agricultural Grants Scheme. Thanks to the efforts of the SCF, the beneficial parts of the Crofting Reform Bill have been retained while many negative aspects have been removed.

- As an SCF member you are part of a wide network of contacts for sharing experiences and sourcing information.

- SCF members benefit from the resources in The Crofter magazine and e-mail notifications from SCF HQ on policies, information and news.

- SCF members have access to advice and can be put in touch with someone who can help solve problems.

- SCF members can make use of a discount scheme from suppliers across the Highlands and Islands and the savings made can recover the cost of your subscription.

- SCF members have access to the services of the NFU Mutual Insurance Society, whose schemes have been specially drawn up to cover crofting homes and activities.

- SCF members have the opportunity to help shape crofting policies for the benefit of future generations of crofters and our rural communities.

- For all this and much more, the annual subscription is only £45.

If you would like to join the SCF please log on to [www.crofting.org](http://www.crofting.org) or email us at: [hq@crofting.org](mailto:hq@crofting.org). We will welcome you and appreciate your support.

## Farewell to well-known Commission staff

**D**ONALD SMITH is retiring after 20 years as solicitor to the Crofters Commission.

Born and brought up on a croft in Lewis, now run by his younger brother, Donald has a sound knowledge of crofting law and the social and economic pressures that crofters face. Over the years Donald has witnessed many changes in crofting law. "Reflecting on the last 20+ years," he said, "probably what surprises me most is that the traditional tenancy-based crofting system of land tenure has survived the changes that have taken place."

"The incidence of owner-occupation of croft land has undoubtedly increased. However, I think the main benefit introduced by the 1976 Act was the rights given to crofters sharing in a common grazing to benefit from the resumption of part of the grazing for development by the owner. That income was then reinvested by the grazings committee to enhance the common grazing or the inbye croft land or the stock kept in the township."

"But, it seems to me that the benefits of ownership over a system of tenure have either not been realised by most crofters or that many still consider the security of tenure the crofting legislation provides is still worth retaining. Perhaps this is not so surprising considering the strong sense of

community and kinship (cairdeas) that still pervades most traditional crofting townships, where most crofters still consider themselves stewards or custodians of the land for future generations rather than property developers.

"It remains to be seen what effect the changes introduced by the 2010 Act will bring about. The act clearly aims to match the rights and responsibilities of traditional tenant crofters and the newly-designated owner-occupier-crofters, wherever possible. As for the proposed new Crofting Commission, it seems to me that its focus will have to be on regulation of the occupation and use being made of crofting land, rather than on the regulation of proposed changes in occupation, which was the primary function of the existing Commission."

Also departing are Hugh Mackintosh, who has spent 26 years with the Commission, Barry Dennis (11 years) and Alistair Beaton (12 years).

Hugh commented: "I've often thought myself to be very lucky in having spent so many years in the Commission. After all, it's not everyone who gets to travel the length and breadth of the Highlands and Islands and meet interesting folk as part of their job – it never did feel like working in the civil service at all!"

We wish them well.

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## Housing and people – the future of rural communities

A joint event between Highland Small Communities Housing Trust (HSCHT) and Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS) Scotland to be held on 31 March 2011 and 1 April 2011 at the MacDonald Resort, Aviemore

We often see housing as something which is special and separate.

We forget that we live in communities and that housing and communities are special! This event will challenge and inform anyone with an interest in housing and developing local communities – landowners, contractors, community land trusts, councillors, tenants, community councillors, housing staff and people who live and work in rural communities.

The conference will end with a presentation and questions from Chief Secretary to the Treasury: Rt Hon Danny Alexander MP.

More information can be found on the HSCHT website: [www.hscht.co.uk](http://www.hscht.co.uk).

To reserve your place, please contact Elaine Scoular on 0141 552 3633.



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- livestock enterprise planning.



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## SCF annual gathering 2011

This year's gathering will be held on Skye on Monday 3rd and Tuesday 4th October.

2011 marks the 125th anniversary of the Crofters' Holdings (Scotland) Act 1886. The conference will look at how the past has influenced our present system and what the future holds for crofting.

The event will begin with "1886 and all that?" – an exploration of the role of crofting since 1886 on the social, economic and cultural heritage of the Highlands and Islands. Day two will focus on "Crofting, where now?" – an exploration of crofting's positive externalities, focussing on how crofting can continue to provide wider social and economic benefits to our communities.

We will also be hosting a ceilidh to celebrate the 125th anniversary of the 1886 act, featuring musicians from throughout the crofting counties.

Further details and booking forms will appear in the next edition of *The Crofter*.

## Celebrating crofting past and present

**T**HIS YEAR we are celebrating the 125th anniversary of the 1886 Act – and to mark the occasion SCF plans to produce a series of commemorative greetings cards.

If you have any photographs or paintings that demonstrate crofting in your area and would like to see them featured on these cards please send digital images to [hq@crofting.org](mailto:hq@crofting.org) or post transparencies and prints to SCF HQ Kyle Industrial Estate IV40 8AX. **Please note, it is essential that digital images are high resolution.**

Brief details of the subject matter: when and where, if known, should be supplied with each picture. Please also supply your contact details so we can return your transparencies or prints.

Throughout the crofting counties there must be shoeboxes full of remarkable pictures of crofting in the past, as well as memory cards full of incredible pictures of more contemporary crofting scenes. Please help us to create some truly original cards to commemorate this significant anniversary.

## SCF calls for director

SCF has a vacancy on the company board for a director with experience of charities accounting (SORP).

Diversifying our income generation makes financial governance an interesting role in this vibrant organisation.

The board meets four times per year. The post is unpaid but expenses are met.

Those interested please contact chief executive Patrick Krause in the first instance at [patrick@crofting.org](mailto:patrick@crofting.org)



Duirinish near Kyle some 50 years ago

### SCF Board of Directors:

**Eleanor Arthur (chair)**

**Marina Dennis (vice-chair)**

**Neil MacLeod**

**Derek Flynn**

**John Gillies**

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**Company secretary:**

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**SCF registered office Unit 26, Kyle Industrial Estate, Kyle, IV40 8AX**

**Company Number SC 218658**

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**Scottish Crofting Federation**

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## How to contact us

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