

Vulnerable areas – recognition at last?

THE RENEGOTIATION of the CAP will see the demise of the Less Favoured Area (LFASS) support scheme.

This will be replaced by Areas of Natural Handicap (ANH). Europe has declared that within ANH systems of support can be developed and targeted at vulnerable areas (VA). The geographical boundary for Scotland's VA has yet to be fully defined. Pack states in his final report: "It will include all of the current very fragile area (ie all of the islands) plus part of the fragile area. In defining the area, the objective will be to identify areas within the current fragile designation which suffer from disadvantage due to natural handicaps based on bio-physical criteria such as an exposed, maritime climate; poor soils with high rainfall; high salinity; a predominance of small fragmented units; extreme remoteness; steep slopes and a high altitude; and a predominance of rugged land with very limited in-bye."

The end of LFASS is something of a bitter-sweet pill, a support scheme which promised so much, but was never allowed to deliver as it could have.

It is clear, with the VA designation, that Europe values the role agriculture plays in more remote communities. It also shows that it recognises the precarious nature of operating within these regions. Vulnerable area designation is the tool provided by Europe by which crofters could be compensated for the natural disadvantages which they face. The challenge, as ever, will be to persuade the powers closer to home that levels of support need to be provided which can allow crofting to flourish, rather than simply subsist.

SCF has proposed the formation of a vulnerable areas working group and this has won widespread support from politicians, NGOs and local authorities. Scottish civil servants who initially rejected the idea are now "welcoming the introduction of another stakeholder group into the debate on the future of agriculture support, particularly because a wider picture of agriculture in Scotland could be presented."

It is proposed that this group will focus on how policy can be developed which will allow crofting to improve and expand, rather than stifling it as is often the case at the moment. It will work in tandem with other groups identified by the Pack enquiry, such as (1) area based payments, (2) TUF + the greening of pillar 1 payments, (3) pillar 2 issues, (4) impact analysis on changes.

Shetland Islands Council has taken the lead role and has provided funding and resources which will see this proposal turned into a reality.

SCF believes that through this combined approach and with the utilisation of resources and expertise from all parties involved, it will be possible to best make the case for the levels of funding which the crofting counties need and deserve.

A radical challenge to the new Scottish Government

AS THE CROFTER went to press we were still taking in the emphatic result delivered by voters in the Scottish Parliament election.

We welcome Stewart Stevenson as minister for environment and climate change, with ministerial responsibility for crofting. We will be seeking an early meeting with the new minister and we hope that he will let us have his thoughts on crofting in an article for the next edition.

In one sense, the election drew a line under a process of legislation on crofting that has been going on since 2005.

The 2010 Crofting Act, for all its imperfections, has at least let us know where we stand. We look forward to the implementation of some positive aspects, like a majority-elected

Crofting Commission, and we will be pressing the case for crofting communities themselves to carry out where possible the mapping required for the new register of crofts and for them to be given the necessary support to do so.

Although we are unlikely to see any new crofting legislation for some time, there is much that government can do to strengthen and expand the system – and this need not incur increased expenditure in current and foreseeable financial circumstances.

In the run-up to the election SCF published its *Crofting Policy Resolution – a radical challenge to the next Scottish Government*. The resolution calls upon the incoming government to publish, within a year of taking office, an action plan for crofting to meet two key objectives:

Continued on page 4



Crofters John Gillies, Carol Anne Stewart, Morag MacKenzie, Susan Walker and researcher Iain MacKinnon met with cabinet secretary Richard Lochhead and Dave Thompson MSP to discuss the SCF manifesto

CROFTERS, being tenants or owner-occupiers of croft land, will be expected to live on or near their land and keep it in good order with regard for the local community.

Is it too much to expect the same to apply to anyone who owns land in this small country of ours?

See director's blog – page 2

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Development threats to crofting
Sustainable housing on croft land
Crofting resources programme
Pairc buyout campaign
Crofting connections
Farmers' seeds
Crofter's wife

And much more ...

Message from the chair...

Eleanor Arthur



FIRSTLY I have to congratulate the recently-elected MSPs, new and returning, and wish them well in their term of office.

It is a great thing for us to have our own parliament and of course a huge responsibility. I particularly congratulate the SNP on defying the odds and winning an

unprecedented majority. Govern wisely – and SCF looks forward to working with you.

My colleague Derek Flynn covers recent SCF activities on members' behalf in his article also on this page, so I won't repeat them here.

I love this time of year. Everywhere you go, you see the land changing, from drab winter colours; then the following days a green hue starts to appear and the growing process starts all over again.

The weather here in Shetland over the past month has been excellent for the lambing. We only lost one lamb out of our lot, possibly as they were all pure Shetland this year instead of cross-Texels. The Shetland lambs are very hardy and the ewes are very capable mothers. It is not only important to use and protect

our native breeds for future generations, but it also makes a lot of sense to use low-maintenance livestock when you are a crofter with 101 things to do.

I am delighted to be part of the SCF delegation, funded by Vodafone, attending the international Slow Food conference in Sweden which is on indigenous practice in food production.

Our presentations will focus on croft use of native breeds of cattle. It is a great opportunity to get crofting on to the international stage again. However, I pity the interpreter who has to translate what I say into different languages!

I was visiting Mary Isbister at Burland croft and got some good photos of her animals. This photo of the cow and calf show what good milkers the Native Shetland cow is, her udder is a proper

picture in itself. The calf was a bit of a surprise for them though as Mary and Tammy's Herd is predominantly black and white. However like all things you get an occasional different colour thrown in when you least expect it.

It is approaching show time of year. SCF will have stands at the Royal Highland and Black Isle shows and the international dog trials in Fearn, as well as local groups attending local shows. So see you there!



Director's blog

Derek Flynn shares his spring schedule

LOOKING back, there has been no shortage of things to do.

The promise was made last October at the Oban gathering that SCF would seek to ensure that its members are kept informed about the provisions of the 2010 Crofting Reform Act.

Since then, the series of meetings attended by Patrick and me have shown this to be a worthwhile exercise.

Last autumn we were in Whalsay, Unst, Lerwick and Stornoway and this spring we have continued with visits to Helmsdale, Breakish and Benbecula, explaining the changes and how they affect crofters.

At the same time, Patrick has been explaining how the SCF crofting community mapping project (CCMAP) might be carried out. In its plans to provide a national crofting register, the Scottish Government wishes to encourage the mapping of crofting townships as a community process. If SCF proposals are successful, the requirement for individuals to register maps will be delayed until at least 2014. Meanwhile Patrick and I are accepting invitations to extend our travels.

With the help of our new company secretary John Bannister and Karen Campbell, I recently formed a membership task force. At the board and council meeting last December, I volunteered to be the director with responsibility for SCF membership. Before that, a working group had spent

much time and energy preparing a strategy and it now falls on us to make progress. John and Karen have between them a wealth of experience in the workings of SCF and Karen is pursuing her special interest in youth membership. She



attended and spoke well at both Breakish and Benbecula.

The SCF board next met in March in Edinburgh and later along with Eleanor, Norman, Russell and Patrick, I went to the meeting of the cross-party group on crofting at Holyrood. My principal interest was to hear about the programme taking forward the implementation of the Reform Act. The first commencement order was approved last December, introducing a few provisions.

The second is at draft stage but seems unlikely to be issued before October 2011 as it will include large parts of the act. So look out for further information in these columns.

John Farquhar Munro MSP, who chaired the group, was about to retire. Eleanor presented him with a beautiful quail on behalf of SCF to thank him for his support of crofting.

Unexpectedly, April found me in Chicago. My niece, deputy stage manager with the National Theatre of Scotland, whilst touring North America with the play "Black Watch", persuaded her father and me to go to attend part of its two week run there. Since first performed on the 2006 Edinburgh Festival Fringe, it has been a notable success everywhere it has played. We felt honoured to be there and lucky to have the chance of visiting this great American city.

In May I attended one of the regular meetings of the board of the Highland Small Community Housing Trust (HSCHT). This has provided much food for thought. Here is an organisation set up to help communities provide affordable housing in their own areas. If any communities have such a need, HSCHT specialises in seeking ways to fulfil it. Some of the problems are caused by the complexities and misunderstandings of crofting law. That is something SCF can help to overcome.

Back in February Patrick was at Holyrood giving evidence to the rural affairs and environment committee on CAP reform. This I know because on that same day I gave evidence to the same committee along with Dr Calum Macleod and Dr Issie Macphail as part of Dr Macleod's team reporting on the working

of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003. My part in it was to explain the difficulties of crofting communities had using the act to acquire their lands. Despite the intention of the act, only one community has been bold enough to even try to use it so far.

Unfortunately for many of our communities land (in large estates) is still seen as an investment commodity and a profitable one too. Strangers with access to money can still purchase and possess large chunks of Scotland without regard to the local population.

Despite the clear statutory intention, a Warwickshire-based accountant, whose family bought the 26,800-acre Pairc Estate on Lewis in 1924, is set to appeal the decision announced by the Scottish Government to allow crofters to mount Scotland's first hostile community buyout. Other absentee landowners cause problems. Some cannot even be contacted.

As I write, the results of the 5th May election have just been made known. It seems to me that there is a stronger likelihood that all the provisions of the Reform Act will be brought into play.

This will mean that crofters, being tenants or owner-occupiers of croft land, will be expected to live on or near their land and keep it in good order with regard for the local community.

Is it too much to expect the same to apply to anyone who owns land in this small country of ours?

New designation needed: zoned for crofting?

WHEN SCF commissioned our *Houses on Crofting Land* report a few years ago it was in response to ever-increasing pressure on crofting land for speculative housing development in our region's property hot-spots.

The most notorious case of this was the loss of an entire croft at Taynuilt in Argyll, in an area where crofts were already very scarce, when an absentee owner was allowed – thanks to negligent crofting regulation and lax planning policies – to develop an estate of up-market dwellings. One of these houses is currently on the market for a cool £330,000, described by the selling agent as an opportunity to acquire an extremely well-presented home in a highly desirable luxury development. What a slap in the face for any young person in Argyll wanting a start in crofting or even just a foot on the housing ladder.

SCF's housing report acknowledges the contribution that crofting land can make to meeting genuine housing needs in the Highlands and Islands. Most crofting townships have areas of relatively poor land on their common grazings that can be made available in order to meet local housing requirements and the report outlines how this can be done without the land or houses finding their way

on to the open, and unaffordable, market.

There are some signs that, better late than never, local authority planning policies are taking some cognisance of the circumstances of crofting. For example, the Highland Council's local plan for Skye and Lochalsh states: "Safeguarding and promoting crofting is a crucial element of preserving Skye and Lochalsh's unique identity. The plan assists in this process by making the quality of croft land a key criterion in site and settlement boundary selection. Where possible, sites will be chosen that do not represent locally important agricultural land and expansion of townships on to poorer common grazings land will be supported." A pilot project to co-ordinate planning and decrofting for house building has been instituted by the Crofters Commission and the Highland Council, which is intended to avoid the situation we have seen so often where the granting of planning permission has forced decrofting regardless of the wider crofting interest.

A recent planning application by the absentee owner of a croft at Drumfearn, Skye, attracted strong local opposition and considerable media attention. It was proposed to build three houses on the best land of the croft, this in an area where there is strong

Continued on page 4



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Striking a balance

A vital question from Crofters Commission board member Angus McHattie

HOW DO WE strike a balance in modern crofting that allows individual crofters or landowners to benefit from their assets whilst maintaining the communal aspects of crofting that set it apart from other agricultural or land tenancy systems in Scotland? One fundamental difficulty for crofters in creating such a balance is the number of grazings committees in the crofting areas that are out of office, meaning that those crofting communities have no way to hold up their end over large parts of the crofting counties.

Remember, without grazings committees, there is no way to access support funding, should development projects on the common grazings be pursued.



Meanwhile, increasingly large sites are being requested for decrofting for housing on parts of the inbye croft land which is often the better quality land, closest to the road access.

This has caused problems in the past and a pilot scheme is underway within part of the Highland Council area to promote early dialogue between planning and agricultural staff when a development application is received.

Hopefully this project will give some pointers to how we can work to protect areas of locally important croft land whilst helping provide much-needed housing. This will only work well if crofters and grazings committees engage with consultation on local plans and define where they want development and where they don't.

Such engagement is absolutely crucial if crofting land is to be positively managed and regulated.

In Skye recently we directed hearings into two cases where we felt we needed additional information.

The first one was into a very large, whole-croft decrofting, some 450 hectares. Only two crofters attended. Interest in resisting the decrofting application was apparent but, as no public support was evidenced at the hearing, a good full-time unit was removed from crofting.

The second hearing that same day was into the creation of three new crofts in south

Continued on page 4

New designation needed: zoned for crofting?

Continued from page 3

demand for crofts for genuine purposes. The planning officer had, incredibly, recommended that planning permission be granted, in breach of the council's own guidelines for crofting land as stated in the local plan. In this instance the planning committee refused two of the three houses. It remains to be seen when and if the Crofters Commission will carry out its duty to seek letting proposals for the remainder of the croft.

Part of the problem in cases of this kind seems to be that there is confusion (even amongst planning professionals) between land which is zoned for housing and land within the settlement development area. Perhaps we need a new definition – zoned for crofting. If the Highland Council follows its own guidance on building on croft land then all well and good, but the inclusion of the get-out phrase “where possible” does not altogether inspire confidence.

SCF has been advocating a government planning advice note for crofting areas which would in future prevent the kind of abuse that took place at Taynuilt and was only partly avoided at Drumfearn. Meantime crofters must be vigilant in

scrutinising and commenting upon any proposed new local plan, to ensure that crofting interests are protected.

Finally, here is an example of how an unscrupulous crofting estate can run rings around the planning and crofting regulatory systems. We cannot go into detail as part of this unsavoury tale is *sub judice*. A croft was allowed to be held vacant by the estate for no less than eight years. The estate was then granted decrofting of three speculative house sites and applied to re-let the remainder of the croft to itself! When two of the few remaining crofters in the township protested at what was going on, they were sued!

When this kind of thing can still happen we need as much as ever a regulatory authority that will take the side of crofters and crofting, rather than a neutral tribunal. How can an agency which aims to promote occupancy of crofts, active land use and shared management by crofters, as a means of sustaining and enhancing rural communities, remain neutral in such a carry-on?

Houses on Crofting Land is available at www.crofting.org/index.php/publications/66

A radical challenge

Continued from page 1

- 70% of existing crofts in productive use by 2020 and 85% by 2030
- Creating 10,000 new crofts (half of them woodland crofts) by 2020 and a quarter of the land in Scotland in crofting tenure by 2030

The document goes on to outline the social, cultural and agro-ecological advantages of crofting. It states what is needed in terms of regulation and governance in order to develop and optimise the system's existing advantages.

It describes the changes of emphasis and direction that we believe are required to bring Scottish agricultural policies in line with emerging issues of biodiversity, resource use and sustainability as these have been defined by the global community and its institutions.

Finally, it makes plain our resolve that the time has come for government to recognise the advantages that crofting brings to our country, to extend the crofting system and make it the model for rural development throughout Scotland.

The agenda is a visionary and radical one for what we hope and expect to be a radical government. It seeks the changes

needed to bring population, economic growth and biodiversity back to poorly-managed, deserted and abandoned land. It emphasises food and energy production, agri-tourism, woodland expansion and conservation of carbon stocks in the peatlands, by getting stock back on the hills and moors.

To achieve that agenda, and to deliver what we know crofting can achieve for Scotland, we need a simplified and accessible SRDP; ring-fencing of crofting support schemes; targeting of LFASS to vulnerable areas; support for small producers in the next CAP reform through capping of SFP; further land reform; safeguarding of native crop varieties; reinstatement of the croft entrants scheme and extension of Crofting Connections; and enhanced crofter housing support.

Finally, here is a challenge to our incoming government: Don't just settle for leading Scotland. Be a world leader in land use and rural development.

SCF's Crofting Policy Resolution can be found at www.crofting.org/uploads/consultations/SCF_Crofting_Policy_Resolution.

Striking a balance

Continued from page 3

Skye. It was attended by over thirty people who were quite determined that whilst new crofts were in principle a good idea, the location suggested by the landlord was not the best land and that the project was a possible cover for a housing development.

After a good deal of debate, discussion and compromise during which lessons were learned by the landlord and their agents about how to consult with communities, a revised scheme was put forward which addressed some of the locally-raised concerns. The Commission approved the proposal to create three new crofts, on condition that an application to create a new common grazing was lodged. The crofts were also considerably enlarged.

In coming to the decision to approve we looked at the size, scale and land quality of the chosen site and recognised that although the land was poor quality, it did offer the potential for the establishment of new holdings where families could settle and develop a land-based business. They can also furnish house sites, where the new crofters can settle and look for other employment, as crofters have always done.

Many crofts are small, deliberately so, established in a time long gone when labour was needed by the state and the landlords.

Crofts were never just about agriculture, even when subsistence ruled. In 1886, the lairds kept the best land. Such a part-time system still works today, perhaps even more so as there are possibly more ways to supplement incomes than 150 years ago when many townships were first laid out.

The recent call by the SCF for the creation of 10,000 new crofts by 2020 seems ambitious however you look at it. How do we reconcile it with their recent condemnation of early attempts to establish a new township – adjacent to an existing township – in a part of the crofting counties that has a development ethos, widespread community activity and a landlord that is attempting to use the legislation in the way it was intended?

I would like to echo comments made at both hearings about the abundance of existing croft land that lies neglected. Perhaps changes driven by economics, food scarcity and security will allow us to review the way we value our croft land – as a vital and irreplaceable resource, before all the best bits are gone.

On all these issues I had one last thought. I much preferred the old SCU motto – “United we Stand”.

Visit us online at www.crofting.org

ENERGY-EFFICIENT HOUSING

The energy-efficient croft house

WHERE DO WE START the search for an energy efficient croft house?

The best approach is to look backwards. The black house was for many centuries the standard housing form of the Gaeltachd.

It was long and narrow, generally made of stone and thatch and was termed a longhouse or byre dwelling. To the English academic, E Cecil Curwin, who visited Lewis in the 1938, they revealed that there was an "iron-age society" still existing in the modern British Isles. He titled his essay in *Antiquities* magazine *The Hebrides – A Cultural Backwater*.

It was no wonder that many Highlanders became ashamed of their indigenous architecture, viewing it as a symbol of backwardness and poverty.

But in the 21st century, concerns over energy resources and global warming allow us to reappraise the black house and learn lessons which can be applied to modern day challenges.

The black house was a model of sustainable architecture. It used locally-sourced materials, was extremely energy efficient and was designed and sited to respond to topography and climate. The Gaelic saying "An iar's an ear, an dachaigh as' fhéarr – cùl ri gaoith, s' aghaidh ri gréin." (East to west, the house that's best – back to the wind and face to the sun) was often applied rigorously, as seen at the deserted village of Boreraig in south Skye.

In the run-rig system houses were built on the least fertile land, saving the best fields for crops and, importantly, they were grouped closely together in clachans.

Later, the introduction of crofting tenure forced people to build their houses apart – now seen as the traditional settlement pattern to be followed. The clachan informs us what people in villages and towns know – that tightly-grouped

buildings protect arable land, save costs on servicing and encourage social interaction and cohesion. Walking to your neighbours is a healthy activity, saves you money on fuel and saves the planet!

Siting a building to hunker down against the wind – and to have openings to the east where there is morning sun and avoiding the gales – are lessons we should still apply today. How many houses do we see sited high up on built-up ground, with the main door facing south west?

But the materials of the black house – stone and thatch – are expensive to use in modern houses and people may think that this is where it loses its relevance with the needs of modern day house builders. But the most important lesson of the black house was adaptability, not materials.

People used stone and thatch because it was the material to hand. They could collect stones and pull heather and reeds from the fields. It was affordable for people who had to battle against a subsistence living.

The late Duncan Stalker, master thatcher and clachar of Camuslunnie, would tell the anecdote of an old man in his childhood village whose job it was to twist together discarded wire to form staples for fixing the thatch. It was laborious and tedious work. But when the community could afford to buy steel staples, they did so. When metal sheeting became available to replace the thatch, this would be used instead, as it saved time and was lower maintenance. We adapt as technology moves on and find ways to save time and make improvements.

While some would argue that the stone and slate white house which replaced the black house was an improvement in design, with its careful proportions and nod to classicism, it was not energy efficient, nor did it

respond to the climate. And it was not cheap to build.

Timber-frame kit houses, however, were easy to build, easy to insulate and used materials which were relatively cheap and accessible. But to many who admired the bedded-down modesty of the black house, or the simple beauty of the pattern-book white house, they were ugly.

But why should they be? Why not combine the lessons of the black house, with its response to climate and topography, with the considered proportions of the white house, with the modern technology of timber-frame construction?

Fortunately, in my view, this is now happening. Sustainability isn't just about the amount of energy a building consumes in its use, but it being sustainable through its lifetime. If we build houses which are beautiful, adaptable and which fit and enhance the amazing landscape which we are fortunate to live in, then future generations will preserve and cherish them.

A house may be energy efficient, but if it is ugly it diminishes a locality; if it later is demolished because of its ugliness, it is a waste of the embodied energy used to build it. Architects have taken up the challenge of trying to develop modern houses based on traditional forms. My own practice, Dualchas Building Design on Skye, has shown how this can be done, with many more architects across the Highlands following a similar path.

Our clients demand large areas of glazing so that they can watch the landscape and violent weather from the comfort of their living room – not something which the crofter, who spent all day outside come rain or shine, would require. And often the houses are timber clad, the larch allowed to weather to a silver colour to match the rocks and birch.

But it is the pattern book kit house which has the answer to the needs of the Highlands, as despite my best efforts, not everyone will employ an architect. Modern building standards mean that highly efficient houses have to be built. Air tightness is measured and renewable heating systems are now mandatory if a proposed house is going to be approved by the council. Kit companies have taken up this challenge, with new construction technologies, such as structurally insulated panels (SIPS) being used more and more often.

The downside of this is that costs are going up, but with the political push towards carbon reduction, this is unlikely to change.

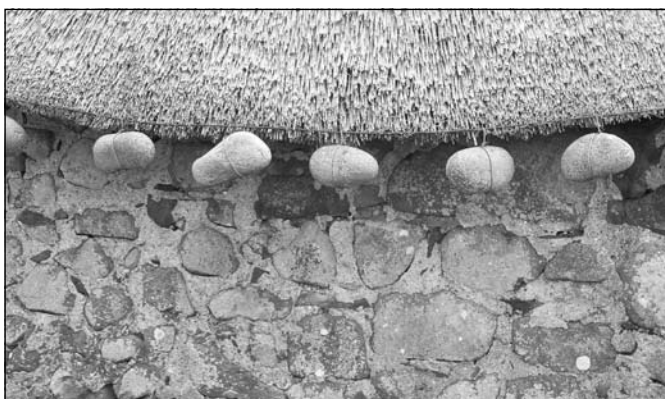
Therefore, the best approach is to carefully consider not the cost of the house, but what is the best investment. Some renewable technologies give generous feedback tariffs, but capital costs and the efficiency of the system have to be carefully weighed up.

Building a house which isn't bigger than you need is also useful – open plan living and double height volumes can give a feeling of space while keeping the footprint smaller.

But most of all think about the bigger picture. The black house – whatever attributes and emotions people attach to it – enhanced our landscape and was part of our landscape.

So, choose the site carefully, think about sharing of services and remember our responsibility to our beautiful country and its future generations.

Neil Stephen is a partner in architect practice Dualchas Building Design (www.dualchas.com 01471 833 300) and director of kit company Hebridean Contemporary Homes (www.hebhomes.com 0141 550 7360).



ENERGY EFFICIENT HOUSING

Building on the croft

THE SAME good management of our stock, land and produce has to be extended to what we build.

As steadings, sheds and other enclosures have to be thoughtfully put together, it goes without saying that the same applies to the home, workshop and home office.

Low or zero carbon energy usage – firstly with new construction – is now an international and local aim. The Scottish Government's introduction of Section 7 to the Scottish building standards has initiated sustainability labelling for buildings to reinforce the emphasis on good use of our energy and other resources.

Turning the byre (illustrated below) into a house annex illustrates four practical applications of all this.

Best use of space

It is very important that any arrangement of space inside and outside our buildings is pleasing and attractively set out. A basic 3D illustration can engage the household in an informed discussion and give a clearer idea as what is required early on. Expensive changes during construction are minimised and reduced waste and construction effort are friendly to the pocket and the environment.

Heating, hot water and ventilation

A wood burning stove is the main source of heat here and a small heat recovery box linked to the kitchen and shower room ventilation recovers waste heat when the weather is cold. The fan is powered in part by photovoltaic (PV). Basic solar water heating (2.5m²) helps to keep the hot water cylinder warm when the fire is not burning and in addition to warming water for sink and shower use will give some heat to the building to keep it dry.

A similar provision (2.5m²) of PV panels will provide power for low voltage lights in the darker areas of the building and power that is not required can be used in the home, or sent into the national grid using an inverter box instead of being stored in batteries.

The capital cost of the solar water and photovoltaic systems will need to be looked

at closely, as over the next months the government's financial payback support, through Renewable Heat Incentives (RHI) and Feed in Tariffs (FIT) will be determined.

Fitting your construction well together

The focus is on locally-sourced (joinery) skills to build efficiently and effectively. As with the construction of your house, there is the requirement for structural calculations. For a building warrant, the services of a certified structural engineer are normally used.

Locally-sourced materials

Using local and indigenous materials, where possible, at reasonable price is the key to sustainability. Windows may come from Norway and slates from a quarry in Spain – but all at reasonable cost despite the energy used in transit.

If horse hair could be used as a breather membrane under Ballachulish slate 100 years ago, surely we can use wool as an insulant on a commercial scale to wrap up our buildings, let them breathe and keep us warm? With new ways of developing products there can be a down side, but measures can be taken to reduce the risk and it is encouraging to see a number of manufacturers offering wool as a building insulant.

Finding the most appropriate recycled materials to suppress weeds below attractive plants and bushes is as significant as choosing the colours and textures for our walls and can be researched on-line. Awareness and demands for products and energy systems that are friendly to our environment are finding focus through web sites like the BRE's green guide to specification (www.Greenspec.co.uk) – recommended by the building standards section of the Scottish Government.

In the stringent times we face, research will continue to be focussed on advancing new ways of using the materials and harnessing the energy we have to hand.

Neil Ferguson
Chartered architect



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Dualchas house interior



Restorations by Ian Brown using recycled materials where possible and high levels of insulation.

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ENERGY EFFICIENT HOUSING

Ardgeal affordable housing

Ronnie MacRae, director of the Highland Small Communities Housing Trust (HSCHT), explains how one community achieved affordable housing for its local people.

WE ALL KNOW how important housing is to rural areas.

If the community can't ensure suitable affordable housing for its families it risks losing them – and the free care support they provided for elderly neighbours, the workers required to keep the rural economy sustainable and the care workers required to look after the ageing population.

This affects viability of schools with falling rolls, medical surgeries, reduced trade for post offices, shops, pubs and small businesses. It also reduces the chances of getting improved transport and communication links.

Partnership working, pulling together all the parties that can make rural development happen, is essential if we are to ensure we have sustainable communities in the longer term.

HSCHT's Ardgeal development is an example of what can happen when multi-partners such as the community, landowners, strategic bodies (council, etc), contractors

and housing providers are working towards the same goal.

Finding the location

We worked very closely with Kincaig and Vicinity Community Council. Having identified a shortage of affordable housing, the Ardgeal site was eventually selected by the trust and its partners, including the community council, Highland Council, Cairngorm National Park Authority, Scottish Government and Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS). The role of FCS was critical, as its decision as landowner to sell the site to the trust at an affordable price through the National Forest Land Scheme made the project viable for further detailed consideration.

What then?

Designs submitted by David Sommerville Architects form the basis of what is now built on site. The house designs and large plots provide low-cost home ownership opportunities specifically with the option of working from home and the capacity to support a significant element of self-sufficiency.

The homes are highly insulated and designed to be constructed with minimum damage to the local environment with high

levels of energy efficiency, low emissions and make best use of locally-sourced timber.

House design proposals were also expected to be, as far as practicable, replicable in any part of the Highlands or beyond where affordable housing may be required – especially in environmentally-sensitive locations such as forest or peaty areas where the stilt construction will provide cost savings.

Heat source

The houses are heated with wood-burning stoves located centrally in a large space with living and dining areas opening to an upper-floor study. Its central location takes full advantage of heat gains from the flue. The open plan layout of the house will allow heat from the stove to flow naturally.

Local timber is available as fuel for the stove which helps reduce fuel poverty and the use of wood as fuel helps reduce CO2 emissions when used appropriately. A solar panel will provide hot water, particularly in summer months, and will supplement the wood stove in spring, autumn and even to some extent in winter.

Solar gain is exploited by aligning the house such that all main living and bedrooms have a south-facing window. The large surface areas of the two-storey living space will be able to absorb any summer overheating with the ultimate option of opening a window. The use of north-facing windows has been minimised to further reduce heat loss.

The resulting estimated CO2 emissions from the house amount to 30.1 kg CO2/m2/year or 2738 kg CO2/year, compared to an average house built according to 1995 building standards of 4241 kg CO2/year. The use of wood burning stoves and solar panels reduces that impact even further.

Affordable

The trust applies what is called a rural housing burden (RHB) to all sales. The RHB secures an equity share in the home roughly equivalent to the discount on market value that the selling prices represent. In Ardgeal that equity share has been fixed at 35%. The trust has a right of pre-emption to buy back at 35% below market value on any resale after which it can sell to another priority household on similar terms. The RHB lasts in perpetuity and therefore locks in that discount.



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Connecting coastal communities

THE SCF IS supporting a project exploring issues of cultural identity and continuity in fishing communities in Scotland and Ireland.

Since the early 19th century fishing and crofting have been closely connected in the Highlands and Islands and, for many island fishermen of Scotland and Ireland, their work is more than just a source of income. It is a livelihood from a way of living that has helped to define island identity for many generations.

Small-scale fishermen on the islands of Arranmore, Inishbofin and Tory off the west coast of County Donegal in Ireland, and on Barra in the Western Isles of Scotland, believe that their livelihood and way of living is threatened by powerful forces against which they find it difficult to make their voices heard.

In Donegal islanders are seeking to overturn the Irish Government's decision to implement a total ban on their traditional subsistence salmon fishery. The ban has been implemented because there has been a decline nationally in the numbers of salmon returning to Irish rivers.

Barra islanders are opposing proposals from the Scottish Government's heritage conservation agency to establish a marine Special Area of Conservation in the seas close to the island.

In both localities concern is being expressed that restrictions on, or the loss of, a traditional livelihood from fishing – which has been so vital for the island peoples' past survival – could make life on

the island untenable for many who have maintained cultural traditions, including language traditions. They fear that, in consequence, emigration – on islands where past population loss has been dramatic – will begin to increase again. These concerns have been made particularly acute in the context of the current economic crisis.

The connecting coastal communities project aims to be a means by which islanders can express the importance of their relationship with their home place and with the seas, a relationship which has helped to form their cultural identities.

The research, supported by funding from the ColmCille Partnership, is likely to begin in July this year and will be carried out by Iain MacKinnon from the Isle of Skye and Liam Campbell from Donegal.

They will be asking fishermen on the Donegal islands and on Barra to tell them what their work means to them not just as a source of income, but also as a way of living – and whether and how this way of living has encouraged a sense of responsibility for their environment, as well as supporting their cultural and linguistic traditions.

By exploring their distinctive but shared maritime cultural identities, the research will seek to express connections between the Scottish and Irish island communities in ways that may help encourage their resilience to maintain their traditions in the face of a changing world.

This project is funded by ColmCille Eirinn is Alba.

A fresh look at our land struggles

Iain MacKinnon reports

AROUND FIFTY people met in Glendale in north-west Skye in mid-April to learn about the key role played by Skye and Lewis crofters during the land struggles of the late 19th century.

Key to the event was the participation of people from some of the communities on Skye and Lewis where the crofters rebelled against their landlords. It was in large part as a result of these rebellions that the British Government set up the Napier Commission, whose report led to the crofting system of land tenure being enacted in 1886.

From Glendale emerged some of the most powerful anti-landlord sentiment and action during the 1880s and at the head of it were crofter John MacPherson and local minister Rev Donald MacCallum.

Professor James Hunter highlighted the ongoing relevance of the crofters' achievements during the late 19th century and Ian Blackford of the Glendale Trust described the background to the Glendale rising and how the actions there had helped galvanise anti-landlord feeling on Skye.

Journalist Norman MacDonald analysed the testimonies of the Glendale delegates to the Napier Commission, emphasising the role that oral tradition had played in the statements of the Glendale men, explaining that their testimonies were part of a communal memory going as far back as the time of Culloden.

He said: "These are the kind of people who were facing the Commissioners. It pervades the evidence they gave that they feel for the world and a feel for their own world. There comes out of the evidence a deep feeling of regret at that which has been lost. It is a theme that runs through the evidence of the Glendale people."

Seamas MacDonald from

Brogaig in Staffin told about the land struggle in other parts of Skye, including the Staffin area. Speaking in Gaidhlig, with English translations provided by Gilleasbuig Ferguson, Seumas' clear account was grounded in oral traditions of the rising, but also asked the question of what its leaders would make of crofting communities on Skye today, at a time when there are moves towards community ownership of land on neighbouring islands.

Also speaking in Gaidhlig, Lewiswoman Anne Macleod gave a compelling and at times dramatic account of past resistance in one of those areas presently striving for community ownership. In her description of the Creach Mhòr na Pairce (the Great Pairc Deer Raid) of the winter of 1886 she emphasised – as did all the other speakers – the sincere religious motivations of the raiders. Anne said that during the raid the crofters thanked God for the plentiful food about them and asked a blessing on the good work they were doing on His behalf.

Colin Shields then spoke about his great-great-grand uncle, Rev Donald MacCallum. MacCallum was Church of Scotland minister in Glendale in the 1880s and his unfailing support of the crofters' cause in the late 19th and early 20th century has made his name remembered with honour in the Highlands to the present day.

Throughout the afternoon tour of historical sites around Glendale, lively discussions continued about crofting past and present.

Thanks to this excellent, informative gathering organised by the Glendale Trust and the Islands Book Trust, they are discussions that are likely to continue in Glendale, and beyond, the weeks and months to come.

Angus MacNeil MP



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Stornoway

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Tel no 70 2272

E-Mail AngusMacNeilMP@parliament.uk

Enquiries welcome – office open Monday-Friday



Three of the speakers from the Glendale conference:
Seumas MacDonald, Anne MacLeod and Prof Norman MacDonald

CROFTING RESOURCES PROGRAMME

This project is funded by HIE, Scottish Government, Esmée Faribairn Foundation, EU

Local food initiative

Susan Walker describes a new initiative

WITH GLOBAL warming and rising concerns about food security, food shortages and fuel and food prices, we are constantly being told we have to find new, more sustainable ways of living.

Living sustainably is not a new concept. Up until the first decades of the 1900s, the crofting townships of Scotland understood and practiced how to live within their economic and ecological means.

In Camuscross and Duisdale in south Skye at the turn of the 20th century, almost everyone lived on a croft. Despite the crofts being extremely small, with an average of three acres of generally poor inbye land each and a souming of only two cows, most households produced much of their own food.

There was also a local shop, selling everything from food, to hardware, to clothing; and a range of craftsmen from cobblers to blacksmiths. It was possible to provide all your household needs without travelling further than a mile from your door.

In 2011, modern progress means that 48% of our population of 180 live on the 50 crofts but very few households produce any significant quantity of their own food. Since 1999 there has been no shop in the township and people have to drive up to a 20-mile round journey to the Co-op in Broadford to buy even a pint of milk. There is a growing recognition that the present situation for our crofting township is unsustainable, both ecologically and economically, as fuel and food prices continue to rise.

Camuscross and Duisdale Initiative (CDI), set up in 2008, is a community company working to develop projects which will benefit the community. In autumn 2010, community consultation commissioned by CDI indicated strong interest (72-96%) amongst all respondents in buying local food – with vegetables top of the list, followed by eggs, soft fruit and meat. The consultation also found that 73% of crofters interviewed want to

make their crofts more productive.

This April CDI was delighted to secure funding from the Climate Challenge Fund to work with our community members, including crofters, to increase food production again in the townships. We hope to show that even a very small croft with poor land can make a significant contribution to a family's and a community's food needs. The project has been further strengthened by the offer of the Scottish Crofting Federation's Crofting Resources team to work in partnership with CDI on the project.

A series of workshops, demonstrations and exchanges with other crofting townships is now being planned. The training sessions will include producing vegetables and fruit in gardens and polytunnels; tractor skills for small field cropping; and will also include butchering, cooking with local produce and harvesting and preserving field and garden crops. Crofters' markets will take place later in the growing season and there will be a series of talks and demonstrations over the autumn and winter.

The project also wants to rekindle the concept of communal and partnership working.

While many comment that the communal working of the past was developed out of sheer necessity, the demands of modern life, – with most crofters in full time employment – might result in communal working becoming a mechanism enabling busy crofters to return to cropping their crofts. The project also wants to encourage the use of unused croft land and already two crofters have offered their land for growing crops. The project intends to experiment with communal cropping on some of this land.

People who follow the movement to develop more sustainable lifestyles will have heard of the transition town movement. This started in Kinsale in Ireland and is an attempt to prepare communities for the transition which they believe we will all have to make to prepare for a future without oil. Camuscross and Duisdale Initiative is therefore keen to see if it can work towards becoming Scotland's first transition township!

We have a very long way to go, but being able to produce more of our community's food will be an important first step.



CROFTING RESOURCES PROGRAMME

Traditional Shetland food joins Ark of Taste

ON 24th JUNE at the Royal Highland show the SCF will celebrate the entry of a variety of traditional food from the Shetland Isles into Slow Food UK's Ark of Taste.

These include Shetland lamb, Shetland cabbage, Shetland cattle, reestit mutton and the wonderful Shetland black potato. To celebrate, we will be serving bowls of reestit mutton soup to give you a flavour of the excellent produce available from the Shetlands.

The Ark of Taste is a catalogue of traditional and regional foods that are danger of becoming extinct. The project is run by Slow Food UK, part of a global, grassroots movement with thousands of members around the world that links the pleasure of food with a commitment to community and the environment.

By identifying and celebrating foods that are sustainably produced, unique in taste, part of a distinct ecological region and which are in danger of extinction due to current mass food production, the Ark of Taste promotes a greater understanding of these vulnerable gastronomic traditions and supports and protects the overall biodiversity of our food system.

Working with farmers, producers and their communities our local groups run educational events, food tastings and farm visits; and our network of slow chefs up and down the country feature ark products on their menus.

If we lose these foodstuffs, we lose choice, flavour and the varied landscape and wildlife associated with traditional food and farming.

Find out more at www.slowfoodark.com.

*Ed Crowley,
Ark of Taste Coordinator, Slow Food*



Shetland kye



Shetland sheep

Horticulture in Shetland

THERE HAS BEEN a dramatic decline of about 90% between 1971 and 2008 in the area of crops being grown in Shetland.

Consumers have started to value local produce. Thanks to regular farmers' markets and the efforts of some small local food shops, we can now source a good range of locally-grown produce.

But there is still an unmet demand, and this prompted SCF's fieldworker Sue White to look into setting up a horticultural producers group in Shetland.

Training was one of the needs identified and in March Audrey Litterick ran a two day course for professional and budding horticulturists. Where to start, what to grow, site and soil assessment, propagation, protected cropping and crop rotation were covered, plus pests and diseases and crop nutrition. Following the classroom lecture on the components and properties of good soil, practical tests demonstrated structure, texture, organic matter, drainage properties and likely fertility.

We learned the definition of pests – those animals which attack your crops; diseases – illness caused by pathogens that attack them; and disorders – illness in plants not caused by either of the above, but might be due to lack of light, too much or too little water, too high, low or variable temperatures. Nutrient cycling and maintaining soil fertility were explained and what constitutes a well-structured fertile soil that is full of life.

The soil has to have a balance of nutrients and the ability for water and air to move freely, drainage of excess water and yet good water-holding capability. Poor soil structure can be caused by over-cultivation, continuous cropping, heavy machinery, working in wet conditions, over-grazing, livestock and formation of natural pans. Climate and topography also influence production. Although Shetland does not experience the rainfall of say, the north west Highlands, it does suffer from a lack of sunshine and particularly a short growing season; possibly less than a third of that of the south of England!

Sustainable horticulture emphasises prevention rather than cure, trying to avoid pesticides where possible and limited use or, better still, avoidance of bagged fertilisers. Balancing soil nutrients is essential and can mean the difference between poor and good cropping. Audrey recommended soil tests, even on small plots, and particularly a check on pH. Soil acidity/alkalinity levels are very important as the pH affects plant growth indirectly through influence on nutrient availability and take-up through the presence of toxic ions. Each crop has an optimum soil pH and a good average to aim for would be about 6.5.

The right order of crop rotation becomes particularly important here. If, for instance, club root is a problem with brassicas, a pH level of 7 might be advised, but anything greater than 5.5 can cause scab on a potato crop. So be careful not to over-lime, as too alkaline a soil can inhibit take-up of other elements – both macronutrients (nitrogen, phosphorous, potassium sulphur and magnesium) and micronutrients that include iron, manganese, boron, zinc etc.

Crops demand different amounts of N (nitrogen), P (phosphorous) and K (potassium). Root crops tend to need more P and K; grass and cereals more N; green vegetables N and P; brassicas N and K; legumes no N, plenty P and K; alliums N, P and K. These can be supplied by use of synthetic or other bagged fertilisers, or by organic materials including all bulky fertilisers such as livestock manures or slurries, seaweed, compost and green manures.

Bulky fertilisers should be able to supply most, if not all, of crop nutrient requirements, but the timing of these applications in the rotation should be targeted towards crops that are likely to benefit most from the nutrients and improved soil conditions developed.

We cannot hope to describe Audrey's course in full, so if you get a chance to experience it first hand, do so!

*Pete Glanville, Shetland Organics CIC
Sue White, CRP*



Varied land use on crofts in the south end of Shetland, including protected cropping

CROFTING RESOURCES PROGRAMME

Polycrubs

Colin Dickie, manager of nortenergy, reports on a new initiative in Shetland

NORTENERGY grew out of Powerdown, a Scottish Government initiative taken up by the Northmavine Community Development Company (NCDC).

To try to make NCDC sustainable, a new wholly-owned subsidiary called nortenergy (yes, no capitals) has been set up. The aim is to give a full service to any and all customers considering installing any kind of renewables solutions.

One of the surprise early successes have been our polycrubs. These started out as a Powerdown design for a community polytunnels venture which has seen twelve community-run polytunnels erected across the parish of Northmavine.

As demand grew from as far away as Mull, they acquired the name 'polycrubs' (from the Shetland term 'crub' meaning enclosed growing space) since they are quite different to conventional polytunnels.

Polycrubs are designed to withstand all that the Shetland weather can throw at them and are built from recycled plastic pipes and twin-walled polycarbonate sheets. Patents are now being sought.

Powerdown started building polycrubs last year as part of a local food project. However due to popular demand we are now making these available in kit form to anyone who wants them, from the trading subsidiary nortenergy ltd.

The most popular size is 4.3m wide by 10.6m long although the length can be extended/shortened to customers' requirements. There is also a 3m-wide version but only one of these has been built so far and we would like to monitor its performance for a while before offering it widely.

We've just delivered a few to the Isle of Mull, and if they can stand Shetland's rigours they are bound to do well there. We are confident of a very long life span.

This was a critical element of the original design, as it is important that the Northmavine polycrubs carry on without requiring maintenance, now Powerdown has been wound up at the end of government funding.

The nortenergy website will soon be live and will include full information. In the meantime, anybody interested in acquiring one should contact Colin Dickie on 01806 544 222 or colin@nortenergy.co.uk.



Rare Breeds Survival Trust

Development manager Claire Bowry describes the work of the trust

THE RARE Breeds Survival Trust (RBST) is a registered charity dedicated to the conservation of the UK's rare breeds of native farm livestock, which include breeds such as Shetland cattle (fewer than 750 breeding females) and North Ronaldsay sheep (fewer than 500 breeding females).

Between 1900 and 1973, when RBST was formed, 26 native breeds of farm animals – and the genetic resources they represented – were lost forever; but since the formation of RBST, no native breed of livestock has become extinct.

Rare breeds represent a living part of our precious agricultural heritage and provide vital genetic diversity within the UK's farm livestock, which could be important in a major disease outbreak or in meeting the farming needs of the future. Wool from rare breed sheep is valued by spinners for its colour and fine quality and breeders may also sell sheepskins. The produce from native breeds also offers consumers an important choice in the range of food they eat.

Natural management of the environment has created a new market for rare breeds, grazing environmentally sensitive areas such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest and nature reserves. Natural pastures need grazing to prevent the vigorous grasses swamping other plants and herbs and many rare breeds do this extremely well. Not only do they graze on the right sort of plants, but often they are lighter than mainstream breeds and do less damage to the ground in poor weather. Native breeds are more likely to

tackle poorer-quality forage plants, helping to reduce invasive scrub and coarser grasses and sedges to encourage wild flower growth.

RBST works closely with breed societies to monitor breed populations and each year we publish the RBST watchlist of breeds at risk, which may be found at www.rbst.org.uk. RBST maintains a national gene bank of semen samples to help safeguard the future of these rare native breeds.

Our conservation team analyses pedigrees to develop breeding conservation programmes and RBST provides breed support grants, either for promotion of a breed, for the support of breed registrations or for technical breed research.

We have two field officers who travel the country offering advice and support to keepers of rare breed livestock. Ruth Dalton is field officer for Scotland and she may be contacted on 07880 584551 or email ruth@rbst.org.uk. You can see rare breeds at RBST's two approved conservation farm parks in Scotland: Palacerigg country park near Cumbernauld and Doonies farm near Aberdeen. RBST has two active volunteer support groups in Scotland and we are always looking for new volunteers to help us.

Contact Ian Bell (Perthshire, Angus and Fife), simpsonbell@btconnect.com; or Ernie Strachan (North East Scotland), strachern@gmail.com. If you would like to find out more about our work and how you can support us visit www.rbst.org.uk or call 02476 696551.



CROFTING RESOURCES PROGRAMME

Taking Stock

IN THE LAST issue we reported on SCF's Taking Stock study of crofters' stock clubs.

Our fieldworker Yvonne Richardson is analysing the results and writing the final report on the study. Yvonne will be contacting respondents by phone with some follow-up questions.

We would like to thank all those who responded to the survey and provided such valuable information. It is already clear that stock clubs are a success story that has stood the test of time and could form a model for productive use of our hill and moor grazings in the future.

We are organising a seminar on Taking Stock to take place on Wednesday 3rd August (Wednesday of the Black Isle Show) at Dingwall – further details to be announced. If you wish to attend, please contact donald@crofting.org or phone SCF head office.

Concerns over abattoir downturn

THE ABATTOIR SITUATION in the Highlands has taken a turn for the worse.

This is a result of the curtailment of the excellent delivery service that was operated by John M Munro Ltd, at Dingwall abattoir.

Farmers and crofters over a huge area of the northwest mainland and the Isle of Skye have become increasingly dependent on Munro's as local abattoir facilities have gradually shut down. From the north end of Skye it takes three and a half hours to make the journey to Dingwall with a stock box in tow. A long stretch of that journey is over very poor roads, adding to the stress on the animals.

At least up to now a cheerful and helpful Munro's driver would deliver the chilled meat back to the customer, whether butchered or in whole carcass form, but no longer. Meat will now only be delivered to centres such as Kyle or Portree. Anyone beyond such places will have to make their own arrangements for the last stretch, which will involve breaking the all-important 'cold chain', essential for food safety, unless they happen to have their own chilled vehicle.

A member in Skye recently described the procedure he had to go through to get an over-thirty-month animal slaughtered at the Lochmaddy abattoir. He chose to go to Lochmaddy because they have the flexibility of a small unit to hang the carcass according to the customer's requirements – essential for an OTM, native-breed animal.

The abattoir provided an excellent service, but the cost and uncertainty around a ferry crossing in winter and arranging

chilled transport of the meat back to Skye added considerably to the stress of the experience. The costs involved accounted for at least half the value of the animal.

Crofters in Lewis and Harris will be faced with similar problems in future if they need to have a beast slaughtered outwith the opening season of the council-run Stornoway abattoir, which this year is to be cut back further, not opening until into September. The Comhairle blames increasing costs and reduced throughput, which is a familiar scenario.

The time seems to be right for a fresh look at the whole abattoir question, as the status quo is no longer an option. We need to look at facilities of appropriate scale that can easily be opened up and closed down in accordance with demand. Scotland has gone, by default, for a network of industrial scale abattoirs in major centres.

It is a model that simply does not work for the Highlands and Islands which has half of the country's landmass and a very poor transport network. One of these large plants, at Dornoch, has recently been taken over and closed down.

We need to look as well at community ownership and appropriate business structures; and to see if we can learn from recent developments in Shetland, where a new, co-operatively run abattoir is taking shape; and from other EU countries that have retained local slaughterhouses.

At the time of writing a group of concerned individuals is coming together with new proposals for the Skye and Lochalsh area. We will report on any progress in the next issue.

Seann innealan agus cosgais innealan ùra

UILL, THÀINIG an t-earrach mun robh sinn buileach deas air a shon!

Gu h-obann am meadhan a' Ghiblein dh'fhàs an t-side blàth, agus thòisich am fear air fàs.

Thàinig a' chuthag agus na gobhlain ghaoithe agus sguir sinn biadhach nam beathaichean cho tràth 's a sguir sinn riamh. Cha b'fhada an uair sin gus an robh am buntàta air a chur, agus fear agus siol eòrna cuideachd.

Chan e gu bheil mòran dhiubh sin againn, chan eil sinn ach a' treabadh iomaire beag agus a' cur siol agus an ath bhliadhna cur buntàta 's a' bhliadhna an dèidh sin siol coirce a rithist le fras feòir gus an tèid e air ais gu fear. 'S e iomairean beaga tha mi a-mach air an seo, mòr gu leòr gus buntàta a chumail air ar truinnsearan tron gheamhradh, ach beag gu leòr gus nach bi tuilleadh 's a chòir obrach ann a bhith gan cumail glan.

Tha inneal againn a-nis airson buntàta a thogail agus tha sin a' dèanamh diofar mòr, togaidh sinn am buntàta ann an aon fheasgar, seach lathaichean de dh'obair leis a' ghràp. Ach tha innealan airson an tractair an dà chuid nan cuideachadh agus nan crois. Mura bheil thu dol a chosg fortan ann a bhith ceannach innealan ùra, tha thu ag obair le seann innealan a bhitheas buailteach briseadh.

Cha bhi iad uair sam bith a' briseadh nuair

a tha iad nan tàmh sa gheamhradh, 's ann nuair a tha thu gan cur am feum a tha iad a' briseadh! Bidh an t-inneal-geàraidh a' briseadh nuair a tha thu a' gearradh fear, bidh an t-inneal-tionndaidh a' briseadh nuair a tha thu a' tionndadh fear agus mar sin air adhart. Agus sin gun luaidh air an tractor fhèin! 'S e MF 35x a th' agam agus mar sin chan eil e buileach na "chlasaig" ach tha luach ann a thaobh aois – dà fhichead bliadhna a-nis. Tha e furasta gu leòr a bhith cosg nan ceudan de notaichean gach bliadhna ann a bhith ga chumail a' dol – ach tha e na thlachd a bhith ag obair leis nuair a tha e a' dol.

Dè freagairt a th' ann ma-tà? Contractor a chleachdadh? Iasad fhaighinn bhon bhanca agus a' ceannachd uidheaman ùra? No 's dòcha a bhith co-obrachadh le nàbaidh, mar a tha mi fhìn a' dèanamh le cuid de na h-innealan. Tha sin a' gearradh na cosgaisean airson gach duine. Agus ma ghabhas e obrachadh, b' fhiach e buidheann a chur air dòigh airson innealan math a cheannach, rud a chuala mi, nuair a bha mi thall an uiridh, a tha cumanta ann an Nirribhidh.

Bhiodh e math sgeime taic-airgid a bhith ann airson a leithid mar a bha bhon t-seann Bhòrd Leasachaidh aig aon àm.

Gabhan Mac a' Phearsain



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CROFTING CONNECTIONS

The hills are alive

Crofting Connections in Shetland

A look at the sheilings of Dalwhinnie 250 years ago

THIS WAS the title of a talk given recently at Dalwhinnie primary school as part of the school's involvement in the Crofting Connections project.

David Taylor, former head of history at Kingussie high school, has been studying the Dalwhinnie area 250 years ago as part of his PhD research and he told the Dalwhinnie community about his findings.

The talk explored the importance of the sheiling system to the local economy and included viewings of some very old and interesting estate maps. Rather than the ten to twenty people expected at the talk, we were amazed to have more than 60 attend and enjoyed a very informative and interesting evening.

One of the most interesting points to arise from Mr Taylor's research has been the sheer numbers of livestock that were on the ground at the time and this certainly surprised many of the people who attended. He also raised several new points on how the sheiling system actually worked which should lead to further discussion in the future.

As the audience came from all walks of life, a very lively question and answer session followed the talk, with some of the older farmers and estate workers adding to what had already been said.

Head teacher Miss Filshie thanked David for coming and speaking to us and adding to our knowledge of our local area. The evening was such a success that it is hoped to have another evening in the future.

*Moir Webster
Teacher, Dalwhinnie primary school*

Crofting Connections is funded by HIE, Scottish Government, EU, Lottery, Leader, Craigish Trust, SNH.

Pam Rodway, project coordinator, on achievements in Shetland

MY VISIT to Shetland in February was a refreshing reminder of how enthusiastically pupils, teachers and crofters have engaged with the project.

The first four schools, Baltasound junior high, Whalsay junior high, Burravoe primary and Dunrossness primary are now in their second year of the project, while two new schools – Urafirth primary and Cullivoe primary – joined in August 2010. The schools show that Crofting Connections can provide a framework for the delivery of Curriculum for Excellence in very small primaries as well as larger ones and in all classes from nursery to S4 in the junior high schools.

Highlights include watching five Urafirth pupils taking turns to grind oat groats in a little hand mill, working together to mix, shape and bake oatcakes and then leaving the classroom clean and tidy for the next day – all in the space of one lesson.

A second group was making a model of the hills, fields, beaches and voes of the local crofting landscape in papier maché, ready to place their models of croft houses into the landscape just as their parents and grandparents have placed their real houses in this stunning part of Shetland.

A third group was involved in desk research on crofting, using books and computers. Here was Curriculum for Excellence in practice as a whole school worked in a focussed way across a range of subjects and skills, both traditional and contemporary, supported by staff with deep connections in the local crofting community.

Burravoe primary, surrounded by crofts on three sides and very much the centre of the community, is a wonderful example of the balance between the practical skills passed on by local crofters and the impressive IT skills of the young.

Children, who now use just the tips of fingers and thumbs to send messages and click on a mouse to expand their virtual horizons, are able to balance this narrowing of focus on keyboard and screen with the rhythms and more expansive movements involved in geology, gardening, spinning, baking and exquisite felt-making with help from their very real and supportive community.

Cullivoe school pupils are



learning from local crofters how to cut peats and how to make kishies and skeklers' hats from Shetland aet straw. Balancing traditional and contemporary skills is the essence of Crofting Connections – the indoor and outdoor skills of traditional croft work through intergenerational exchanges whose relevance goes beyond just studying the past.

Teachers, even in very rural schools in the Highlands and Islands, are concerned that some children do not have enough exercise and fresh air. I was at a Royal Society meeting in Edinburgh last week, where academics were discussing the challenge of food security and global food production.

The global food industry allows us to outsource the drudgery of growing food to other less affluent societies or to use poorly paid immigrant labour in caravan camps in the cold muddy fields in arable areas of the UK to pick Brussels sprouts or root vegetables in the winter.

How will we re-dignify the manual labour required to grow local food in crofting areas where the large machinery of industrial arable farming is totally inappropriate and anyway we may have to face the oil running out? Or should we just keep relying on the ferry to stock the shop shelves?

Whalsay and Baltasound pupils

from nursery to S4 are engaged in gardening, animal husbandry, in discovering where food comes from and how much can be grown locally. The younger classes are great gardeners, producing salads and peas and strawberries for school dining rooms. Older pupils are able to engage with the more complex issues around food production which will help to shape the future of crofting.

In Dunrossness primary children are making global connections with a school garden project in Kenya, where rural communities face challenges of weather, climate change and population decline as young people move to the cities – similar problems, but with more stark consequences in Africa.

Outside in the grounds of all the schools are the school gardens, some shared with the local community, waiting for the spring planting of strawberries, aubergines and tomatoes in the poly-tunnels – which reflect the contemporary diet – and of tatties, roots and cereals of the traditional crofters' diet of their parents' and grandparents' generations.

And in the spaces between the cultivated and play areas of the grounds, children will be making compost and sowing wildflowers to attract insects to the gardens – a ray of hope for this summer and for many summers to come, a new generation working for the benefit of our crofting communities.





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FARMERS' SEEDS

The revolution of tradition: farmers' and crofters' seeds

WHAT WE now call farmers' seeds is a natural resource: the product of long-held, careful agricultural practices.

The sustainable management of this natural resource by saving and exchanging seeds, indigenous knowledge plus the short supply chains involved ensure its social and economic efficiency. Farmers' seeds are sustainable, encouraging participatory practices regulated by cultural and economic systems.

Over the last few decades we have moved from a dynamic selection system – involving the conservation and renewal of seeds in our fields – to industrial laboratory-based plant selection, producing homogeneous unchanging varieties. The word variety is a misnomer in this context as the widespread adoption of relatively few crop types has led to the loss of an estimated 75% of European food product diversity since 1900.

In America the picture is much worse with 93% of food product diversity being lost in the same period. Crops with a very narrow genetic base succumb more easily to pests and diseases and require greater use of chemicals to combat them.

Sustainable agricultural systems depend on a diversity of species to withstand attacks from existing and future diseases, pests, climate and other environmental changes. It is imperative that this dramatic loss of irreplaceable genetic resources is arrested.

Varieties produced by the seed industry today require each field to replicate the cultivation conditions created in the selection laboratory.

This involves a high input of fertilisers and chemical pesticides and often the need to irrigate the crops with large amounts of water, particularly in drier climates where water may already be in relatively scarce supply.

Industrial seeds are appropriated by seed producers via exclusive industrial or intellectual property rights.

In contrast, farmers' seeds are naturally reproducible from harvest onwards and are the product of population varieties which were not bred in a laboratory using industrial techniques.

Farmers' and in our case crofters' seed varieties have been produced over many years through multiple cycles of adaptation to the land, to agrarian practices and to the climate, by seeking to maintain the diversity of their cultivated varieties. This system employs exchange and collective management to avoid and limit genetic erosion, to increase diversity and maintain the adaptability of the seed to different conditions.

Current research into plant improvement takes place almost exclusively in laboratories, where scientists paid by agri-industry corporations manipulate genes and transform varieties in order to file for plant breeders' rights or a patent allowing the industrial breeders to progressively appropriate every kind of seed. The majority of these seeds are not reproducible from saved seed.

It is now time for researchers to return to the fields, to recognise the expertise of farmers and crofters in selecting and renewing locally adapted varieties, traditionally grown and selected to grow in our demanding environment, truly capable of adaptation to climate change and suitable for open pollination.

The SCF's participation in the *European Farmer's Seeds Project – Best Practices in Sustainable Agriculture and Food Sovereignty: development of an inclusive approach in the fight against poverty* – aims to raise awareness of these issues by promoting small-scale agricultural and agro-ecological models.

More information on the project can be found on the Projects and Partners page of the SCF website www.crofting.org.

This project is funded by EU.

The poor had no lawyers – and still don't

Carol Anne Stewart reports on a recent visit to Hungary

MY TRIP to the Let's Liberate Diversity conference in Szeged involved, as you can imagine, a considerable amount of travelling.

I left Kyle on a wet and windy Tuesday evening and arrived in a snow-covered Szeged on Wednesday evening. To while away the hours spent on planes and trains I took Andy Wightman's latest book *The Poor Had No Lawyers*. I was struck by the similarity between the issues surrounding farmers' rights to use farm-saved seed and some of the issues Wightman raised in the book.

The legal system of land registration, which disenfranchised the poor and allowed the rich and powerful to appropriate what they wanted, is in effect what is now happening with the current system of seed registration.

The asymmetry in the current legislation gives advantage to a few seed corporations and fails to recognise the rights of the many farmers and crofters who conserve agricultural biodiversity and indigenous knowledge on their farms and crofts.

In the EU seeds can only be legally marketed (this includes selling, sharing or even giving away for free to your neighbours) if they fulfil strict criteria and are entered onto the member states' national list and then the EC common catalogue of agricultural plant varieties.

This has resulted in thousands of local varieties being lost as any variety that did not pass its distinct-uniform-stable (DUS) test could not be registered. To comply a variety must be distinct from any other variety; the plants in a particular variety must be similar to one another (uniform); and a variety is deemed to be stable when its relevant characteristics remain unchanged over two years.

The DUS testing required to register a variety is costly and prohibitive unless you are a large corporation and wish to sell seed in large quantities. In this way the large corporations have appropriated the ownership not only of the seeds that they have

genetically modified but also the ownership of existing no-GM varieties. If a variety is not in the catalogue, then it is technically illegal for such non-varieties to be marketed. This has, in effect, made many of our traditional crops and seeds illegitimate.

Under the pretext of using humanity's common heritage, or through negotiations with sovereign states, multinationals award themselves free and unconditional access to all the seeds selected and conserved by farmers and then privatise them through industrial property rights which means that certain parties profit more than others in the use of common resources.

We believe that plants and plant varieties are not inventions over which anyone can claim intellectual property rights. The management of locally-adapted crofters' seeds is carried out first and foremost at a local level. Locally defined collective rights of usage for crofting communities must take precedent over globally extensive private industrial property rights.

These locally defined rights enable communities to put a stop to the private monopolisation of resources defined as a common good (biopiracy), to control the use made of these resources, to outmanoeuvre the unfair competition of major food producers and to protect local seeds from genetic contamination from exogenous and patented sources.

The Scottish Government must recognise the past, present and future contributions of crofters to the conservation and renewal of cultivated biodiversity in Scotland as enshrined in international biodiversity legislation. We require the Scottish Government to recognise that crofters have the rights to conserve, use, exchange and sell croft-saved seed, without requirement to standardise seed for certification, or to homogenise or stabilise varieties for catalogue registration.

SCF is working in conjunction with a network of European organisations to raise awareness of these issues and defend our members' right to have control over their own seeds and to encourage the development and conservation of biodiversity.

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ON THE CROFT

Muirburn

Eilidh IM Ross, a solicitor with Inksters, outlines the legal position

THE MUIRBURN CODE is contained in the Hill Farming Act of 1946.

The 1946 Act has recently been amended by the Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2011.

Previously, the period during which one could burn heather was 1st October through to 15th April. This could be extended until 30th April or 15th May for areas above 450 metres, if the landowner consented, but there is no distinction now for areas above 450 metres. The rest of the muirburn regulations remain the same.

The muirburn code includes a prohibition on burning at night and leaving fires unattended – and those managing the burning have a responsibility to control it

and prevent fire spreading to neighbouring properties. If the land is affected by a designation such as a Site of Special Scientific Interest, the prior approval of SNH must be sought. Areas of woodland, scheduled ancient monuments, nesting areas, or areas of blanket bog or exposed peat should also be protected from damage.

The purpose of burning heather is to remove old, dead heather in order to promote new growth and also to preserve wildlife habitats. Heather which is not managed by burning presents an increased risk of hill fires; a problem which dominated local headlines during the month of April.

These uncontrolled hill fires this year happened unusually early due to the prolonged dry weather. Organisations such as the John Muir Trust and other environmental bodies have indicated a likelihood of

widespread environmental damage, particularly to ground nesting birds.

For more information on muirburn and the muirburn code, see the following links:-

- Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2011 – <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2011/6/section/34/enacted>
- The Hill Farming Act 1946 - <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Geo6/9-10/73>
- The Muirburn Code (NB this has not been updated since the 2011 Act in relation to the dates, but other aspects remain unchanged) - <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2008/04/08154231/2>

Newsflash...

Readers may like to know that Eilidh recently joined the firm of Inksters and will continue to advise clients on matters of crofting law. Inksters was founded in 1999 by Brian Inkster (a Shetlander) and currently has its base in Glasgow. The firm will now also have a presence in the Highlands and Islands as Eilidh will be based in Inverness, making regular visits to various crofting areas.

Inksters' use of the very latest technology will ensure that Eilidh can spend a much higher percentage of her time in the crofting areas, providing advice on your crofting legal issues regardless of geography.

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Red diesel – a confusing picture

WHEN A MEMBER contacted us recently with various concerns regarding the supply, storage and use of rebated heavy oil fuels (red diesel) we were unaware of the confusing picture that has developed in recent years, placing yet more unsustainable burdens on small agricultural producers.

This article attempts to set out the problems and some possible solutions.

The easiest question to answer is "What can red diesel be used for?" Tractors and light agricultural vehicles such as quads can use red diesel on the public road provided they are employed for purposes of agriculture, horticulture or forestry. Other agricultural machinery may also use red diesel. Suppliers of red diesel may require the purchaser to complete a form stating their name and address and what the fuel is to be used for.

Full details can be found at <http://customs.hmrc.gov.uk>.

EC Directive 2005/33/EC requires that, with effect from the start of this year, non-road vehicles and plant, including agricultural tractors, can only be fuelled with low-sulphur diesel. This has caused difficulty for some members who have been buying their tractor fuel from marine fuel suppliers.

Marine diesel is still high-sulphur and can only be purchased by signing a declaration that it is to be used in a seagoing vessel.

SCF has carried out a survey of members to determine the extent of this problem and responses are still coming in at the time of writing, but it is already clear that there are significant problems both with supply and storage. It may be that in some remote areas and small islands marine diesel is the only fuel available. If this is the case we will need to press the Scottish Government for a solution.

A further complication is that certain modern diesel engines will only run on low-sulphur fuel. Even if you have an assured supply of the new fuel, that is not the end of the matter. There are practical issues and legislative requirements regarding storage. The low-sulphur fuel is more difficult to store due to its bio-diesel content, as any water contamination causes a bacterial sludge; and it waxes more readily at low temperatures. Both of these conditions can cause blocked filters. The water contamination issue can be resolved by either siting tanks under cover or by fitting a water drain tap at the lowest point of the tank.

Since 1st April 2010 it has been a legal requirement that any fuel tank with a storage capacity of 200 litres or more must have a secondary containment (a bund or drip-tray)

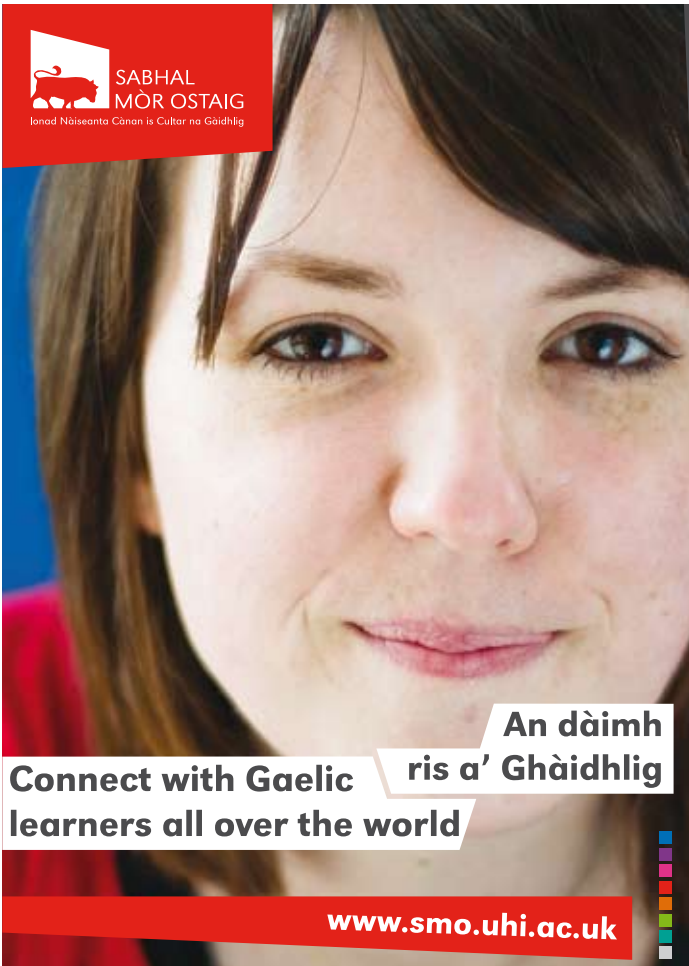
to ensure that any leaking or spilt oil cannot enter the water environment. The secondary containment must be of sufficient capacity to hold at least 110% of the maximum contents of the tank. Provision of new fuel storage tanks is an allowable operation for CCAGS funding.

One way of avoiding some of this expense would be to store less than 200 litres at a time. In this case the regulations state only that the container must be of sufficient strength and structural integrity to ensure that it is unlikely to burst or leak in its ordinary use. Unfortunately the standard oil drum size is 205 litres, but there are ready-made containment vessels on the market to fit a standard drum.

Storage of fuel is a cross-compliance issue that will be checked by government officials in any inspection.



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ON THE CROFT

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For information on how to get started visit the guidance updates section at www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/farmingrural/SRDP/RuralPriorities.

Once you commit your proposal, you can no longer upload documents online. Instead, you should send any further documents to your case officer who will upload them for you. Similarly, if you don't have access to a scanner, your case officer can upload documents on your behalf.

Bracken control

No opinion decision by EU committee

THE PROPOSAL to ban asulam (Asulox) – one of the most cost-effective and selective chemicals available for bracken control – was discussed in March and again in May by the EU's standing committee on the food chain and animal health.

The EU wish to ban asulam as there were concerns over its safety when used on spinach and other food crops.

However an outright ban would have the effect of removing one of the key chemical controls of bracken. The SCF lobbied both the Scottish and UK Government to ensure that any ban would apply to food crops only.

The vote for the non-inclusion of asulam, the active substance of Asulox, resulted in "No opinion" from a blocking minority of eight member states, including the UK. In effect this

means that at the moment Asulox may still be used for bracken control. The dossier on asulam will be referred to the appeal committee, a new procedure that has yet to be tried and tested. At the moment we have no timing for when this appeal will be considered.

Crofters will recognise the seriousness of this situation. Climate change combined with the loss of stock from the hills is leading to a bracken stranglehold in some areas which undoubtedly has been one factor in this spring's wildfires in the north-west. If asulam is being misused on food crops in certain countries, then surely it is that misuse that must be dealt with rather than leave us defenceless against a rapidly advancing pest species.

We must not have a repetition of the sheep EID fiasco, when some EU member states imposed an impractical solution to a non-existent problem from a position of wilful ignorance.

Good food for everyone forever

A people's takeover of the world's food supply by Colin Tudge

EVERYONE WHO is ever likely to be born on to this planet could be fed to the highest standards of nutrition and gastronomy – and this could be done without cruelty, or destroying our fellow creatures.

By 2050 we will need to feed 9.5 billion people – which is as big as the world population is ever likely to get. To achieve this we need only to design farming expressly for the purpose – what in this book called enlightened agriculture.

But present-day governments, the corporates and banks who determine policy and the scientists and economists who advise them have no such strategy. Instead they are committed to a neoliberal economy intended simply to maximize wealth. To achieve this they encourage industrial farming – which is immensely damaging. It follows that if we, people at large, truly take our future seriously, then we need to take matters into our own hands.

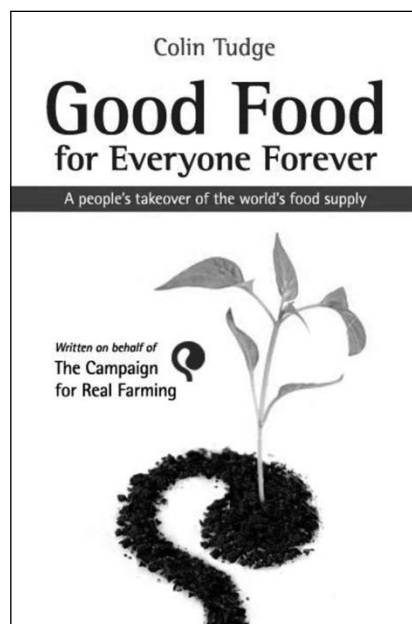
Good Food for Everyone Forever describes what's needed and why. Picking up from his earlier book, *Feeding People is Easy*, the author introduces the new campaign for real farming, intended to bring about nothing less than a people's takeover of the world's food supply; and in particular the college for enlightened agriculture – already existing in virtual form as a website, but planned to evolve by degrees into a bricks-and-mortar establishment.

In short: this book is intended not simply to inform and to stimulate but to invite everyone, from day one, to get involved. Our future is

in our own hands. The powers-that-be have got it horribly wrong and we cannot afford to leave our affairs and our children's lives in their hands.

Details of the campaign for real farming and the college for enlightened agriculture can be found on www.campaignforrealfarming.org.

Good Food For Everyone Forever
by Colin Tudge
ISBN: 9788895604138 £9.99
www.paripublishing.com



Dates for your diary

KEEP YOUR crofting calendar up to date with the guide below, put together in partnership with Scotland's Environmental and Rural Services (SEARS).

These are some of the key dates and deadlines for application forms, licenses etc. The list is not exhaustive and some dates may change.

- 10 June – Last day for the Scottish Government Rural Payments and Inspections Directorate to receive:
- Single Application Form (SAF) 2011*. SAFs received on or after 11 June 2011 will not be accepted.
- Rural Development Contracts – Rural Priorities claims (RP1). Claims received on or after 11 June 2011 will not be accepted.
- 10 June – Last day to nominate currency (euros or pounds sterling) for Single Farm Payment Scheme and Scottish Beef Calf Scheme payments.
- 15 June – Return date for holdings which were sent a June Agricultural Census Form.
- 15 July – Last day to commit applications for the September 2011 Rural Priorities funding round (Axis 2 only).

*The last day for return of the SAF without penalty was 16 May 2011.

For more information on SEARS visit <http://www.sears.scotland.gov.uk>



Interested in generating your own electricity?

With the introduction of the UK Government's Feed-in-Tariffs (FiTs) for small scale low carbon electricity generation in April 2010, there has never been a better time to invest in renewable energy. Payback could be within 4 years subject to wind speed.

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Skills for the 21st century training programme

Training manager Su Cooper reports

SKILLS COURSES are up and running and began with a course in fleece felting at the end of April.

This was well received by participants, who all ended the day with a finished product such as a rug or bag. The course showed just how simple it can be to add value to a fleece, a viable option for anyone with the time and inclination to create an unusual and unique product.

Courses in small-scale horticulture and safe use of pesticides also took place during May to get the programme off to a good start.

Anyone with an interest in crofting, smallholding and other rural skills is welcome to attend any of the training sessions that are being arranged, whether they are currently working a croft or not. Upcoming courses for the summer are intended to include:

- sheep shearing in Shetland
- polytunnels in the Western Isles
- vet skills in Inverness-shire
- dry stone walling in Skye
- livestock husbandry in Caithness and Sutherland
- and around 30 others.

Some of the above topics will be advertised in more than one area and courses are being arranged on an almost weekly basis, responding to demand from across the Highlands and Islands. The training page

of the website will be regularly updated with details of these training sessions. If you would like to attend any of the courses advertised on the website please get in touch.

A leaflet with further information about the training is included with this edition of *The Crofter* – please feel free to pass on to anyone else you think may be interested.

Further training requests are welcomed, as the programme will be running until at least May 2012. Contact Su Cooper for information training@crofting.org, 01463 796836.

Entry level induction courses

In addition to the normal winter running of the entry level crofting induction course, an autumn series will also be arranged this year, thanks to funding from the Scottish Government and HIE for the whole training programme. It is intended to run four or five courses from September to December. The exact locations depend on the demand for the course so please get in touch if you would be interested in participating.

Also, local course directors will be needed for each course – this role involves booking an appropriate venue for the course, arranging speakers for each evening in accordance with the course synopsis and handling publicity to attract participants to attend.

For further information on the role and payment rates please get in touch with Su Cooper training@crofting.org.

Young crofters revolution!

AS WE WENT to print the SCF's young crofters group were waiting on confirmation on a grant for £5000 from the Co-operative.

The Co-op's initiative has already helped hundreds of thousands of people to bring their ideas to life and they want to empower even more revolutionaries to get involved; to keep communities thriving, support co-operatives, protect the environment and respect animal welfare.

They asked applicants what our revolution aimed to achieve and this is what we told them.

This year is the 125th anniversary of a successful revolution when the crofters of the Highlands and Islands rose up against the tyrannical oppression of their landlords to win the right to work the land without the threat of eviction.

But how do we keep the revolutionary spirit alive? The movement of young crofters is the answer. Our revolution is to kindle the spirit of crofting in the heart of the new generation.

We can achieve this by inspiring young people in the crofting counties to get actively involved in their communities. Young people of these areas have already expressed an interest in the movement.

The next step is to get a greater understanding of hopes and aspirations of young crofters. By going out to meet crofters we can get a better appreciation of these aspirations and formulate our action plan.

The findings in the action plan will be presented, discussed and if necessary, revised by young crofters ourselves during the SCF's annual gathering in October.

As well as developing the action plan, the gathering will also give young crofters the chance to speak with crofting elders about their knowledge and experiences. People at the gathering will then go back to their communities and spread the word that young crofters are active.

We will have held our first young crofters meeting by the time *The Crofter* is printed – but don't worry, there will be plenty more activities happening as the group gains momentum.

To keep up to date with the young crofters get in touch with Karen on 01599 530005 or email Karen@crofting.org.



Trainees rolling the wool fibres together to create felt



© Lynne Kennedy

MEMBERS' PAGE

Membership matters

Update on membership groups

Everyone should now have been informed that individual membership has increased to £47.00. However, if you have not already signed up to direct debit but do so now, you will receive a discount of 20% taking your next year's payment to £37.60.

Joint membership is also available; it is open to households which would like to have a double membership. It costs £70.50, which is a saving of £22.50 on two individual memberships. If you would like to make any changes to your subscription please contact Karen at HQ.

Communications

Karen has started producing regular E-newsletters. The first went out at the start of May and had a good response. It included information on training courses, deadline reminders and a recent press release on wildfires. If you would like to receive a copy of the newsletter please email hq@crofting.org or give Karen a phone.

Dates for your diary

We would also like to invite all members and supporters to come and visit us at the shows. We will be attending the Royal Highland Show, from 23rd to 26th June and the Black Isle Show on 3rd and 4th August.

Local SCF activities

FEEDBACK from the members' survey last year suggested that people wanted to see more local activity, so the Caithness and East Sutherland Area decide to put on a full programme of meetings over the winter.

Area meetings were held on the implementation of the Crofting Act and on CAP reform; branch meetings were addressed by Rob Gibson MSP and Rod Mackenzie on the National Sheep Strategy; a hustings was held prior to the Scottish Parliament elections; and the annual trip to the Royal Highland Show will take place in June.

The best-attended meeting was the discussion on the Crofting Act and community mapping. The worst attended was the branch meeting with the MSP (though he did get the constituency vote at the election). Most of the meetings did get a few new faces along.

So what are the lessons to be learned from this season's events?

- Topics – more directly relevant and practical topics draw bigger crowds. Variety is good as different topics attract a different group of people. Non-meeting activities again bring out some people who don't go to evening meetings.

- Venue – area meetings can draw on a bigger pool of people but the extra travelling can put others off. A journey time of one hour seems to be the cut off

- Advertising – postcards sent out from HQ are the most effective means of informing people but they only reach members so you still need adverts in the paper to attract potential new members. Everything should be SCF branded in order to keep the profile up.

- Cost – postcards are expensive for HQ to send out so plan the whole programme early and get it on one mailing. Adverts and booking a hall can easily cost over £60 so branches need fund raisers, sponsorship or grants

- Membership – always have a few membership forms available and don't be shy about handing them out.

You can help with recruitment

BUILDING a stronger SCF with an even more powerful voice to protect and develop crofting is a vital goal.

This is something every member can help with. Below are some of the reasons why every crofter and every person who cares about our crofting communities should support the Scottish Crofting Federation. Please use these pointers at every opportunity when you are in conversation with folk who are not SCF members and persuade them to join up.

The future of crofting depends on a strong representative organisation, now more than ever.

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 the 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 of 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 £47.

Membership forms are available from SCF HQ and local contacts. New members can also simply and easily join up on-line via the SCF website.



Scottish Crofting Federation

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

Of mice and rats

Marina Dennis with tails to tell

I AM NOT AFRAID of spiders or mice, but I loathe rats. I have had the company of both spiders and mice throughout the winter and while I would never kill a spider I have trapped plenty of mice without a second thought – until a month ago.

I was awoken at 3am with what felt like a gentle ruffling of my hair which I thought might have been a spider dropping from the ceiling. I flicked it away and went back to sleep. Half an hour later the same thing happened but there was now a definite pattering of tiny feet across my scalp. I flicked it off again and lay there wondering what to do as I am a grumpy old woman if I don't get a good night's sleep.

I could hear scuffling under the bed and, knowing it was a mouse, I lifted my duvet and went next door to sleep. Going into my bedroom next morning I found a tiny mouse, curled up fast asleep on my fleece-covered hot water bottle. As my granddaughter would say, it looked so cute I just couldn't kill it, so I opened the window and returned it to the wild.

On telling this story to a friend he told me of an even more amusing incident which took place in the Straan in Tulloch involving one of the Sharps. After a good night's sleep Donald got up in the morning to be asked by his family what had happened to his hair as he had a considerable bald patch on top of his head. He was flabbergasted and at a loss to understand what had happened to his hair.

So he went back to look at his bed and there hidden by the pillow was a beautiful mouse's nest made out of his hair. He hadn't felt a thing during the mowing of his hair.

Thankfully, as far as I know there are no rats currently in Tulloch. But who knows when they might migrate here as they are frequent travellers. My uncle, who was a shepherd in Glen Roy, told me of being on the hill with his dogs when they stopped suddenly and cowered behind a boulder.

He was always a gentle person who would never scold or beat his dogs so he knew by their behaviour that there was something unnatural going on. He took out his glass and spied on the valley below him. It was then he saw the snaking, moving mass of migrating rats. Hundreds of them were on their evil way, set on mischief and destruction.

I remember a folksy rat story told to me by an Irish chap who used to work for the RSPB but also enjoyed helping the Tulloch crofters. On one occasion when Lorcan came to help we inevitably got round to talking about potatoes and as the spirit moved, mostly around the table, we swapped stories of frosts and famine. But we were all spellbound as he told us this tale from distant times.

It was early May and the farmer was driving his cattle to the common grazing before joining the rest of the family planting potatoes. It was a warm day and his feet got too hot so he took off his boots.

On the way he passed his neighbour's farm where turnips and potatoes were stored in a pit and where a weasel and a rat were fighting to the death. The bootless farmer

took pity on the tiny weasel, for the rat was strong and evil, clearly winning the fight.

While the animals were locked in battle, the farmer stood on the rat to give the weasel a chance to kill it and, as he did so, the rat bit deeply into his heel. In agonising pain the farmer picked up a stick and killed the rat. The weasel, exhausted and dewy eyed, cleaned herself – removing the filthy rat hairs stuck in her teeth and paws and assiduously licked all the rat's bloody puncture marks. She disappeared into the dyke and was seen no more.

The farmer went home, cleaned and bandaged his foot, put on his boots and joined the others planting potatoes. In no time the foot was swollen and painful and he had to go home to bed. The swelling got much worse during the next two days and despite poultices of herbs, the foot turned a worrying blue/black, the infection having spread. The nearest doctor was a day's travel away and not considered.

The rest of the family had to get back to the potato planting while the farmer sat at the fire bathing his foot, unable to walk. The door stood open. As he sat there the weasel came through the door and laid a small green leaf on the flagstone in front of the fire. In a little while she came back with another leaf of a different kind. She did this a third time bringing a new kind of leaf.

The farmer knew she had brought the leaves to cure his foot; so he laid them on the wound and bandaged his foot. He fell asleep and when he woke up the swelling had gone and he was cured.

Pairc community buyout appeal

Fundraising is now underway by the Pairc Trust to raise money for a community buyout on the Pairc Estate in Lewis. John Randall, vice-chairman of the trust, explains the background.

MANY MEMBERS of SCF will have been following the long saga of the Pairc community buyout – which started back in 2004, but which after many twists and turns along the way is hopefully now reaching the final stages.

Pairc is a rural area in south-east Lewis, consisting largely of rough moorland and 11 crofting townships. The population today is around 400, compared with nearly 2,000 a century ago. The decline is mainly due to continuous emigration throughout the 20th century as people left for better opportunities elsewhere. A familiar story!

These 400 people live on the Pairc Estate, an area of over 26,000 acres, which has been controlled since the 1920s (through Pairc Crofters Ltd and more recently Pairc Renewables Ltd) by the Lomas family – of whom the leading member today is Barry Lomas, an accountant living in Leamington Spa. There is no estate property in the area and over the last 85 years the estate has not created one

local job. Estate management can best be described as passive, until the last decade when plans for a large commercial wind-farm in conjunction with SSE have been developed.

The Pairc Trust was formed in 2004 with a mandate from the local community to buy the estate on their behalf. We wish to create jobs, better services and more affordable housing in the local area – to reverse the chronic population decline. Our business plan includes renewable energy projects owned by the community plus housing and tourism projects. Community ownership has led to increased investment and improved economic trends in other parts of the Highlands and Islands and we believe these advantages can also be realised in Pairc.

But there have been long delays due to opposition by the landlord to a meaningful community buyout, pending a decision on his wind-farm plans. On 21st March 2011, the Scottish Government finally approved applications by the trust under Part 3 of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 to purchase land and an associated lease on the estate. This followed two ballots of the community; a referral to the Land Court of an interposed lease established by the landlord; and protracted but unsuccessful discussions with the estate about

a possible voluntary transfer. An independent valuation has been commissioned and (unless further legal action by the landlord intervenes) the trust will have six months to raise the money from the date of the government's decision.

The Pairc community buyout has become a test case for land reform legislation. The community has shown great resilience in pursuing its goal of community ownership, despite many obstacles and setbacks. We are most grateful for the support shown us throughout this struggle by the SCF.

We are now seeking to raise funds for purchase of the estate, following the valuation and also for the first projects under our business plan once purchase has been completed. The trust has had encouraging discussions with HIE, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar and the Big Lottery Fund, but it expects the community through its own fundraising efforts also to make a contribution. Our initial target for the fund is £150,000.

A leaflet is enclosed with this newsletter. Please make cheques payable to Pairc Trust and send to: Iain Begg, Treasurer, Pairc Trust, Resource Centre, Kershader, South Lochs, Isle of Lewis, HS2 9QA.

Crofter's wife column

CLEARLY, the role of the crofter's wife differs from the crofter's.

Here on Number 8 my regular duties are predominantly within house and garden. This doesn't mean I don't get out onto the croft or hill; but between looking after the boys, the house and fitting in work, it can be difficult finding the time to get out there.

Over the winter months this is especially the case. The demands of house and kitchen find me perfectly content within the warm confines of the kitchen topping up the teapot, making never-ending pots of soup, trying to keep the

troops in scones and shortbread and trying to prevent the porridge from going lumpy. However, at this time of year I can usually find some time to enjoy what I love most about being up on the croft: the space.

Down in the house phones interrupt every activity, computers mysteriously lure you to their screens, dogs and children vie for attention, meals needs cooked, clothes needs washed... In the garden constant weeding, lopping, pruning, chopping and burning, the half-hearted attempts to grow something other than tatties and the twisting tangle of rhodys

blind you to the wide open space beyond – so close it's within welly-throwing distance!

But the pleasure I take from participating in on-croft activities is nonetheless great. I bear no illusions to the fact that my input is secondary. I'm the underling, the apprentice, the "stand there and don't let the cows get past you", operator of the cattle crush, controller of needles and syringes. I've even been used, albeit spectacularly unsuccessfully, as a spare sheepdog! But I take pride in the fact that my help *helps*... usually.

There is nothing I'd rather do and nowhere I'd rather be. The views from up on Numbers 7 and 8 are stunning – the very best on offer. But more than that, the roots I have put down in this place, its story, combined with the memories we have made for ourselves ensure that no matter what mood I'm in when I go up – and sometimes they are truly foul – when I come back down I feel renewed, invigorated and calmed.

Within this space, in all weathers and under the great, vast, open

sky I have experienced almost every emotion life can throw at you: being proposed to by the ruin of the house where the Crofter's grandfather was born; the joy of assisting in my first calf and lamb deliveries; hearing the distinctive sounds of both cuckoo and woodpecker for the first time; and experiencing the satisfaction of my first haymaking – the swell of pride at the whole family working harmoniously (well, almost: nothing is completely harmonious with teenager and toddler around).

However, I've also retreated there in times of personal sadness for comfort and reflection and witnessed the inescapable trials and suffering that is part and parcel of keeping stock and the place has undoubtedly given me strength.

I was recently talking to someone about my life here – the joys of new life, the dignity of death, the space, the peace – and the word that jumped into my head was privileged.

And, indeed, I am.



© Claire Nicolson

Let's Liberate Diversity forum to be held in Scotland

THE LET'S LIBERATE Diversity forum are the annual gatherings of farmers' organisations, gardeners, artisan food producers, civil society organisations, researchers, breeders and representatives of gene banks concerned with the issues surrounding agricultural biodiversity in Europe.

The 2011 forum was held at Szeged University, Hungary and its central theme was the question of farmers' rights related to conservation, sustainable use and development of agricultural biodiversity.

A wide range of thought-provoking topics was covered at the forum including local food systems; collective management of cultivated biodiversity on farms and in gardens; international and European seed legislation; intellectual property rights and how these relate to current seed legislation; and the impact of GMOs on agricultural biodiversity.

The role of small scale farmers in conserving the thousands of breeds of domesticated livestock species was also debated. However, these diverse breeds are fast disappearing as industrial

livestock production is spreading. There is a worrying and increasing trend towards a pyramidal selection system of livestock breeding, which is in effect diminishing the gene pool for most of our domesticated livestock. There were several presentations on the situation of small animal races in Eastern Europe with speakers from Poland, Hungary and Bulgaria focussing on and the obstacles for small-scale practices, and how small scale farming can add to productivity, environmental sustainability and more employment. There were also presentations on the situation in Western Europe where stockbreeding has become increasingly industrialised.

A poster display was set up at the university which gave delegates the opportunity to discuss what was happening to conserve agricultural biodiversity in each country. The SCF posters focussed on the situation in Scotland, where field crop landraces survive on the very margins of Europe in a uniquely Scottish combination of remote islands and crofter agriculture.

A very-well-attended seed exchange was arranged on

Saturday afternoon at the farmers market in Szeged.

The forum has gone from strength to strength with the number of participants increasing over the years. The first forum, held in Poitiers, France was attended by 150 delegates from across Europe. The gathering in Szeged was attended by over 280 delegates. In the intervening years the event has been held in Spain, Germany, Italy and Austria and SCF is pleased to announce that the 7th edition of Let's Liberate Diversity will be coming to Scotland in 2012.

A meeting of the European co-ordinating group for the next event will be held in Kyle of

Lochalsh in July and full details will be available in the September *Crofter*.



Patrick Mulvany of the UK food group, Carol Anne Stewart and Maria Scholten

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Staff changes

IT IS ALWAYS very sad when a valued member of staff leaves. Mabel MacAulay, our accounts administrator, has been involved with the SCF for more years than I can – or she would care to – remember, having first worked for us as a temp early this millennium! She came back to sort us out on a permanent contract in the spring of 2006. Financial administration is absolutely crucial to the well-being of a company and Mabel's skill and perseverance has kept us on track despite a very complicated workload.

On top of that Mabel has also been a strong stabilising influence in our team, a wise and caring person, with no short measure of Gaelic humour. So it is with sadness that we say goodbye as Mabel moves into her well-deserved retirement and it is also with much affection that we wish her well.

We have the good fortune to welcome Barbara Thayer into the post of accounts administrator. Barbara lives in Kyle of Lochalsh with her family, only a stone's throw from the office. She joins us at a very busy time and has a huge workload to get a hold of, and she is doing this commendably.

Barbara can be contacted on barbara@crofting.org or 01599 530005.



From Merseyside to Kyle

Barbara Thayer, who's now in charge of SCF accounts, introduces herself

BORN ON the Wirral, Merseyside, the youngest of four girls, I had dreams of becoming an archaeologist. However my career was to be a very different one.

A Wednesday morning, late June 1977, began my entrance into the world of administration with these resounding words from my dad: "Don't think you're lying in bed all day. You'll get a job in an office or factory and you'll start by Monday." I'd finished school the day before and I dutifully did as instructed.

On that Monday I started work for a building company on a youth opportunities programme. The wage was £10.00 a week and I felt like the richest girl in the world.

For many years I worked in the Liver Buildings for a shipping company; operating the telex machine, making up the bills of lading and on occasion a sojourn down to the renowned docks – a truly fabulous job.

The murky waters of the Mersey were then constantly bustling with boats and container ships from all around the world. The

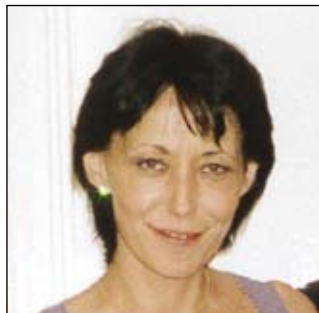
vibrant colours and folk laughing all captured my imagination and to this day I would never want to live anywhere without hearing the gulls and smelling the scent of the sea. What an experience for a 17-year-old.

When I left Liverpool I travelled Britain working in an administrative capacity, my jobs being in the catering and retail sector and then in 2000 I arrived in Kyle.

Here I met my fab husband-to-be Lanny, a local man who spent all of his youth with his gran working the croft in Uig and who now works for the ambulance service. In 2002 we were blessed with the arrival of our son Calum.

What did 2011 bring? CRP, SDS, HIE, SG, SCF!! I have knowledge of this now, thanks to the time and patience of my colleagues, retired and current. Four months ago I had no idea of the work that is being done to maintain the crofting way of life.

Thirty years on and my dad's ultimatum has taken me the length and breadth of Britain, from Birkenhead to Bournemouth, the Lake District to the Highlands of Scotland – and here another chapter has begun.



SCF office, Kyle of Lochalsh

SCF annual gathering

THE THEME of this year's annual gathering will be "1886 and all that".

It is appropriate that the gathering should return to the Isle of Skye, after a break of almost 10 years, as 2011 is the 125th anniversary of the Crofters Act.

Skye was the place where crofters' discontent at their ill-treatment rose into a mass protest and a national scandal, and names like the battle of the Braes and the Glendale martyrs entered Scottish consciousness. Police and troops were dispatched to keep the peace amid fierce rioting; the rest, as they say, is history. In 1886 the Crofters Act was passed through parliament and the crofting community for the first time had the rights which we still value today.

After 125 years, crofting is still a valued and valuable form of landholding and the gathering will be celebrating this. Children from throughout crofting areas will be performing the poetry and song of their island ancestors and young crofters will be meeting to describe what they feel are the needs and aspirations of their generation.

The gathering will be held at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, on 3rd and 4th October. A celebration ceilidh organised by our young crofters' group will take place on Monday evening.

Tickets for this event will be available separately and anyone interested in attending should contact Karen@crofting.org.

Further details including booking forms have been sent to all members with this edition of *The Crofter*. The SCF would like to thank Scottish Islands for supporting this event.

SCF Board of Directors:

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